

The homecoming experiences of female Saudi Arabian international students

Ruth Gresham

Bachelor of Arts, University of Sydney, Australia

Graduate Diploma in Education, University of Newcastle, Australia

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Master of Philosophy (Social Work)
University of Newcastle

School of Humanities and Social Science

February 2013

DECLARATION

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

Signed.....

Date.....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Having the opportunity to write this thesis has been a long-held professional dream for me. I would like to thank the following people for their contribution to making this dream a reality.

To my supervisors, Professor Mel Gray, and Dr Jill Gibbons, I extend my heart-felt thanks for your encouragement, guidance and support. Most of all, I thank you for your belief in me.

To my dearest mum Jessie, who passed away in 2011. You taught me to value an education and to always do my best. I dedicate this thesis to you.

To my darling husband, Paul, I thank you for always being there for me, for your love and encouragement.

To my dear friend and mentor, Diana (Maymuna) Rah and her colleagues at the Newcastle Muslim Association, I thank you for sharing your knowledge of Islam with me, for your friendship and support.

To my postgraduate colleagues, I thank you for the fun we have had together, for your friendship and willingness to share your knowledge with me.

Most importantly, I thank my Saudi sisters for trusting me with their stories, adding to my knowledge of the world and allowing me to tell their stories to others.

PUBLICATIONS ORIGINATING FROM THIS RESEARCH

Gresham, R. (2012). Trusting relationships: a key for cross-cultural engagement. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 34(5), 491-501.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS ORIGINATING FROM THIS RESEARCH

Gresham, R. (2013). *The homecoming experiences of female Saudi Arabian international students*. Paper accepted for presentation at the Diversity in Organizations, Communities and Nations Conference, Darwin, Australia.

ABSTRACT

There is an increasing world-wide trend for people to live overseas and at some point, to return to their countries of origin. The displacement of these individuals has the potential for both disturbing and favourable consequences for themselves and their families, as well as the social and economic fabric of their home and host countries. This thesis explores the experiences of six Saudi Arabian female postgraduate students, as they completed their international education sojourns in Australia and began the repatriation process. It chronicles the participants' individual perspectives of repatriation, with the aim of reporting descriptively on their experiences. A qualitative methodology involving in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the study's participants at significant junctures within the repatriation process was the primary data collection method used for this study. The special place of culture and cultural identity was explored throughout, with particular emphasis on how cultural differences were bridged during the research process. The findings of this study are noteworthy for their capacity to augment understandings about the repatriation process; provide descriptions that link expatriate experiences with repatriation outcomes; and generate ideas that might be later used to develop frameworks for improving sojourner readjustment.

Key words: cultural identity, intercultural relations, international sojourn, readjustment, repatriation

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABS Australian Bureau of Statistics

AEI Australian Education International, the international education arm of the
Department of Industry, Innovation, Science, Research and Tertiary Education.

CCTV Closed circuit television

ISB International Student Barometer

KASP King Abdullah Scholarship Programme

KSA Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DECLARATION.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
PUBLICATIONS ORIGINATING FROM THIS RESEARCH.....	iv
CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS ORIGINATING FROM THIS RESEARCH	v
ABSTRACT.....	vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	vii
TABLE OF CONTENTS	viii
LIST OF TABLES.....	xiii
LIST OF FIGURES.....	xiv

Chapter 1	1
Introduction.....	1
The personal motivation for this journey of inquiry.....	1
Background for this study.....	2
The international education industry in Australia.....	2
Meeting student expectations and sustaining a valuable industry	3
Key junctures in an international education sojourn.....	4
Entry transition.....	4
Significance of this study.....	5
Re-entry transition: The principal issue under investigation	7
Aims of the study.....	7
Research questions.....	8
Theoretical perspectives and conceptual framework.....	8
Methodology.....	9
Sampling and data collection	10
Data analysis	10
Trustworthiness and validity.....	11
Working across cultures.....	11
Culture and cultural identity	12
Limitations of this study	13
Definition of key terms	14
International students.....	14
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, KSA, the Kingdom, Saudi Arabia	14
Repatriate, returnee, returning sojourner	14
Repatriation and re-entry	14
Sojourners	15
Outline of this thesis	15
Chapter 2	17
The context for this story: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	17
Location and demographics	18
Recent history: A summary	18
First Saudi State	18
Second Saudi State.....	19
Modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia	19
A succession of monarchs.....	20

Snapshot of Saudi Arabia today	20
Government.....	20
Cities	21
Economic development.....	21
Infrastructure	21
Religion.....	22
Families, tribes and relationships.....	22
Impact of tribal association on social interaction	23
Kinship.....	23
Marriage.....	24
Age at marriage.....	24
Polygamy	25
Endogamous marriage	25
Role of women in the family	26
Women's rights within the family	26
Extended and nuclear family structures	27
Islam.....	27
Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims.....	28
Religion and identity.....	28
Arabic.....	29
Arabic syntax	29
Communication patterns	30
Education system	30
Literacy rates and government assistance.....	30
Girls' and women's education	31
Pedagogy.....	31
Career aspirations for women	32
Saudi women.....	33
Female sphere	33
Impact of technology to build connections between women.....	34
Women's issues	34
Women and dress.....	35
Women and employment	36
Matching skills to qualifications.....	37
Emerging opportunities for female employment.....	38
Employment of women from affluent backgrounds	38
The situation for younger women	39
Social change and the rise of the middle class.....	40
Saudization of the workforce	41
Struggle for change	41
Conclusion	42
Chapter 3	44
Literature review: Repatriation	44
Description of repatriation	45
How it feels to come home	45
Dimensions of repatriation.....	46
Expectations.....	47
Stages of readjustment	48
Impact of readjustment on returning sojourners	49
Belonging or not?.....	50

Impact of personal and environmental changes on readjustment experiences	51
Theories of repatriation.....	52
Affective stream.....	52
Behavioural stream	53
Cognitive stream	54
Individual variables of repatriation.....	56
Gender.....	56
Age.....	58
Personality.....	59
Religion and region.....	60
Marital status.....	61
Socioeconomic status.....	61
Prior intercultural experience and re-entry	62
Situational variables of repatriation	62
Length of intercultural sojourn	62
Cultural distance	63
Contact with host country	64
Home organisations' and peers' responses to returning sojourners.....	65
Housing conditions	67
Importance of maintaining networks	67
Transition strategies	68
Conclusion	69
Chapter 4	71
Culture and cultural identity	71
Definitions of culture	71
Contextualising culture	73
The emergence of social work practice: A Western phenomenon	76
Postmodern perspective	78
Social work in the Arab world.....	79
Rejecting fixed differences	80
Bridging differences.....	81
Other influences that shaped the interpretation of culture in this study	81
Cultural Identity Model	85
Towards a redefinition of culture: Finding common ground.....	90
Conclusion	93
Chapter 5	94
Methodology	94
Choosing a qualitative methodology	94
Researcher–participant relationships built on trust.....	95
Challenges to relationship building	97
Conceptual evolution of this study	98
Research process.....	99
Ethical issues and challenges	100
Human ethics approval	101
Research design	101
Sampling	102
Data collection	104
Interview questions	107
Interview process	108

Other data collection methods	109
Data analysis	111
Step 1: Extracting demographic data	111
Step 2: Listening and noting	111
Step 3: Reading and noting	111
Step 4: Organising the information	112
Step 5: Developing emergent themes	112
Step 6: Adding and coding new data	113
Step 7: Rewriting	113
Trustworthiness and validity of findings	114
Conclusion	118
Chapter 6	119
Findings Part 1: Descriptive overview of the participants' international experience	119
Choosing a study destination	120
Studying in Australia	122
Observations about the local environment	123
How locals responded to their presence	124
Adaptation strategies	125
Adjustment and support	125
Caring for children	128
Preparing children for returning home	129
Professional experiences and some observations	130
Synopsis of the participants' experiences in Australia	132
Chapter 7	138
Findings Part 2: Repatriation experiences	138
Primary theme 1: The push and pull of home	140
Secondary theme: Pride in achievements and hopes for the future	142
Secondary theme: Feelings of fear and powerlessness	151
Primary theme 2: Learning to live at home again	158
The first few months after return: The homecoming experience	158
The emotional response to being home	160
Expectations	161
The experience for children	162
Making sense of the sojourn experience	164
Putting the international experience into practice	164
Rebuilding relationships with family, friends and colleagues	166
Support of religion	168
Lasting memories	168
Advice for others	169
View of the future	170
Conclusion	171
Chapter 8	172
Discussion of findings	172
Major findings	173
Personal growth and identity change	173
The comfort, frustrations and challenges of being home	174
The experiences of children	175
Expectations theory	178

The readjustment process.....	179
Readjustment challenges.....	180
Key factors that supported readjustment.....	181
The impact of individual and situational variables	187
Gender, age and marital status	187
Prior intercultural experiences	189
Cultural distance	190
Housing	191
Cultural Identity Model	191
Additive identities.....	196
Subtractive identities.....	198
Affirmative identities	199
Intercultural or global identities.....	201
Conclusion	202
Chapter 9	203
Conclusions and recommendations.....	203
Major conclusions	203
The international education sojourn as a life-changing experience.....	203
Importance of individual stories to international education	206
International education's profound impact on sojourners' lives.....	207
Participants fulfilled the goals of the King Abdullah scholarship programme.....	207
Recommendations for further research	208
Build on the findings of this study	208
Explore the Cultural Identity Model using a larger population sample.....	209
Investigate the potential of technology	209
Examine how religion affects repatriation outcomes.....	210
The experiences of children	210
The ripple effect.....	211
Implications for practice	211
Approach cultural differences from an individual perspective.....	211
Building relationships with international students.....	212
Recognise the significance of the international experience	213
Prepare for homecoming.....	214
Recognise the impact of the international experience on children	215
Conclusion	216
REFERENCES.....	217
Appendix 1.....	230
Interview schedule	230
Appendix 2.....	234
Consent form.....	234
Appendix 3.....	236
Information statement	236
APPENDIX 4.....	240
Glossary	240

LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Summary of the categorisations of culture.....	83
Table 2: Summary of participants' demographic data.....	120
Table 3: Primary and secondary themes	139
Table 4: Indicators that show identity shifts in line with the Cultural Identity Model	193

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1:	The conceptual evolution of this study.....	98
Figure 2:	Flowchart of the research process.....	99
Figure 3:	Emotional responses to the sojourn experience, consisting of three phases, early days, during the sojourn, pre-departure	133
Figure 4:	Oscillation between positive and negative emotions during the early days of the sojourn showed less positive than negative responses.....	134
Figure 5:	Emotional responses that carried over into the duration of the sojourn.....	134
Figure 6:	Oscillation between positive and negative emotions during the sojourn showing the emergence of more positive feelings	135
Figure 7:	New emotional responses developed during the sojourn and carried over to pre-departure.....	135
Figure 8:	Oscillation between positive and negative emotions prior to departure from Australia showed more positive than negative responses.....	136
Figure 9:	How the participants described themselves at the end of the sojourn	136
Figure 10:	Primary and secondary themes that emerged through the data analysis.....	140

Chapter 1

Introduction

The introduction highlights key aspects of this study and provides an outline of subsequent chapters. It begins with an account of my motivation for undertaking research in this area, a background to the field and a rationale for this study. It highlights key aspects and gives an outline of the subsequent chapters.

The personal motivation for this journey of inquiry

What happens after an international education sojourn ends? What are the challenges associated with returning home? How do returning sojourners optimise their international experiences? How does it feel to be home again? These are some of the questions that prompted me to commence this journey. Being involved in international education for 18 years, in roles that included Manager of Student Support and Manager Community Relationships (International), I often pondered what happened when international students left the University and returned home. Contributing to the support and care of students, over the years I came to know many individuals from diverse backgrounds. I was privileged to hear their personal stories, share in their successes and commiserate with their disappointments. They contributed enormously to my knowledge and understanding of the world and became part of my life. With sadness, I said goodbye to many, wished them well for the future and contemplated what life would offer them on their return home. I also pondered how they would remember their time at the University, whether they might remember me and what the impact of their international sojourn might have been, personally and professionally. Some students corresponded after returning home, with news of their

family, work and adventures, but largely these communications were brief, friendly and continued for only a short time after departure. They did not provide a rich account of what it was like to return home, so my curiosity grew, leading to the realisation that I was no longer satisfied waving goodbye and imagining – I had to know. My aspiration is that this study will provide insights into what it means for one group of students to return home and focus attention on the importance of this phase of the international education experience.

Background for this study

The international education industry in Australia

Enrolments of international students in on-shore undergraduate and postgraduate programmes across Australia reached 200,000 in 2010 (Australian Education International [AEI], 2010), making international education one of five top revenue-generating exports for Australia (Ward, Masgoret, & Gezentsvey, 2009) and by inference, an extremely valuable asset to the Australian economy and contributor to the Australian community. In 2009-2010, the industry contributed \$18 billion to the Australian economy and was recognised as being instrumental in the way Australia was perceived throughout the world in terms of intellectual capital and international influence (Adams, Banks, & Olsen, 2011).

Yet despite seemingly inexorable growth, there have been signs of fragility within the industry in recent years. Being dependent upon financial investments made by individual students makes this industry vulnerable to fluctuations in the world economy and necessitates the delivery of quality services to keep pace with incessant demand. In 2009-2010, a number of Australian vocational education colleges collapsed (Owens & Loomes, 2010) indicating the importance of meeting student expectations through the delivery of quality services and inextricable link between student satisfaction, industry growth and economic prosperity. According to Ward (2001), growth in international education has occurred at such a fast rate

that thorough research and development is urgently required if exporting countries are to maintain their competitiveness into the future.

Meeting student expectations and sustaining a valuable industry

Whether their desire is to be more competent in English, become better practitioners or leaders in their field, international students invest in becoming the people they want to be through international education (Koehne, 2005). Investing in an international education requires a large financial and personal commitment and is driven by expectations that personal and professional outcomes will match, or exceed, the investment made. According to the Australian Human Rights Commission (2012), obtaining the best possible international experience is not solely the responsibility of students, but a shared obligation among students, their educational institutions and the host communities in which they reside, as positive outcomes stand to benefit all stakeholders.

The International Student Survey involving international students from 34 Australian universities, conducted by AEI (2010), identified quality learning experiences, culminating in well-regarded qualifications from reputable institutions as a significant consideration when choosing a destination for overseas study and one of the most important expectations of an international education sojourn for international students. The International Student Barometer [ISB] survey confirmed this finding and drew attention to a substantial body of evidence demonstrating the importance of services, such as accommodation, support and engagement with members of host communities in delivering satisfying international experiences (Universities Australia, 2011).

Rationale

At the time of this study Saudi Arabian students were returning home from study in Australia in unprecedented numbers. Unlike entry transition, the homecoming experiences of

international students are not well represented in the research literature. Furthermore, studies about international students' experiences have tended to generalise the experiences of men and women, not reflecting that there may be differences between genders. My research set out to explore the homecoming experiences of Saudi Arabian female students to address this gap in the literature.

Key junctures in an international education sojourn

Entry transition

While the findings of the AEI (2010) and ISB (2011) surveys show that all aspects of the international education cycle are important and contribute to addressing student expectations, the literature suggests there are some key junctures within the international sojourn cycle. One of these is entry transition, as it is one of the most challenging times for international students, requiring them to adjust not only to a new study environment, but also to the local community and a new country. This raises the potential for feelings of disorientation and frustration, depleted energy and sometimes illness (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006; Andrade, 2006; Church, 1982; Storti, 1990; Zhang & Brunton, 2007). The process of adjustment, identified as culture shock (Oberg, 1960), might involve experiences of loss and include feelings of deprivation in regards to friends, status, profession and possessions. To assist international students to overcome this shock, universities have developed comprehensive orientation programmes (often with a mentoring component delivered by senior students), which include tailored support provided by professional staff and innovative cross-cultural programmes to aid the adjustment of new students (Gresham & Clayton, 2011; Owens & Loomes, 2010). There is a widely held belief that positive entry transition experiences give rise to feelings of belonging, have the capacity to improve the mental and emotional health of newcomers and

provide a basis for achieving optimal learning outcomes (Andrade, 2006; Severiens & Wolff, 2008).

Current literature suggests entry transitions can be testing and successful adjustment is aided by thoughtful, carefully constructed approaches that assist newcomers to surmount initial challenges and lay solid foundations for building their international experiences (Storti, 1990). If we accept this premise, then questions about re-entry transition begin to surface, motivating us to ask what happens when sojourners return home and whether it is possible that some of the same issues and concerns arise.

Homecoming has been far less scrutinised in the literature than entry transitions (Adler, 1981; Black, Gregersen, & Mendenhall, 1992; Martin, 1984; Szkudlarek, 2010; Thompson & Christofi, 2006). The implicit assumption has been that re-entry transition should be easy. Yet, studies by Storti (1990) and Sussman (2001) suggest that returning home may actually be more difficult, because returnees do not anticipate or prepare for challenges, which can magnify their impact.

Significance of this study

This study was highly significant because of:

- Its timeliness. At the time of writing Saudi Arabians are returning home in unprecedented numbers, increasing the significance of this study that focuses on the issue of repatriation for this population. In 2009, there were 12,500 international students from Saudi Arabia undertaking studies in Australian universities. As students completed their academic programmes and returned home, these numbers continued to decrease, as evidenced by the reduction in numbers to 9,000 in 2010 (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2010). Most Saudi Arabian students in Australia were part of the multi-phased King Abdullah scholarship

programme (KASP) involving 120,000 Saudi Arabian Nationals across 24 countries (Abdul Ghafour, 2011). The broad aim of this programme was to equip scholarship recipients with skills in strategic areas and provide them with knowledge and experience of living overseas (Alomar, 2010). The programme's principal goals were for recipients to build and extend knowledge, increase understanding, gain experience, enhance development and engage in activities of cultural exchange (Alomar, 2010). There was an expectation that, on their return, graduates would lead change in social and professional areas, with the ultimate goal of reducing the Kingdom's reliance on foreign workers, in a process known as 'Saudization' (Pharaon, 2004). The importance that the Saudi Arabian Government placed on the outcomes of KASP increases the significance of this study for its capacity to report on the repatriation experiences of some of the recipients of this scholarship programme.

- Restrictions on research within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. There has been limited research and writing about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, largely due to restrictions on travel and inquiry (Adelman & Lustig, 1981; Jamjoun, 2010; Kapiszewski, 2006). This makes empirical studies about families and social change new to this part of the world. Information about Saudi Arabia often reflects foreigners' personal accounts of living and working in the Kingdom (Brooks, 2008; Koolmees, 2004). It tends to highlight the more sensational aspects of life within the Kingdom by emphasising links to terrorism, or evoking labels of 'backwardness' and repression (Gold, 2003; Kapiszewski, 2006). This study has the capacity to contribute an empirical work that highlights aspects of family and social life within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
- The dearth of gender-specific studies. Only one previous study involving Saudi Arabian repatriates (Corey, 1979) was located during the literature search, and this

study was not gender-specific. Further, the literature showed that studies about Saudi Arabian women are few, possibly due in part to the traditions of Arab culture that operate by oral sharing of information (Jamjoon, 2010; Schvaneveldt, Kerpelman, & Schvaneveldt, 2005), making this study highly significant for its capacity to report on the experiences of women.

- The subject matter. Literature searches showed that re-entry transition was an important, but under-explored topic. With the number of people sojourning internationally continuing to grow each year, and by inference, returning to their countries of origin at some point, this topic is worthy of further exploration.
- The importance of the international education export industry to Australia. The international education industry is valuable economically and socially to the Australian community. Research that has the capacity to identify key outcomes of international education sojourns is valuable information that can assist in the development and sustainability of this valuable industry.

Re-entry transition: The principal issue under investigation

The principal issue under investigation in this study was the re-entry transition experiences of a small group of female, Saudi Arabian, postgraduate, international students from the University of Newcastle in Australia. Using the framework of the Cultural Identity Model (Sussman, 2000), this study examined aspects of the participants' experiences of living and studying in Australia, described their expectations and attitudes to returning home and explored their perceptions of re-entry transition.

Aims of this study

This study sought to investigate:

1. The participants' emotional responses to homecoming

2. The impact of the participants' overseas experiences on their re-entry transition.
3. How the findings from this study might be used later to develop strategies to assist international students in preparing to return home.

Research questions

There were three primary research questions:

1. What was the students' experience of living and studying in Australia and its impact on them personally and professionally?
2. What were the students' expectations and attitudes to returning home?
3. What was the reality of their return to Saudi Arabia?

Additional follow-up questions were linked to each of these primary questions to tease out and further explore the participants' experiences. A complete interview schedule is presented in Appendix 1.

Theoretical perspectives and conceptual framework

Sussman (2000) espoused three main theoretical perspectives relating to repatriation:

1. A reductionist perspective that considered all transitions, adjustments and adaptations to be variants of the same process, including domestic transitions, overseas transitions and repatriation.
2. A perspective that distinguished cultural transitions from all others, but regarded entry and re-entry adjustment as similar.
3. A perspective that recognised the unique qualities of the repatriation process and acknowledged the complexity of repatriation.

Sussman (2000) used these disparate perspectives to build a new model of individual-level responses to inter-cultural transitions and repatriation, which she called the Cultural Identity

Model. This model drew on the notion that cultural identity emerged as a critical element of an individual's self-concept within the sojourning environment, with both individual and cultural factors influencing the extent of adaptation to the host culture. The principal idea was that, as a result of cultural adaptation, the self-concept was disturbed, leading to salient changes in cultural identity on the commencement of repatriation. For many repatriates, this meant their newly-formed cultural identities and home culture no longer provided an 'acceptable fit' and resulted in their identification as a member of a new 'out-group' within their home country.

The Cultural Identity Model (Sussman, 2000) was chosen as the conceptual framework for this study to organise thoughts and perceptions and explain how sense was made of what was happening and the processes involved. While cognisant of some limitations of this model (described in Chapter 4, pp. 89-90), it explored a number of assumptions that were important to this study: (i) repatriates undergo a profound personal transformation during an overseas sojourn which impacts on their cultural identity and sense of belonging; (ii) there is a relationship between the expatriate experience and repatriate outcomes; and (iii) there is an association between overseas adjustment and the repatriation experience.

Methodology

A qualitative methodology was chosen for this research because it suited the topic under investigation, allowed scope for exploration and description of the participants' stories and ensured their cultural needs were taken into consideration (Creswell, 2003; Gilgun, 2006; Padgett, 1998). The emphasis of this study was the collection of a small number of individual stories to develop an understanding of the participants' experiences and enable a meaningful

comparison of the similarities and differences between them (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

Sampling and data collection

A purposive sampling method was adopted initially, but snowball sampling, initiated by participants, occurred after the first two informants had been recruited. These sampling methods were successful in delivering participants who matched the eligibility criteria for the study. According to Liamputtong (2009), multiple sampling methods are acceptable when attempting to recruit participants who are less likely than others to respond to advertised recruitment strategies.

The participants were asked to attend three one-on-one interviews with the researcher, two prior to leaving Australia and the third approximately six months after their return to Saudi Arabia. The timing of the third interview was in line with the literature suggesting that, after six months, most repatriates would have experienced extreme highs and lows associated with readjustment and would be able to reflect objectively on their re-entry experiences (Adler, 1981). The first and second interviews were conducted face to face with all participants, as was one of the third interviews. The remainder of the third interviews was facilitated using *Skype*. Additional data were obtained through email and telephone communications, informal meetings and social interactions with the participants. A journal was kept to note observations and reflections as the study progressed.

Data analysis

A four-step approach to data analysis involved: (i) listening to taped interviews; (ii) transcribing data, noting recurring themes; (iii) ongoing reflection and noting; and (iv) reporting the findings using descriptive and thematic approaches, with negative cases being noted, recorded and discussed.

Trustworthiness and validity

Validity and trustworthiness were built into this study largely through prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation. Prolonged engagement was adopted to develop trust with the study's participants, and to demonstrate that the confidence they placed in the researcher would be honoured (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement was important as it assisted in addressing issues of power between the researcher and participants, building respect and bridging cultural differences. Through persistent observation, the most important elements of the study were identified and emphasised to give added depth to the findings, while triangulation (using various methods and sources, discussed in Chapter 5, pp. 114) was used to enhance the study's validity.

Working across cultures

To have ignored the significance of culture and cultural identity in this study would have placed the value of the information uncovered at risk. As Donohoue Clyne (2001) asserted, lack of sensitivity to cross-cultural dimensions prevents the researcher from finding answers to the question, 'What does it all mean?' thus diminishing the significance of the research findings. Working across cultures to reduce inaccurate and culturally biased understandings of the data required acknowledgement that researchers bring their own cultural interpretation of phenomena to the research (Brislin, Lonner, & Thorndike, 1973).

Four key strategies were employed to work cross-culturally throughout this study. They included: (i) preparing thoroughly for all encounters and engagements; (ii) working consistently to build trust with the participants; (iii) engaging in activities that involved reciprocity or give and take; and (iv) acknowledging the researcher's status as an outsider. Central to these strategies was the desire to ensure that all parties emerged from every engagement with dignity and a sense of achievement.

Culture and cultural identity

Understanding the experiences of the participants from a cross-cultural perspective was at the heart of this study and required consideration of how culture and cultural identity were to be interpreted. A range of literature drawn primarily from anthropological and social work perspectives merged to shape how culture and cultural identity were defined and approached in this study. From the social work literature emerged an appreciation of culture as a matter of personal identity, and as an essential ingredient of individual dignity (Sowers-Hoag & Sandau-Beckler, 1996), along with the understanding that individuals hold differing levels of association to their respective cultures (Gray & Coates, 2008; Marginson, Nyland, Sawir, & Forbes-Mewett, 2010; Park, 2005). Also from this body of literature surfaced a perspective that brought a sense of dynamism to the concept of culture, recognised culture to be ever-changing and personal, acknowledged possible flexibility in each participants' cultural interpretation of phenomena and saw cross-cultural interaction as providing opportunities to learn, shift and diversify thinking (Ling, 2008). By approaching culture from this perspective, difference was recognised and used to build understanding, rather than to marginalise the 'other'.

From the anthropological literature, Geertz (1973) wrote that understanding another's culture is about being open to the 'normalness' of others such that through engaging with difference, awareness emerges that can be used to build appreciation for difference and dissolve misunderstandings. Park (2005) and Yon (2000) were critical of this perspective. They claimed that anthropological theories of culture objectified and fixed cultural differences. They focused on the etymology of culture rather than its definition. Nevertheless, the anthropological viewpoint was considered valuable to this study for the way in which it managed to explain culture as a system comprising elements, symbols and principles that individuals use to negotiate their way through life.

Limitations of this study

Five limitations were identified during this study:

1. Because a snowball sampling method was used largely by the participants to recruit their colleagues, a biased sample might have resulted. It is unknown whether there were other potential participants who might have met the study's eligibility criteria and might have been able to contribute different insights for this study.
2. The conceptual framework used – Sussman's (2000) Cultural Identity Model – emphasised the connection between expatriate experiences (with an emphasis on integration and social inclusion) and repatriate outcomes. Given that the participants of this study were drawn from the same Australian regional city, their expatriate experiences were largely reflective of their lives within this context. As a consequence, the findings from this study are pertinent to this context and caution should be taken about generalising the findings.
3. The city of Newcastle, in which this study was conducted, has a lower level of cultural diversity than other Australian cities of similar size (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011). This situation has been shown to bring forth challenges around issues of social inclusion and integration (Gresham & Clayton, 2011), which might have impacted on the experiences of the study's participants. It also underscores the importance of regarding these findings only within this context.
4. The timeframe for this study was short, necessitating the third interviews with participants to be conducted six months after their return home. Although some of the literature concluded that, for most repatriates, the main highs and lows of readjustment would have been overcome by this time (Adler, 1981), there is also evidence to suggest full repatriation might take much longer and this might have

impacted on the study's findings (Church, 1982; Minoura, 1988; Yoshida et al., 2002).

5. Social and political disturbances in the Middle East during the data collection period restricted travel for the researcher and participants. As a result, most of the final interviews were conducted through technologies such as *Skype*, which proved to be a viable alternative, but might not have produced the richness of data that might have been collected through face-to-face interviews.

Definition of key terms

International students

International students were defined as those individuals enrolled in institutions of higher education on temporary student visas.

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, KSA, the Kingdom, Saudi Arabia

All of the above terms were used in this study to refer to the homeland of the study's participants.

Repatriate, returnee, returning sojourner

The terms 'repatriate', 'returning sojourner' and 'returnee' were used synonymously in this study to describe those who had returned to their country of origin.

Repatriation and re-entry

The terms 're-entry' and 'repatriation' were used interchangeably to describe the transition of sojourners back to their home country. Repatriation was favoured slightly however, because of its implication that readjustment was a process comprising a number of steps, while re-entry conveyed the notion that transition was a one-step process. Sussman (2011) noted that the origin of the term repatriation was the sociological literature about refugees who had been

forcibly returned home, while re-entry referred to the risk of psychological damage caused to astronauts after travelling in space. The origin of both terms was therefore negatively charged, with the implication that returning home was somehow risky and undesirable. Their negative connotations aside, both were used in this study to describe the process of returning home.

Sojourners

The term ‘sojourners’ was used to denote people whose change of residence was temporary and intentional (Sussman, 2011). Sojourners entered a host country for a specific purpose, such as work, business and education or as members of the Peace Corps or for missionary activities. They resided in their host countries with the understanding that they would return home when the purpose of their sojourn had been fulfilled (Tetsuo, 2007).

Outline of this thesis

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce and provide a rationale for this study. Included were the aims and significance of this study, the research questions and overview of the methodology, limitations of the study and definitions of key terms.

Chapter 2 focuses on the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Its purpose is to examine some of the influences that might have shaped the participants’ experiences prior to entering Australia and to describe the context into which they were likely to return.

Chapter 3 documents the literature about repatriation. It includes an exploration of repatriation theories and scrutinises individual and situational variables that have been shown to impact on repatriation experiences.

Chapter 4 examines the place of culture and cultural identity in this study. It charts the scholarly influences that shaped the study's definition and understanding of culture and how these insights were then applied during the research process.

Chapter 5 focuses on methodology and research design. It includes justifications for the decisions taken in terms of sampling procedures, timeframes and methods of data collection. This chapter includes a data analysis plan and shows how validity and trustworthiness were integrated into the study.

Chapter 6 presents part one of the findings from this study. Its focus is the lived experiences of the study's participants, prior to departure. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a context on which key findings that chronicle the participants' homecoming could be built.

Chapter 7 presents the key findings from this research, through an exploration of primary and secondary themes. The two primary themes, the *push and pull of home* and *learning to live at home again*, were validated through numerous secondary themes demonstrating the complexity and depth of participants' repatriation experiences.

Chapter 8 discusses the key findings from this study, linking them to the relevant literature.

Chapter 9 documents the study's conclusions, presents recommendations for further research and outlines implications for practice.

Chapter 2

The context for this story: The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The participants of this study were Saudi Arabian Nationals and the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was their homeland. Nationals are defined as those residents who hold citizenship (Gauntlett, 2005). Saudi Arabia is the context in which the participants of this study were raised and to which they returned after their international sojourns in Australia. For these reasons, it was considered critical to acquire knowledge of this context so that the significance of the participants' Australian experiences might be better appreciated and the impact of these experiences on repatriation better understood. This chapter begins with a brief description of the location, demographics, recent history and social structure of the country. The important place of the family, religion and the Arabic language in Saudi society are then explored for their significance as the foundations upon which much activity is based. Education and pedagogy in Saudi Arabia are described. Particular focus is given to the education of women. The chapter then continues to focus on Saudi women, their place in society, employment status and how dress acts as a symbol of religion and culture. What follows is an examination of recent changes within Saudi society, including the emergence of the middle class, the reduction in reliance on foreign workers, in a process known as Saudization, and the recent social change movement.

The aim of this chapter is to lay a foundation on which to build the participants' stories. Entire papers are devoted to many of the elements chronicled in this chapter with several providing detailed arguments about historical, political, social and religious influences within Saudi Arabia. Constraints of time and space prohibit lengthy reporting on the content of some of these papers, but omission to do so does not detract from the chapter's

main purpose, which is to skim broadly across the elements that might have shaped and influenced the lives of this study's participants prior to coming to Australia.

Location and demographics

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is the largest nation on the Arabian Peninsula. It is bordered on the north by Jordan, Iraq and Kuwait; on the east by Qatar, with the island nation of Bahrain lying off its eastern shore in the Persian Gulf; on the south east by the United Arab Emirates and Oman; and on the south by Yemen. The Red Sea and the Gulf of Aqaba lie to the west (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2010).

The population of Saudi Arabia was estimated in 2011 to be 26,534,504 people (CIA World Fact Book, 2011). Approximately three quarters of Saudi Arabia's population are native Saudis, while the remainder are foreign nationals of Arabic or African descent. The foreign national population (estimated to be 5,576,076 persons in 2011) comprises Arabs from other Middle-Eastern countries, as well as a large population from Pakistan and India. About 100,000 people from Western nations also live in Saudi Arabia (CIA World Fact Book, 2012).

Recent history: A summary

First Saudi State

In the early 18th Century, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahhab and Muhammad bin Saud formed an agreement to restore the pure teachings of Islam to the Arab Peninsula. In that spirit, bin Saud established the First Saudi State, which prospered under the spiritual guidance of bin Abdul Wahhab, known simply as the Sheikh. It was from bin Abdul Wahhab that *Wahhabism* originated, a conservative branch of Islam still practised within Saudi Arabia today.

By 1788, the Saudi State ruled the entire central plateau, known as the Najd. By the 19th Century, its rule extended over most of the Arabian Peninsula, including Makkah and Madinah (Mecca and Medina). In time, the popularity and success of the Al-Saud rulers aroused the suspicion of the Ottoman Empire, the dominant power in the Middle East and North Africa. In 1818, the Ottomans took control of the Saudi State by dispatching a large expeditionary force and besieging Diriyah, the most important city of the time, levelling it and making it permanently inhabitable by ruining wells and destroying date palms (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2007).

Second Saudi State

In 1824, the Al-Saud family regained control of central Arabia from the Ottomans. The Saudi ruler Turki bin Abdullah Al-Saud transferred his capital to Riyadh and established the Second Saudi State. Under Turki and his son Faisal, the people enjoyed a period of peace and prosperity; trade and agriculture flourished. However, the calm was shattered in 1865 by a renewed Ottoman campaign, which led to the capture of parts of the Saudi State and the eventual exile of Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al-Saud, first to the Empty Quarter (an area of vast desert) and finally to Kuwait (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2007).

Modern Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

In 1902, Abdulaziz, son of Abdulrahman bin Faisal Al-Saud, led a daring night march into Riyadh and retook the city garrison. This event marked the beginning of the formation of the modern Saudi State. After establishing Riyadh as his headquarters, Abdulaziz captured all of the Hijaz, including Makkah and Madinah, in the process united warring tribes into one nation.

In 1932, the country was named the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, an Islamic state with Arabic as its national language and the Qur'an as its constitution (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2007). These principles remain at the core of Saudi Arabian society today.

A succession of monarchs

Since 1932, there has been a succession of monarchs who are recognised for shaping socio economic development within the Kingdom: King Abdulaziz (1932 –1953) is attributed with establishing infrastructure that includes roads and communication systems, and improved education and healthcare. His successor, King Saud (1953–1964) continued this legacy and went on to establish schools and Institutes of Higher Education, including the King Saud University in 1957.

King Faisal (1964–1975) was responsible for continued economic and social development, including the establishment of the first public schools for girls, while King Khalid (1975–1982) led growth in physical infrastructure. King Fahd (1982–2005) was considered to be a leading political and economic force who guided Saudi Arabia through a turbulent era, including two Gulf Wars. Saudi's alliance with the USA was the cornerstone of King Fahd's foreign policy (Sydney Morning Herald, 2005). The reign of the current monarch, King Abdullah (2005 -) is characterised by respect for religion, history and Arab heritage (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2007). King Abdullah is recognised for embracing modernisation without threatening traditions and culture, as well as taking practical steps towards peace and development (Saudi Gazette, 2012).

Snapshot of Saudi Arabia today

Government

Saudi Arabia is divided into thirteen provinces and is ruled by a hereditary monarchy from the House of Sa'ud. The King is the Head of State, Head of Government and Prime Minister.

The King appoints his cabinet, mostly comprised of other members of the royal family, and a consultative council, which serves as the legislative branch of government (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2007).

Cities

The largest city and capital of Saudi Arabia is Riyadh. Other important cities include Jeddah, Makkah, Madinah and ad-Dammam (CIA World Fact Book, 2012). Problems in cities like Riyadh are similar to those of other large cities of the world: wealth juxtaposed with poverty (Montagu, 2010).

Economic development

The discovery of oil in the 1930s began the transformation of Saudi Arabia from an agricultural society dependent on the export of dates and capital generated through pilgrims coming to visit the holy sites of Makkah and Madinah, to a regional and global economic power (Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia, 2007). Saudi Arabia today is a largely urbanised society, exposed to a wide range of electronic media and dependent on a modern petroleum-driven economy (Pharaon, 2004). Some Bedouin people continue to live a nomadic or semi-nomadic existence in the desert region of the country, although many have joined the population migration to large urban areas, largely for economic reasons (CIA World Fact Book, 2012).

Infrastructure

Saudi Arabia has a complete road network linking all corners of the country. It operates over thirty national and international airports, has the largest water desalination capacity in the world, a fully developed water distribution network and a huge electricity generation capacity. It has built an ultramodern telecommunication system, provides a functional state-

subsidised health sector and a large number of schools, colleges and universities. It has succeeded in city planning of most urban areas (Meleis, 1982).

Religion

Saudi Arabia is a Muslim nation and recognises no other religions within its borders. It is estimated that around 90 per cent of the Saudi Arabian population are Sunni Muslims, with the remainder Shi'ites. Approximately one-third of the Shi'ite population resides in the oil-rich Eastern province (Tietelbaum, 2010). According to Al-Rasheed (1998), opinions differ on the exact numbers of Shi'ites in Saudi Arabia as the Saudi Government was reluctant to provide an accurate estimate. In his view, Shi'ites constituted between 12.5–25 per cent of the population. *Wahhabism*, a conservative form of Islam which advocates a fusion of state power and religion, remains dominant within the Kingdom (Al-Rasheed, 1998).

Families, tribes and relationships

The Arab world largely developed around the growth of families and tribes (Gauntlett, 2005). A tribe is a group that has descended from a common male ancestor. The word *qabila* (tribe) refers not only to a kinship group but also to a status category: *qabili* families claim descent from one of two Arab ancestors, Adnan or Qahtan, and perceive themselves to be distinct from, and superior to, the non-tribal *khadiri* people who cannot claim such descent. People of the *qabili* status divide themselves into superior and inferior tribes, with the former able to claim purity in blood and origin. There are marriage barriers between people of inferior and superior tribes. However, this is beginning to break down in contemporary Saudi Arabia as access to education and economic advantages create new status categories, which are beginning to compete with tribal affiliation (Doumato, 2010). Nevertheless, tribal affiliation still plays an important role and the central government recognises the role of tribal leaders who act as representatives for tribal members' interests (Arabian Business, 2012). These

leaders work through district *amirs* (officials) and governors on matters such as education, agricultural development, legal assistance, transportation and communication improvement, welfare and social assistance and obtaining citizenship privileges (Doumato, 2010).

Impact of tribal association on social interaction

Because the Arab world developed around families and tribes, social interactions take into account group feelings and are viewed through their capacity to command loyalty and exert influence (Gauntlett, 2005). An individual's capacity to leverage strategically beneficial relationships in order to enhance the group's social standing (known as *wasta*) is critical in Arab society. As such, the functional basis of Arab societies was developed through personal connections and influence that allowed for complex networks to develop over time, favours to be exchanged and activities to be undertaken for mutual benefit (Al-Rasheed, 1998; Gauntlett, 2005; Rizzo, Meyer, & Ali, 2002). It is on this understanding that much activity in Saudi Arabia is based.

Kinship

Kinship within Saudi society combines the functions that in Western societies are divided between business partnerships, professional associations, clubs, neighbours, networks and family members (Altorki, 1977; Holtzhausen, 2011). Children grow up with large networks of extended family and an extensive social network is an integral part of everyday life. There are often daily gatherings of family members to demonstrate support and comfort, console those who are ill, share in another's happiness, or simply for the joy that the company of others brings (Alazzi & Chiodo, 2006; Meleis, 1982).

Marriage

Marriage is highly valued and viewed as a socioeconomic alliance to bolster connections between families and tribes (Ali, 2003; Foley, 2010). It is regarded as a strong bond and total life commitment (Schvaneveldt et al., 2005). Women have a substantial say in marriage and wide latitude to reject potential partners, as set out in the Qur'an (Ali, 2003; Foley, 2010). They have the right of consent to marriage, a condition that validates the nuptial contract. Into the marriage contract they may insert any conditions, including prohibiting prospective husbands from taking a second wife. Husbands are obliged to provide three basic needs for their wives: food, clothing and shelter according to her social status before marriage. Breaking any of the terms of the marriage contract automatically annuls the marriage. According to the Qur'an, women have the right to inherit and appropriate, without interference from family members or their spouses and, although they are entitled to inherit only half the share of men, they are free to dispense their money and property in any way they desire. Men, on the other hand, are financially responsible for supporting their close female relatives, in the absence of a closer male relative (Ali, 2003).

Age at marriage

In recent times, Saudi Arabian women have been marrying at an older age, on average 22 years, with the single most important determinant in the age of marriage being education (Moghadam, 2004). Delaying marriage has allowed some women more time to continue their education and work towards other socioeconomic achievements. This has played a determining role in their life course (Heaton, 1996). Due to the costs associated with marriage, including the dowry paid by the groom to the bride, festivities and provisions to establish a new household, the number of people marrying later is increasing (Moaddel, 2006).

Polygamy

In Saudi Arabia, polygamy is diminishing, to a large extent, because of the rising costs of marriage (Moaddel, 2006) and because it does not fit the lifestyle of the better-educated Saudi citizen (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006). Further, polygamy in Islam has, as a central principle, a condition that requires husbands to treat and provide for all wives equally (Qur'an 4: 129), which adds to the cost of supporting several wives. Although diminishing, when polygamy is practised, it is often explained in terms of a legitimate and more socially accepted way of practising extra-marital affairs (Yamani, 2008). Polygamous marriage has been shown to be far from positive for some women, as revealed by a study of Bedouin-Arab women that found women in polygamous marriages developed significantly higher psychological distress and levels of somatisation, phobia and other psychological problems (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2006). They also experienced more problems in family functioning, marital relationships and life satisfaction.

Endogamous marriage

Endogamous marriage, arranged marriage within the tribe, is still favoured in Saudi Arabia as it reinforces existing lines of reciprocal support and common interests (Alsuwaigh, 1989; Altorki, 1977; Moghadam, 2004). However, marriage customs are beginning to see change, with many upper middle-class Saudis, who might have been educated abroad, choosing to marry non-Saudis or departing from the old custom of marrying within the tribe (Baki, 2004). Although Schvaneveldt et al.'s (2005) study involved women from the United Arab Emirates, they found support for the view that younger Middle-Eastern women were seeking unarranged marriages and looking to meet their prospective husbands either abroad, or by way of letters, telephone and other means of communication. This demonstrated a shift away from arranged endogamous marriage.

Role of women in the family

For Saudi women, their roles as wives and mothers are perceived as most important, with their foremost duty being to conserve the family unit (Baki, 2004; Le Renard, 2008; Moghadam, 2004; Pharaon, 2004). Marrying and reproducing earn women status within the family and society. Family honour and reputation rest largely on public perception of women (Pharaon, 2004). The concept of *Ired* referring to a woman's chastity is one of extreme sensitivity for Saudis (Alhazmi, 2010; Okruhlik, 2003). *Ired* relates to gender segregation and restrictions on women designed to protect their virtue and chastity, along with the reputation of the family and tribe. *Ired* appears to have secular rather than religious value, as it does not appear in the Qur'an, although it did exist among pre-Islamic Arabs and is mentioned in the *Hadiths* (sayings of the Prophet). Should a woman breach imposed restrictions, and *Ired* is lost, then it might take many generations before it can be regained (Alhazmi, 2010).

Women hold key responsibilities within families for transmitting cultural and religious traditions that reinforce the solidarity of the family unit. Educated women participate in decisions concerning their children's education and might assume the role of tutor. This gives today's mothers unprecedented authority over their children. Given the important status of women within families, the fear is that the whole social system would disintegrate if women were to allow their key role within the family to be overtaken by other roles (Pharaon, 2004).

Women's rights within the family

Saudi husbands control women's ability to work or travel and hold unilateral rights of divorce. Children belong to the husband's family and may be lost to the mother upon divorce (Pharaon, 2004). Women's rights to work are not only subject to their husband's approval but also are defined within the limits of Qur'an, *Sunna* (tradition of the Prophet) and consensus of

religious scholars (Le Renard, 2008). A royal decree in 1985 forbade women from working in sectors of the economy outside education and health and from managing businesses even if they owned them (Foley, 2010). Although women are now taking significant steps forward, it is a short history between this decree and the present time.

Extended and nuclear family structures

As a by-product of development, affluence and social mobility, the traditional extended family household in Saudi Arabia is giving way to the nuclear family. This situation has created a physical distance between nuclear families and their relatives, reducing pressure to emulate the lifestyle of older generations (Pharaon, 2004). Women in nuclear families have come to demand more of their husband's time for joint activities, including social gatherings, and have asserted their independence from their mothers-in-law, reinforcing the move towards nuclear family households. However, while the structure of the nuclear family has increased intimacy between husbands and wives and brought them in closer contact to their children, some women report increased feelings of isolation (Alsuwaigh, 1989).

Islam

The religion of Islam has shaped 'the history and character of Saudi Arabia since the sixth century AD' (Pharaon, 2004, p. 349). Today's Saudis, just like those of medieval times, demonstrate great pride in and strong attachment to their religion (Chejne, 1965; Schvaneveldt et al., 2005). Islam is totally ingrained in the fabric of society, with *Shari'a* law the constitution of the Kingdom and *Sunna* regulating daily life (Holtzhausen, 2011; Kapisewski, 2006; Montagu, 2010; Pharaon, 2004). Islamic law derives from three sources: the Qur'an, which Muslims regard as Divine Revelation, the *Hadith*, the sayings of the Prophet, and the *Sunna*, the tradition and practice of the Prophet (Ali, 2003).

Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims

Within Saudi Arabia, there is a small minority of Shi'ites, whose religious beliefs and practices do not conform to official ideology (Al-Rasheed, 1998). Shi'a narratives articulate an alternative discourse, with their main objective being to create a space in society for Shi'ite religious and political rights, social recognition and economic prosperity. Traditionally, Shi'ite Muslims have been employed in agriculture and this, along with discrimination on religious grounds, has restricted their capacity to expand into other types of employment (Al-Rasheed, 1998). Cases have been identified where Shi'ites have been excluded from educational opportunities, employment in educational institutions and the army, as well as from holding high-ranking positions within the oil company ARAMCO (Al-Rasheed, 1998). Other discriminatory practices include the ban on building Shi'a mosques and centres of religious learning. Many of these practices are based on the premise that Shi'ites are not an indigenous group, having their origins in countries such as Iraq and Iran (Al-Rasheed, 1998). Shi'ites are depicted as people whose lives are a continuous struggle under Saudi rule, due to *Wahhabi* prejudice and Saudi enforcement, with imprisonment, torture, termination of employment and exile regular occurrences (Al-Rasheed, 1998). Ongoing oppression has, however, resulted in solidification of the Shi'a faith and crystallised their demands for equal status.

Religion and identity

Moaddel (2006) debated the question of religiosity in Saudi Arabia through a values survey which identified that a lower percentage of Saudi Arabians described themselves as religious than Iranians, Jordanians, Egyptians or US Americans. Mosque attendance further reinforced the conclusion that Saudis were not more religious than the publics of other Muslim countries, and if religiosity was measured in terms of the practice of daily prayers, women would be found to be more religious than men. The finding that Saudis were less religious

than Egyptians and Jordanians was noteworthy, given that the Kingdom is officially a religious state with the law enforced by religious police and school curricula containing significant elements of religious education. However, Moaddel (2006) also demonstrated that Saudis consider religion the most important element of their identity, with 75 per cent of respondents defining themselves as Muslim above all, 17 per cent defining themselves as Saudi above all and less than 9 per cent defining themselves as Arab above all. Ochsenwald (1981) affirmed the importance of religious over cultural and tribal identities, by claiming that for Saudis religious and national identities were intertwined. The Saudi state's authority could not be accomplished without supporting Islam in its *Wahhabi* version.

Arabic

For Muslims, particularly Arabs, Arabic has long been regarded as a 'God-given' language. It is a pillar of nationalism, mainstay of faith and instrument of religion, with the Qur'an held up as the highest linguistic achievement of the Arabic language (Chejne, 1965). Arabic is one of the most important ties that bind Saudi society together, not only because it is the instrument of communication, but also because it acts as a link between the past and present (Chejne, 1965).

Arabic syntax

The Arabic language has a persuasive influence, meaning that often the words used to describe events are more significant than the events themselves. Common rhetorical patterns of exaggeration, over-assertion and repetition occur in everyday speech. Verbal threats are commonly used for psychological release rather than intimidation. Consequently, a firm assertion to a US American may sound weak and ambivalent to an Arab (Adelman & Lustig, 1981).

Communication patterns

Communication patterns involve attention to polite interactions through elaborate and prolonged greeting rituals. In business dealings, it is important to learn about an associate personally before any matter of business is discussed (Meleis, 1982). In the initial stages of interaction, polite expressions and inquiries are expected to take a considerable amount of time with these social rituals taking precedence over business appointments or negotiations (Adelman & Lustig, 1981).

Although orientation to time is not strictly related to language use, it does impact on communication. Saudi Arabians, along with other Arabs, often regard prearranged matters as less pressing than those at hand. What this means is that appointments might be broken or begin late, events scheduled for today can be just as easily dealt with tomorrow and there is no reason to schedule appointments too closely (Meleis, 1982). There are no formal distinctions between work, business and pleasure, resulting in most planning, problem solving and decision making going on at any time (Meleis, 1982).

Education system

Literacy rates and government assistance

In 1970, Saudi Arabia had one of the lowest literacy rates in the Middle East (Cordesman, 1984; Fernea, 1986) with 15 per cent of males and just 2 per cent of females literate. Within 25 years, Saudi Arabia improved its literacy rates to 73 per cent for males and 48 per cent for females largely through a plan to provide basic education free of charge to all Saudi Arabian citizens. To this day, the government provides financial incentives for some students, including those enrolled in vocational, technical, technological and higher education, along with free transportation for females (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 2002).

Girls' and women's education

From a relatively young age (around nine), girls withdraw to female schools and are instructed by female teachers in schools run by female administrators (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991; Le Renaud, 2008; Sonleiter & Khelifa, 2005). The only exceptions are some classes conducted by male teachers through CCTV (Baki, 2004). The expansion of girls' education over the past two decades has not, however, meant the disappearance of traditional attitudes towards the place of women in society or the fear that education is a Western-inspired innovation (Al Rawaf & Simmons, 1991), but it has created a legitimate public space in which females can carry on various kinds of activities. It has brought together females from varying social groups, backgrounds and ways of life. It has broadened the experience of females beyond family networks (Le Renard, 2008) but has, at the same time, led fundamentalists to express concern that education of females has dissolved traditional arrangements of space segregation, family ethics and sex roles (Pharaon, 2004; Schvaneveldt et al., 2005). Despite concerns from fundamentalists about expanding education for females, the Saudi education system continues to grow and women are permitted to study medicine and law (Fernea, 2000). However, women and their male counterparts still favour degrees in the humanities and social sciences, especially religious studies (Foley, 2010).

Pedagogy

Education gives a central role to Islamic doctrines and values, supports the concept of the family as the key social unit and emphasises the importance of maintaining family networks (Al-Hariri, 1987; Doumato, 1999). Limited world experience and contact with people from other countries, despite the significant number of foreign workers within the country, increases the insularity of the student experience and reinforces current pedagogy (Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005).

In terms of learning styles, students are expected to regard their teachers as absolute authorities, to acquire knowledge by rote memorisation and to fear making mistakes. As part of this pedagogical approach, students are discouraged from learning about social issues and how to develop plans to address them. This limits their capacity to question, challenge and analyse aspects of their own way of life and that of others (Sonleiter & Khelifa, 2005). Within the Saudi education system, there is a strong emphasis on structure and performing to teachers' standards, with little opportunity for students to select courses and take personal responsibility for decisions relating to their education (Meleis, 1982). These factors combined with gender segregation constrain robust discussion, bring forth students who lack information on global issues and events, have few opinions about issues that do not directly affect them and little experience in expressing their thoughts and ideas (Baki, 2004; Gauntlett, 2005; Sonleiter & Khelifa, 2005).

Career aspirations for women

Al-Yousef (2009) found that Saudi women were less enthusiastic about their daughters' career aspirations for reasons related to safety and happiness. While they supported their daughters gaining information about higher education, they did not necessarily approve of career plans. The level of the informants' education did not influence their attitudes about their daughters entering higher education. Fathers tended to play a greater role in helping their daughters to choose career paths in keeping with their abilities and interests. Al-Yousef's (2009) findings support Pharaon's (2004) argument that resistance to change in women's roles and, indeed, career advancement are not broken down along gender lines. Liberal men in many families and communities are open to new ideas and methods.

Saudi women

The Saudi woman, as promoted by the state, is ‘pious and virtuous and modest, educated, financially comfortable, and devoted to her family’ (Le Renard, 2008, p. 614). Her role within the family as wife and mother is well regarded for the contribution she makes in ensuring her children are raised in accordance with appropriate cultural and religious teachings. Her first duty is to conserve the family as a unit. Her right to work and earn a living is defined within the limits of the Qur’an, *Sunna* and consensus of religious scholars (*ulama*) (Le Renard, 2008; Moghadam, 2004). Her participation in charitable organisations, generally under the aegis of princesses is accepted, since the skills of generosity and devotion to others required for performing these duties are considered typically female (Baki, 2004; Le Renard, 2008). Respecting her, and providing for her, is a binding duty on her husband and failure to provide for her basic needs can be the basis for divorce, instigated by the woman (Ali, 2003; Pharaon, 2004).

Female sphere

The segregation of the sexes from an early age within Saudi society means that the Saudi woman has limited contact with males outside her immediate family. Her world largely revolves within ‘female spheres’ where entry is forbidden to men (Le Renard, 2008; Palley, 1991; Somers & Caram, 1998). In contemporary Riyadh, women are rarely visible in mixed-gender public spaces, but this does not mean they are limited to the domestic sphere. It simply means they confine their interactions to the female sphere in line with legal frameworks set out in the 1960s (Le Renard, 2008; Palley, 1991). While women’s institutions constitute spaces of autonomy, to some extent, they are still subject to decisions from male-dominated institutions and state rules and laws (Le Renard, 2008; Rizzo et al., 2002). Women’s entitlements to breaking out of the domestic sphere and entering the public female

sphere are dependent upon her family's consent. Her legal guardian can either give or withhold consent for her to be educated, work or hold an identity card (Foley, 2010; Le Renard, 2008; Palley, 1991; Somers & Caram, 1998).

Impact of technology to build connections between women

The internet and technological advancement has dramatically increased the scope for interconnectedness between women through the formation of social categories in cyberspace. Through these groups, women are making new social connections (Le Renard, 2008; Montagu, 2010; Pharaon, 2004). Unofficial statistics suggest that two thirds of internet users in Saudi Arabia are women (Teitelbaum, 2002). Female users tend to access the web from home to discuss many different topics, including social issues, family life and religion. They avoid the use of public terminals so that the Committee for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice (*muttawa*) cannot monitor their communications (Pharaon, 2004). As such, the internet has opened up a whole new arena for women to gather and exchange information.

Women's issues

Restrictions on women moving around without a guardian, the ban on women drivers and general restraints on travel have impacted on the way women's issues have developed and caused them to be dealt with in a fragmented and isolated way (Baki, 2004; Montagu, 2010; Palley, 1991). State reforms regarding women are not compulsory and depend on the family's choice. Women can break out of the domestic sphere and enter the public female sphere of activities, but only with their family's agreement (Le Renaud, 2008).

According to Pharaon (2004), the integration of women in development has produced mixed results and their involvement in the work sector remains limited, along with their entitlement to equality under the law. Hijab (in Pharaon, 2004) described three conditions

that must be met on a state and individual level before women can be fully integrated into the waged labour force: need, opportunity and ability. At the state level, ‘need’ refers to the country’s human resource requirement, ‘opportunity’ to the official efforts made to create the environment for employment by way of planning and legislation and ‘ability’ to the government’s efforts to train people in requisite skills. At the individual level, ‘need’ refers to a family’s income requirements, ‘opportunity’ to the social and cultural obstacles to women’s work and ‘ability’ to an individual’s possession of appropriate skills. This perception counters the view that the under-representation of Saudi women in the country’s economic development is related to social, religious and cultural factors (Pharaon, 2004). Accordingly, planning, legislation and training are critical to women’s participation at the state level, while appropriate skills and removal of barriers are vital for the individual.

Women and dress

Saudi women regard the veil as a religious obligation. It is a symbol of the depth of their religious convictions and solidarity with other Muslim women (Pharaon, 2004). In some regions, the *abaya* is a relatively recent phenomenon that transcends national boundaries and customs, a symbol of responsibility and independence (Ali, 2003; Al-Qasimi, 2010; Le Renard, 2008). The *abaya* is not worn at all times by women, but acts as a covering as they move through public spaces (Le Renard, 2008). It is their ‘protection’ from being seen by males who do not belong to their immediate family. Recent trends show how the *abaya* as a fashion statement is seen to privilege style over piety (Ali, 2003; Al-Qasimi, 2010). The wearing of the *niqab* (the veil that hides a woman’s face so that only a narrow slit allows vision) is not widespread, although according to Ali (2003) is on the rise.

Women and employment

The 8th Development Plan 2006-2010 for Saudi Arabia continued the focus of the 7th Development Plan 2000-2005, emphasising privatisation and economic diversification, increased support for women and opportunities for improving education (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Economy & Planning, 2005). In response to this plan, women continue to contribute to the economy, with about 10 per cent of private businesses in the Kingdom currently thought to be run by women, compared with hardly any a generation ago. Women with family connections, personal wealth, or who belong to work environments that stress merit and competence, have become a pervasive presence in business (Foley, 2010). However, female entrepreneurs still need the permission of the family patriarch to engage in business and must also have a 'front man', usually a foreigner, to run the business (Pharaon, 2004; Somers & Caram, 1998).

Women are emerging, but they are also meeting resistance, particularly in a crowded labour market, where they have to compete for promotion alongside men. Sex segregation in the workplace continues, although the number of mixed-gender workplaces is growing, mainly in the health and financial sectors (Le Renaud, 2008). There are instances where women have been castigated for placing individual desire and career aspiration over group good, but there is also a growing respect for modestly attired women who are attempting to make reforms on an egalitarian basis (Fernea, 2000).

In an interview with Lama Abdulaziz Al-Sulaiman and Nashwa Abdulhadi Taher, Saudi Arabia's first women elected to office, and Basmah Mosleh Omair, General Manager of the Khadijah Bint Khouwalid Women's Centre, Omair put forward the view that as in other parts of the world, regulation change was the key to equal opportunity for women in Saudi Arabia (Scharpf, 2007). She added that, in Saudi Arabia, regulations must go hand in hand with Islamic rights, and that the interpretation of these rights was critical. In her view,

the current legislation was interpreted extremely and this was hindering the progress of women. Women needed to have an awareness of their rights in Islam as well as an understanding of the regulations. Omair posited that women around the world faced the same challenges and desired similar outcomes as Saudi women, notably, a good career with equal opportunity, a healthy family and education for their children. A consequence of the extreme current legislation was the growing number of young Saudi women who lived with one foot in an overseas country. These women, although keen to assist in shaping the future of the Kingdom, chose to live abroad until they were assured that their desire and capacity to contribute to change would be welcomed and embraced (Doumato, 1999).

Matching skills to qualifications

Saudi Arabia has undergone rapid economic, social and demographic changes in recent years. These have raised similar concerns to those in other developing countries about the mismatch between the qualifications of graduates and the country's skills shortages. This situation has been exacerbated by an education system that continues to produce substantial numbers of graduates who are only qualified to work in the public sector, despite the majority of new jobs being created in the private domain (Baki, 2004; Pharaon, 2004). In an attempt to address this issue, a 'rapid expansion policy' has been implemented with emphasis on the quantitative expansion of the education sector (Jamjoom, 2010). There are also initiatives to allow young Saudi to undertake studies to improve their skill levels, particularly in technical and vocational education (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 2002).

In 2001, there were nearly 50,000 Saudi women looking for work, and in 2007 the Saudi government estimated that unemployment among Saudi women stood at 37 per cent (Foley, 2010). Even where women possessed the requisite skills and experiences, they faced constraints, including strong cultural and familial pressures to remain close to their families. This limited their ability to travel to regions in which jobs were available (Baki, 2004; Foley,

2010; Palley, 1991). Contributing to this is women's reliance on their spouses and male family members and restrictions to their independence, particularly when isolated from their extended families and communities (Midgley, 2009). Further, female employees encounter serious obstacles around inadequate support as mothers, unfair labour legislation pertaining to women, gender-based wage differentials and, in some areas, unhealthy work environments (Baki, 2004; Palley, 1991; Pharaon, 2004).

Emerging opportunities for female employment

Despite obstacles hindering their participation in the workforce, women are emerging both in fields where they have traditionally held positions, such as teaching, healthcare and social work and in important new fields, such as poetry, letters, the novel and visual arts (Fernea, 2000). They are moving steadily into new areas of private sector employment, such as advertising, broadcasting and journalism that would have been unacceptable a generation ago. Working in at-home offices also allows some women to be employed in professions such as architecture that are still closed to women (Doumato, 1999). At lower levels of education, there are fewer unemployed women than men, suggesting that women who do not achieve high levels of education are likely to find work more easily in mundane jobs compared to those who are highly educated and seeking work within their chosen professions (Calvert & Al-Shetaiwi, 2002).

Employment of women from affluent backgrounds

Women from affluent and more liberal backgrounds in Saudi Arabia have used education to enrich their lives and, in some cases build careers (Rizzo et al., 2002; Somers & Caram, 1998). Some elite women who hold a private, Western-style education choose not to seek employment, or abandon it after marriage, due to conservative social norms (Moghadam, 2004). The improvement in living standards and the fact that some women do not need to

work has been considered a marker for both wealth and moral distinction, differentiating Saudi Nationals from foreign women who are seen to work through necessity (Le Renard, 2008).

The situation for younger women

Young, qualified women differ from their mothers' generation in that they aspire to financial independence and to live active professional lives, even though workforce participation can be a struggle (Le Renard, 2008; Schvaneveldt et al., 2005). The consequence of this greater engagement with work has been to reduce the involvement of many young women in traditional networks of kinship and friendship that circumscribed their mothers' world of social interaction. It has changed their focus from a collective emphasis toward more individual status (Altorki, 1977; Pharaon, 2004). Access to education has an immediate impact on women's perceptions of themselves, their reproductive and sex roles and their social mobility expectations. However, these aspirations have also brought about concern from fundamentalists who argue that women's education might dissolve traditional arrangements of space segregation, family ethics and sex roles (Fernea, 2000; Pharaon, 2004).

A study by Moghadam (2004) identified a relationship between educational attainment and fertility, with women of lower status having higher fertility rates and those with most access to education and employment choosing to have fewer children. Salaried middle-class women were identified as having fewest children. Opportunities for personal advancement were more likely to emerge for women in urban settings than for those from rural settings, where patriarchal family arrangements were likely to limit their options (Pharaon, 2004).

Social change and the rise of the middle class

Since the 1970s, state expansion, economic development, oil wealth and increased integration within the world system have combined to create educational and employment opportunities in Saudi Arabia. Although benefits have spread unevenly, female education and employment have, to some extent, undermined patriarchal attitudes and practices, as Saudi Arabia, along with other developing countries, faces increasing pressure to embrace the faster pace of the global community (Moghadam, 1993).

The groundwork for much of the country's development has been undertaken through policies instigated by successive monarchs (King Abdulaziz – King Abdullah) and these have had far-reaching effects on Saudi society. For example, decisions to expand the national government, send young Saudi abroad for an education and bring in large numbers of foreigners to help develop the economy have all contributed to the emergence of a middle class. This has developed, however, in an unusual environment, alongside more traditional groups, such as princes, tribal sheikhs and *ulama* (religious scholars). It has meant that Saudis who do not complete a modern secular education, can still assume positions of authority because of traditional family ties, personal connections, trust and respect for religious learning (Rugh, 1973).

The exposure of the emerging middle class to modern political and social trends has resulted in social changes and influenced the structure of the extended family, the procedures of marriage and the education of women. There has been a shift from the rural existence of farmers and Bedouins to the modern concept of industry and technical businesses. Yet, despite these changes, predominant social practices continue to be tempered by traditional Saudi customs (Adelman & Lustig, 1981).

Saudization of the workforce

Around 1980, the Saudi Government recognised the need to reduce the country's reliance on professional foreign workers and, in response, started expanding its higher education system (Pharaon, 2004; Somers & Caram, 1998). It was deemed that foreign workers presented the biggest threat to the country's stability and security. In order to maintain current living standards, change from reliance on a largely foreign workforce to a Saudi one was required (Pharaon, 2004). This strategy was termed Saudization, with the primary agenda of creating a form of capitalism in keeping with Saudi social custom, with companies staffed and run by Saudi. Over time, the aim was to develop the productive sector beyond oil and gas exports (Pharaon, 2004).

The Saudization plan has been relatively slow to achieve its goals, despite extensive programmes to promote indigenous male workers. According to Foley (2010), this situation is creating space for women to assert their skills. As the participation rate of Saudi women in higher education significantly exceeds that of men, sometimes by as much as 24 per cent, they offer an alternative solution to expatriate workers, especially in skilled positions (Foley, 2010). With further education, women are becoming better placed to take advantage of political, economic and social changes, address the increasing costs of employing expatriate labour and overcome the problem of male colleagues unable to fill skilled and unskilled positions (Baki, 2004; Foley, 2010).

Struggle for change

Saudi society attests the importance of Islam and provides a key to understanding the Arab outlook on life and social, psychological and traditional value orientations (Jamjoom, 2010; Storti, 1990). Saudis, along with other Arabs, believe that human beings have some control over their destiny, but that God determines the future. It is a society that values mutual dependence rather than self-reliance (Adelman & Lustig, 1981) where most activity is an

interplay between honour and shame. This results in behaviour that is other-directed, shame-directed and prestige-oriented. Saudi society is homogeneous and conservative (Jamjoon, 2010; Montagu, 2010) with state-enforced conformity, discretion and limitations on expression engrained socially and internalised by the people (Okruhlik, 2003). Saudi society prizes consensus, endeavours to maintain harmony through consultation, is deeply averse to conflict and strives to preserve long-held values and traditions (Kapiszewski, 2006).

All these factors conspire to make the emergence of movements for change difficult. Where change does come, it comes slowly in line with Saudi society's core values and principles (Jamjoon, 2010; Montagu, 2010). The situation is further complicated by evidence that the country is being held back by skills shortages, a scarcity of Saudi Nationals being ready to take up management positions and contentment by some with the status quo (Montagu, 2010). In sum, Saudi Arabia, like many countries throughout the world, is a country in transition. Some advocate for change and aspire to blend ideas from the outside world, while at the same time preserving their values and traditions. Others desire to hold firmly to the status quo (Hanley, 2010).

Conclusion

This chapter examined Saudi Arabia, the context for this study. It began with information about the history, demographics and social structure of the Kingdom and went on to highlight key aspects of Saudi culture, including the importance of kinship, the unifying aspect of the Arabic language and the key role of Islam in shaping everyday life. The place of women within Saudi society was discussed, including an investigation of the role of women within the family, the emergence of women in the workplace and how education has accelerated social change. Finally, there have been references to movements to promote Saudization of the workforce and the challenges of modernising the Kingdom, while retaining the core values of the religion and culture. In conclusion, what has been uncovered throughout this

chapter is an emerging tension within Saudi society that at once looks to conserve heritage and tradition, while at the same time seeking to embrace new ideas from the outside world and sensitively introduce change. In the following chapter, contemporary literature about repatriation is examined, with emphasis given to theories of repatriation and the individual and situational variables that have been shown to impact upon readjustment outcomes.

Chapter 3

Literature review: Repatriation

The purpose of this chapter is to present contemporary work on the topic of repatriation. The chapter is separated into a number of broad categories that highlight important aspects of the repatriation process. These categories include:

1. Description of repatriation
2. Stages of readjustment
3. Impact of readjustment on returning sojourners
4. Theories of repatriation
5. Individual perspectives
6. Situational variables
7. Maintenance of networks
8. Transition strategies

Material for this review was initially obtained by searching journal and bibliographic reference databases. The following were searched: EBSCO Megafire Premier, Informit Social Sciences, Proquest and JSTOR. A further search was conducted for dissertations from universities across Australia pertaining to repatriation and the experiences of international students, particularly from Saudi Arabia. Key words entered were ‘Saudi Arabia’, ‘women’, ‘educate’, ‘culture shock’, ‘cultural adjustment’, ‘sojourner adjustment’, ‘re-entry’ and ‘repatriation’. Additional material from the reference lists of relevant articles was included. To obtain the most current information, the literature review was initially limited to articles published since 2000, but it was necessary to include some seminal works published prior to

this date, for example, Adler (1981), Gama and Pedersen (1977), Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) and Martin (1984).

Description of repatriation

Home means one thing to a man (sic) who has never left it, another thing to the man who dwells far from it, and still another to him who returns (Schuetz, 1945, p. 370).

This description of sojourning and returning home offered by Schuetz (1945) more than six decades ago referred to military personnel returning home after serving in World War II. However, it contains a timeless message about what it means to be a sojourner and what it means to return home. It suggests that sojourning and, by inference, repatriating are life-changing experiences that have unique and personal meanings for the individual. Home is never quite the same after a lengthy sojourn and returning home is a uniquely individual experience.

How it feels to come home

People ... talk about the rupture we feel on our return, an irreconcilable invisible distance between us and others. We talk about how difficult it is to assimilate, to assume routine, to sample familiar pleasures. Though I could convince myself that the fissure was narrow enough to be ignored, it took only a glance to see how dizzyingly deep it was (Maskalyk, 2009, p. 2).

This quote was taken from the autobiographical account of a doctor who undertook a six-month assignment in Sudan. His book chronicled his life in a foreign environment and described the many personal and professional challenges of his sojourn. Despite the enormity of the difficulties he encountered overseas, he acknowledged that some of his greatest challenges took place after his return to his home country, Canada, as he endeavoured to learn to live at home again. The experiences detailed in this autobiographical account echo Adler (1981) who identified that repatriates found returning home slightly more difficult than

the initial entry transition and suffered equally from repatriation shock, regardless of their type of assignment, or their overseas location. Despite this re-entry and readjustment have received far less attention than entry transitions due to the implicit assumption that returning home should be easy. (Adler, 1981; Black et al., 1992; Brabant, Palmer, & Grambling, 1990; Brein & David, 1971; Martin, 1984; Szkudlarek, 2010; Thompson & Christofi, 2006) Implications drawn from these findings are that:

- Re-entry transition is an under-researched topic.
- Transition and readjustment are challenging processes.
- Responses to sojourning and re-entry transition are highly individual.

Dimensions of repatriation

Sussman (1986) identified five significant dimensions that characterised re-entry transitions:

1. Emerging difficulties were unexpected.
2. There was often a lack of interest by colleagues and friends in the sojourn experience, leading to feelings of disappointment and isolation.
3. Repatriates were often unaware of personal changes that had occurred during their overseas sojourn.
4. Family and friends frequently expected the repatriate to exhibit pre-sojourn behaviour and did not expect new or different behaviours.
5. Changes within their home countries had often taken place while repatriates had been absent, leading to inaccurate perceptions about these changes. Conversely, repatriates sometimes anticipated changes within the home environment that did not occur.

Expectations

Expectations were one of the major differences observed between entry to a new culture and returning home (Martin, 1984; Storti, 1990; Sussman, 2001). Martin (1984) reported that sojourners were likely to expect difficulties and newness when adjusting to a foreign environment, while members of the host culture were also likely to expect newcomers to experience some difficulties (in particular with language) and to behave differently in social contexts. However, repatriates were far less likely to anticipate difficulties when returning home, and their families and friends similarly did not expect them to experience difficulties on their return. In a study of employees returning to US America, Adler (1981) reported that returnees planned to return to their previous lifestyles and even expected their children to return immediately to their former behaviours and routines. The consequences for sojourners expecting to return home unaffected are that individuals and social systems are ill-prepared for the challenges that occur, and this magnifies their impact. Further, it is the range of repatriation challenges and their cumulative impact that create most difficulties for returnees, because, in isolation, most of these challenges would be manageable (Storti, 2001). Black (1992) argued that returning to a once familiar environment after a period of time had the potential to create significant levels of uncertainty. However, if individuals held realistic expectations they were more likely to readjust effectively. Those whose expectations were either not met or exceeded were likely to experience greater difficulties. The findings of Rogers and Ward's (1993) study of 20 secondary students returning to New Zealand concurred with Black (1992) and showed that when difficulties had been anticipated, and experiences matched these expectations, fewer readjustment issues emerged.

Stages of readjustment

Adler (1981) identified a process comprising several stages, over a period of time, before readjustment was completed. The period immediately after returning home was described as the honeymoon period, or an initial high, lasting usually less than a month for the majority of returnees. (Some returnees reported this phase lasting just a few hours.) A low period followed, beginning earlier for re-entry than entry transitions, with the lowest periods being reported during the second and third months after return. By the sixth month, repatriates reported feeling 'average' rather than very high or very low. Storti (2001) identified a four-stage process of readjustment that involved departure and leave-taking, the honeymoon period, reverse culture shock and readjustment.

Minoura (1988) and Yoshida et al. (2002) reported a longer readjustment period, with the first year after returning home comprising readjustment to the physical and biological environments, which they labelled surface level adjustment. It took a further two years for repatriates to realise and deal with deeper cultural differences, such as values and ways of thinking, and to make social adjustments in terms of their self-concept.

In their study of 650 Japanese children, who had returned from an overseas sojourn, Kobayashi (in Thompson & Christofi, 2006) found they took longer to readjust to the home environment than to the foreign culture. The longer the duration of the sojourn, the longer the time required by children to readjust to their home environments. However, most had readjusted to Japanese school life within a year. Black et al. (1992) also found that full repatriation adjustment took between six months and one year. These studies suggested that readjustment is a process, with repatriates likely to undergo several stages, over varying periods of time, before finally reaching a position of full repatriation.

Impact of readjustment on returning sojourners

While many studies indicated a pessimistic outlook for returning sojourners (Sussman, 2002), some reported positive re-entry experiences: Martin (1986) identified that repatriates were likely to experience improved relationships with parents; Uehara (1986) noted positive changes in returning sojourners' values; and Church (1982) reported that returning sojourners were likely to have more favourable or objective attitudes towards the host culture, an increased appreciation of their home culture, a broader perspective of the world, increased cognitive complexity and greater personal self-awareness, self-esteem and confidence.

In a study of Hong Kong citizens who had returned home after living in Australia or Canada for various periods of time, Sussman (2011) reported successful readjustment through the incorporation of behaviours, attitudes and values acquired overseas into their home-country environment. Yoshida et al. (2002) reported that repatriates who had lived in various countries abroad and returned in recent years to Japan were less likely to feel different, spend time on self-reflection, experience adjustment difficulties and were likely to feel at an advantage as a result of their overseas sojourn. Their findings suggested this might be due to an increasing openness within Japanese society, or because returnees were less of an anomaly compared to earlier times and had been better prepared for re-entry. Another interpretation is that recent returnees were seen as more flexible and less foreign compared to those who had returned in previous times. Special schools offering opportunities for returnees to share their experiences with others also diminished the number of reports about readjustment difficulties.

However, less positive accounts of repatriation are more frequent (Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Corey, 1979; Gaw, 2000; Kidder, 1992; Thompson & Christofi, 2006). In the only study located relating to Saudi Arabian repatriates, undertaken more than three decades ago, Corey (1979) reported that many Saudi Arabian students who had completed graduate work in US America experienced professional and family repatriation difficulties. In

response, they developed coping strategies such as adopting 'conservative masks' (p. 48) and returning overseas frequently. These types of coping strategies were echoed by Japanese returnees who had lived in various countries, in a study by Kidder (1992). She referred to behaviours adopted by some as 'chameleon-like techniques to blend in with the occasion and change colours according to context' (p. 30). Returnees adopted these techniques to show they were unchanged and unaffected by their overseas experiences and that their cultural identity was not affected by their sojourn, even if these same individuals covertly held opinions, views and behaviours contrary to the views of the majority in their home country.

In a study of 66 US American college students, Gaw (2000) found repatriates, who had studied in various countries abroad, were likely to experience reverse culture shock on their return, manifested in feelings of alienation, depression, isolation, loneliness, general anxiety, speech anxiety, friendship difficulties, shyness and inferiority. This situation was exacerbated by the probability that those who experienced severe reverse culture shock were unlikely to seek support from services, putting them at risk academically and developmentally.

Belonging or not?

Thompson and Christofi (2006) investigated the repatriation experiences of eight Cypriots who studied overseas in undergraduate programmes for periods of between three and 10 years. On returning home, these informants described their situations as neither belonging to their home country nor abroad. (This phenomenon is also discussed by Storti (2001) who labelled this a period of temporary homelessness.) Female respondents identified restrictions on personal freedom as one of their greatest challenges, leaving them with the option of choosing between freedom and career in the host country, or family, friends and traditions of their home country. They did not perceive integration between the home and host environments as possible.

A later study by Christofi and Thompson (2007) investigated this further through the experiences of repatriates who had returned to their home countries in Europe, and then returned to their sojourn countries of England and US America after periods of one to three years. They identified five themes that described a kind of ‘push and pull’ associated with returning home. The first theme, titled conflict/peace, encompassed two sub-themes: frustration and ambivalence. This theme explored returnees’ strong commitment to their home country and simultaneous frustration (described as irritation, annoyance and difficulties) with various aspects of life there. The second theme, reality/idealisation explored issues around expectations and reality with informants holding idealised views of their home country while overseas and, on returning home, being required to confront and deal with a different reality. The third theme, freedom/restriction, examined gender roles, open-mindedness and family expectations. One returnee described how residents in her home country were less accepting of non-conformity in dress and behaviour, while another identified restrictions on women in the workplace as an issue that angered and frustrated her. The fourth theme, changing/static, explored the impact of personal changes and how repatriates observed changes in their home country compared to changes in their sojourning country. The final theme, comfort/discomfort, referred to how the informants felt when they were either in their sojourn country or in their country of origin.

These studies suggested that, for some returning sojourners, the gap between their home and host countries was so wide it could not be bridged. Participants talked about sitting on a fence between two countries, or as having one foot in each country, thus making it difficult to feel they truly belonged in one place.

Impact of personal and environmental changes on readjustment experiences

Martin (1984) argued that returning to a familiar environment might be disconcerting for some repatriates, as it was likely that, through this process, they would become aware of the

significant personal changes they had made. In doing so, the disparity between themselves and their home environments would be accentuated. Church (1982) argued that personal changes, such as increased self-confidence and self-reliance, and modifications in more superficial habits, such as dress, eating and drinking, were more consistent sojourn outcomes than changes in primary cultural values related to family, interpersonal and community relations, religious and political beliefs and sexual norms. However, Uehara's (1986) study of US American students, who had studied abroad, pointed to changes in repatriates' values as major factors influencing readjustment. These changes had the capacity to affect returnees' relationships, opinions about male and female relationships, the place of the individual within society, how they presented themselves to the world in terms of dress and appearance, their behaviours (usually more achievement-oriented) and perceptions of global issues. Black (1992) went further to argue that not only sojourners changed, but also a wide range of elements in their home countries, including technology, social norms, organisational culture and economic conditions. The divergence between sojourners' experiences and magnitude and scope of changes in their home countries affected the readjustment process.

Theories of repatriation

Szkudlarek (2010) identified three functional categories that affected cultural transition: affective, behavioural and cognitive. Szkudlarek's (2010) framework has been replicated in this study, since it encompasses the various theoretical streams of repatriation.

Affective stream

This category focuses on the psychological well-being of repatriates. Cultural transition is conceptualised in terms of the feelings, emotional reactions and mental responses of the repatriate (Szkudlarek, 2010). Some of the most influential writing within this theoretical stream was the work of Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) that set out the W-curve function,

also known as reverse culture shock. The W-curve is described as an extension of the U-curve theory attributed to Lysgaard (1955). According to the U-curve theory, sojourners undergo four distinct phases during an intercultural sojourn: euphoria (positive excitement about the new environment), culture shock caused by surprising, mostly negative experiences in the new environment, acculturation (the learning process of adaptation to the new environment) and, finally, a stable state achieved with successful acculturation. The W-curve mirrored adjustment theory by pointing to initial feelings of euphoria and satisfaction, followed by a decline in readjustment and a free stage of recovery. According to Brein and David (1971), these patterns define the readjustment process of a large number of sojourners, with variations in the intensity of the experience. There is, however, only limited support for the U-curve and W-curve hypotheses (Church, 1982; Hull, 1978; Klineberg & Hull, 1979). Adler (1981) indicated that ‘the moods of returning expatriates follow a “flattened” u-shaped curve’ (p. 344), while Sussman (2001) also queried the curvilinearity of the readjustment process. Questions have also been raised about how repatriates, who regularly transition from one country to another, manage multiple re-entry processes.

Behavioural stream

This stream is derived from Culture Learning Theory attributed to Furnham and Bochner (1986) who posited that sojourners experienced profound personal transformations during transitions by learning and internalising a range of behaviours expected by the host culture. Over time, these learned behaviours might replace those developed in their home country, requiring repatriates to relearn these social skills after returning home. Furnham and Bochner (1986) argued that behavioural adjustment could be assisted through making cognitive adjustments prior to returning home. Brabant et al. (1990) theorised that successful readjustment within the host culture was related to successful readjustment on repatriation, so those sojourners who had been able to adjust well while overseas would use the same

adaptive skills on their return home. What remains unanswered about this theory is whether the skills that expatriates acquired while overseas are discarded when they are not used on their return home, or if they remain dormant until required on a future occasion (Szkudlarek, 2010).

Cognitive stream

Within this stream of repatriation theory are two sub-streams:

1. *Expectations model* provides an explanation of the reality of repatriation versus the returnee's expectations of returning home (Adler, 1981; Black, 1992). It describes the way in which sojourners' expectations prior to returning home influence their readjustment. This stream acknowledges the difficulties sojourners experience when adjusting to foreign environments and the need for preparation to minimise readjustment challenges. Originally developed to explain issues within entry transitions, this theory also assumes that the home country is well-known to the returning sojourner and as such, does not require readjustment strategies to be implemented. The reality however, is that both home environments and sojourners might have changed during the sojourners' absence. This theory underscores the influence of expectations on the repatriation process, although there is no consensus about the relationship between unmet, met or exceeded expectations and successful readjustment. Black (1992) argues that met expectations result in the highest level of readjustment and job performance, while Hammer, Hart, and Rogan (1998) and Sussman (2002) refute a direct relationship between met expectations and readjustment.
2. *Culture identity model* focuses on the identity changes that occur during and after an international sojourn. This theory assumes that repatriates undergo a profound personal transformation during their sojourn, which affects their cultural identity

and sense of belonging (Szkudlarek, 2010). A primary assumption of this theory is that expatriate experience is related in some way to repatriate outcomes. There are two main views relating to this assumption: the first predicts a direct, positive association between overseas adjustment and repatriation experience: the more successful the adaptation to the host country, the more successful the repatriation. A skills-learning model forms the basis of this prediction, asserting that sojourners who adjust successfully overseas are better able to cope with repatriation challenges. The second predicts an inverse relationship between overseas adaptation and repatriation, suggesting that the more successful the adaptation to the host culture, the more difficult would be the return home (Sussman, 2000, 2002).

Cox (2004) proposed an alternative culture identity model, encompassing four patterns of intercultural identity formation: home-favoured (low adaptation to the host environment), host-favoured (high adaptation to the host environment through identity loss), integrated (sense of belonging to a global community) and disintegrated (high adaptation to the host environment through identity gain). His study on the readjustment of 101 US American sojourners returning from work as missionaries in 44 countries indicated that the demographic factors of age, marital status, length of sojourn and debriefing had a significant relationship with readjustment. Intercultural identity patterns demonstrated that home-favoured identifiers, who acquired proficiency in the host culture while maintaining connections with home, had an easier readjustment. In terms of psychological health, those who belonged to the integrated group were less likely to experience depression than those who belonged to the home-favoured, host-favoured and disintegrated groups. The lowest degree of social difficulty was experienced by those in the integrated group, followed by the home-favoured, disintegrated and host-favoured

groups. This differs from Sussman's (2002) finding that home-favoured groups (additive/affirmative identifiers) experienced less difficulty than global identifiers.

Individual variables of repatriation

A substantial number of empirical studies related to repatriation focus on the individual characteristics of sojourners. Research shows that a number of variables affect the distress experienced by repatriates on their return, their capacity to readjust and their satisfaction levels around transition. These variables include gender, age, personality, religion and region, marital and socioeconomic status, prior intercultural experience and re-entry.

Gender

Numerous studies identified gender as an important variable affecting repatriation. Gama and Pedersen (1977) investigated the experiences of 31 Brazilians who had returned from graduate study in US America. Their study concluded that women found it harder to cope with family expectations, experienced value conflicts and were less able to readapt to family supervision of their activities on returning home. Reasons given for this were that women might have changed their values and feelings on interpersonal relationships and sexuality while in US America and, in doing so, experienced difficulties in readjusting to their families' more conservative attitudes and values. Men were less likely to experience similar feelings, their education being more liberal in Brazil. When asked which of the existing values and norms of their home country were dissatisfying, a majority of respondents referred to double standards of morality on the basis of gender.

Brabant et al.'s (1990) study on the experiences of 96 international students who had been studying at a US American campus identified gender as the single most important variable in predicting problems in returning home, with females more likely than males to report problems with family and daily life, and changes in their home-country friendships.

They concluded that younger, single, female, sojourners with fewer overseas experiences, who stayed abroad for long periods of time and returned home without debriefing, would have greater repatriation difficulties. The number of sojourns and number of months since return did not yield significant correlations with repatriation adjustment measures.

In contrast, Rohrlich and Martin's (1991) study of college level students, who had sojourned in Western Europe found that women were more satisfied after returning home and encountered fewer problems. This was attributed to a more independent lifestyle at home, compared with their experiences living with host families overseas. Their findings suggested that the capacity of host and home countries to tolerate different behaviours and lifestyles might be an influential factor in the repatriation process.

The Cultural Identity Model (Sussman, 2000) predicted that female repatriates would experience more self-concept disturbances and subtractive identity shifts (high adaptation to the host country and high repatriation distress on returning home) than men. In a study of senior female international managers based in Western Europe, who had undertaken overseas assignments to various countries, Linehan and Scullion (2002) argued that female repatriates would experience more difficulties than their male counterparts. Interviews with 32 female managers identified isolation, tokenism and exclusion as problems in the workplace. The informants in this study alleged that male colleagues did not endure the same challenges.

In his study of missionaries who had returned to US America, Cox (2004) examined the influence of demographic factors, communication behaviour and cultural identity on repatriation. He reported a slightly higher mean score for women experiencing depression, social difficulty and host identification, while men reported higher scores on home identification upon re-entry, although there was not a significant statistical difference.

Christofi and Thompson (2007) cited the inequality of women in the workplace as one of the overwhelming challenges for female sojourners in readjusting to life in their home countries. One informant described her professional colleagues in her host country (US America) as open-minded and fun, while her description of the workplace in her home country of Cyprus centred around gender inequality and entrenched attitudes. Another of this study's informants from Russia recalled that her time in US America was about freedom to do things and to think creatively, while these freedoms were not easy to achieve in her home country.

Excepting Rohlrich and Martin's (1991) study, these studies point to women being more likely to experience challenges during repatriation than their male counterparts. Findings from these studies indicated that there might be a relationship between readjustment and home country attitudes or expectations about female roles, behaviour and personal freedoms.

Age

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) investigated the experiences of returning US American scholarship grantees and identified professional problems for older grantees and more personal social problems for younger ones. Orr (in Gama & Pedersen, 1977) reviewed research on the experiences of international students and reported that, as a result of their time abroad, returnees were more flexible, insightful and sensitive. Those who experienced most difficulty readjusting tended to be younger, felt alienated from their home culture, perceived they had little influence over change and had originated from more rigid (described by Triandis (1989) as 'tight' cultures) cultures, or from countries where there was distrust of the host country. Martin (1984) posited that the age at which many individuals went abroad to study was the peak development period for forming opinions and understandings of the world, so student sojourners tended to return home more independent and adult than when

they left. This resulted in positive changes in their relationships with parents. In a study on the readjustment of US American students who had been living abroad, Uehara (1986) reported that, although there was little correlation between age and re-entry shock, there were indications that younger returnees tended to experience more readjustment problems than older returnees.

Black and Gregersen (1991) posited that, although there was evidence to support the view that younger repatriates experienced greater difficulties in re-entry, the conclusion could not be drawn that older expatriates made more effective cross-cultural adjustments. Extrapolated from this finding was the inference that older individuals should not be considered preferred candidates for overseas assignments based on their ability to adjust and readjust. In a study involving 104 Finnish managers and their spouses, who undertook overseas assignments lasting more than nine months, Gregersen and Stroh (1997) found that older Finnish repatriates did not necessarily have an easier time readjusting to Finland than younger repatriates. Cox (2004) posited older repatriates experienced lower levels of depression and social difficulty on re-entry than younger returning sojourners. In sum, age has been shown to be an interesting and important variable in successful repatriation. However, the results are not conclusive, with contradictory findings across diverse cultural populations.

Personality

Gama and Pedersen (1977) suggested that those who had the ability to adjust easily exhibited particular personality traits, including openness to new ideas, willingness to engage with multinational experiences and enjoyment in the challenges of everyday events in a new country. These same individuals, however, were likely to experience readjustment problems because their new ideas were likely to cause conflict and familiar events and surroundings of home were likely to be regarded as less stimulating compared with those encountered

overseas. Brein and David (1971), too, suggested that those able to adjust easily to a foreign country might experience difficulties on their return home because their new ideas and behaviours were likely to conflict with more traditional elements of their home countries. Sussman's (2000) Cultural Identity Model suggested that further research was needed to clarify why some sojourners experienced profound changes in cultural identity and others returned from an overseas experience with little change in their cultural self-concept. She posited that the constructs of cultural flexibility, measures of worldview, tolerance and cultural sensitivity might prove to be relevant to this area. In sum, personality variables require further testing, although there is some evidence to suggest they influence an individual's capacity to adjust and readjust.

Religion and region

Brabant et al. (1990) posited that, from the position of broad cultural variables, both region and religion were significantly related to family problems after repatriation. Their study of foreign students, who had studied in US America, concluded that near Eastern and Islamic students proportionately experienced more family problems on their return home. Martin and Harrell (2004) asserted that relationship difficulties might result from returning sojourners having experienced more freedom and exposure to liberal values and less conservative behaviours in host countries. Hull (1978) and Klineberg and Hull (1979) argued that sojourners' religious beliefs remained particularly stable during an international sojourn and, as a result, did not create tensions on their return. According to Szkudlarek (2010), there was limited knowledge about this variable. However, it was particularly important for this study, given the religious background and region from which this study's participants were drawn.

Marital status

There was some correlation between marital status and capacity for successful readjustment. Black and Gregersen's (1991) study of US American managers showed that older expatriates with spouses experienced an easier time in readjustment. They found that each person's readjustment was significantly related to the other, possibly because both parties encountered similar factors in their respective readjustments. Cox (2004) found that single sojourners reported higher depression at repatriation compared with their married counterparts. Though not statistically significant, singles also reported more social difficulty at repatriation and stronger identification with the host culture, while married respondents reported higher levels of identification with the home culture. These studies suggested that marital status might assist in repatriation adjustment. However, there is also correlation of marital status with age, making it difficult to deduce the impact of marriage on readjustment without taking other variables into account.

Socioeconomic status

Limited empirical research in the area of socioeconomic status was uncovered. Brabant et al.'s (1990) study contained very few persons from disadvantaged backgrounds, probably because of their limited opportunities for education abroad. Black and Gregersen (1991) identified a close relationship between job position and social status but did not investigate the relationship between socioeconomic status and readjustment. Gregersen and Stroh (1997) reported that social status appeared to be less significant for Finnish repatriates and their spouses than for US American repatriates. There was inconclusive evidence that socioeconomic status affected repatriation outcomes, a principal reason being that those most likely to undertake an international sojourn enjoyed socioeconomic advantages. This limited the number and scope of studies on this variable.

Prior intercultural experience and re-entry

Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) reported that US American students, who were undergoing their first major geographic move or ‘psychological relocation’, were most likely to experience loss on their return home. In contrast, Cox (2004) found the number of sojourns and the number of months since return did not show significant correlations with repatriation adjustment measures. Sussman (2002) too hypothesised that multiple re-entries could influence sojourners’ readaptation. From these findings, it seems probable that repeated experience in crossing cultural boundaries might lead to an ease in adjustment challenges, either within the host or home cultures. Presuming that expectations play a significant role in the repatriation experience, it might be assumed that a returning sojourner, who has re-entered their home culture on previous occasions, would anticipate some difficulties.

Situational variables of repatriation

Presented below is a selection of situational variables that might influence repatriation. Like individual variables, studies show that situational variables have the capacity to affect repatriation distress, readjustment and satisfaction levels on returning home.

Length of intercultural sojourn

Uehara (1986) investigated the re-entry adjustment of US American students after an extended sojourn (six months to four years overseas) and found that the length of the foreign sojourn was not correlated with re-entry culture shock. However, contrary findings were reported by Gregersen and Stroh (1997) in their study of Finnish managers and their spouses. They identified that those who remained overseas for prolonged periods of time experienced some of the greatest readjustment challenges at work and at home. Black and Gregersen (1991) reported similar findings that the longer employees were overseas the more difficult was their readjustment to work on returning to US America. However, they did not conclude

that length of time spent overseas affected the repatriation of sojourners outside the work situation. The results of studies on the impact of time spent overseas and repatriation are inconsistent, with some studies indicating no relationship between the length of the international sojourn, repatriation distress and home-country adjustment (Uehara, 1986), while others found some correlation (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Gregersen & Stroh, 1997). This suggests that more research is required in this area.

Cultural distance

Church (1982), Kidder (1992) and Triandis (1989) asserted that cultural differences between home and host country environments had a substantial influence on repatriation outcomes. Triandis (1989) suggested that these varying experiences might be explained by referring to cultural differences in terms of ‘tight and loose’ societies. Tight societies had a well-defined behavioural code and loose societies had fewer restraining rules and norms. He proposed that transitioning from a loose to a tight society or vice versa would have a significant impact on the process of repatriation.

In their studies of Finnish and Japanese repatriates respectively, Gregersen and Stroh (1997) and Kidder (1992) identified the homogeneity of these societies as a possible reason for repatriates experiencing elevated feelings of difference and disadvantage on their return. These feelings became more marked when sojourners were returning from host countries that were culturally dissimilar to their home countries. It is noteworthy that Rohrlich and Martin’s (1991) findings about repatriates returning to US America (identified as a heterogeneous population) showed that rather than cultural differences, attributes of the home and host environments, such as food and climate, had a greater impact on cross-cultural adjustment.

In a study of Sri Lankan and Taiwanese repatriates, who had lived and studied in Northern Ireland, Pritchard (2011) reported that returnees were not challenged so much by

emotional adjustment on their return as by their experience of conflicting values between modernism and traditionalism or between individualism and collectivism. Many respondents no longer conformed to the stereotypes of their particular cultures. These findings concur with some of Thompson and Christofi's (2006) conclusions in which the challenges to conformity within the more conservative society of Cyprus most affected repatriation outcomes.

Evidence suggests that cultural distance does have an impact on repatriation outcomes, especially in situations where repatriates may be transitioning from tight to loose societies or vice versa. Heterogeneity and homogeneity of the home country may also be influential factors impeding or facilitating attempts by returning sojourners to put forward new ideas, attitudes or behaviours and to be able to integrate these into more conservative societies.

Contact with host country

Several studies showed that the development of meaningful relationships between international students and members of host communities affected international students' descriptions of the success or failure of overseas sojourns (Hull, 1978; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Perucci & Hu, 1995; Westwood & Barker, 1990). Although many international students reported that establishing superficial relationships with members of host communities was achievable, it was often difficult to move these relationships beyond small talk to more meaningful connections (Gendera, Pe-Pua, & Katz, 2012). It was these deeper relationships that contributed significantly to how students rated a successful sojourn. Further, establishing relationships between international and domestic students often required facilitation and management to achieve positive outcomes, as interaction was unlikely to

occur spontaneously (Brein & David, 1971; Briguglio, 1998; Furnham & Bochner, 1982; Marginson et al., 2010; Todd & Nesdale, 1997; Volet & Ang, 1998; Ward, 2001).

Rohrlich and Martin's (1991) study provided evidence that everyday activities, such as going on walks, outings or spending evenings with host families and discussing significant issues with members of the host country, affected repatriation outcomes. The more frequently sojourners engaged in these activities abroad, the less likely they were to be satisfied on their return home. They concluded that relationships involving meaningful communication between sojourners and members of the host communities and the feelings of integration these activities engendered were greatly missed on the sojourners' return. Although these activities were highly sought during the international sojourn, they had the potential to impact negatively on sojourners' readjustment to their home countries.

These studies raised questions about the assertions of Cultural Learning theorists, such as Furnham and Bochner (1986) and Brabant et al. (1990) who argued that those who were able to learn to adjust most successfully overseas were then able to reuse these same skills during readjustment. Sussman (2000, 2002) talked about two opposing views on this topic: those who claimed that expatriates who were most successful in entry adjustment and host-country integration were more likely to encounter difficulties on their return home and the opposing position that skills learned during entry transition were transferrable and could be used in the re-entry process.

Home organisations' and peers' responses to returning sojourners

Butcher (2002) found the difficulties for many sojourners in returning home were exacerbated by home country organisations that tended neither to recognise nor use their newly acquired skills. He concluded that managers valued those repatriates who did not have the characteristics of foreigners, nor used their cross-cultural learning in the workplace.

Colleagues evaluated the repatriates with the least overseas experience or contact with foreigners as most effective. Howard (1980) reported similar findings in his study of 81 US American managers. He found that many repatriates felt unwanted by their former employers, while peers and colleagues believed that repatriates posed potential competition to their own professional careers within organisations.

Hoshino and Niikura's (1983) and Yoshida et al.'s (2003) studies of peer perceptions of repatriating Japanese grouped responses according to advantage and disadvantage. Disadvantage was associated with difference and reinforced observations that differences caused problems with peers. Returnees' foreignness, language competency (in a foreign language) and tendency to use direct speech were identified as the three top disadvantages when interacting with peers. Paradoxically, these same criteria differentiated them advantageously from their competition when applying to enter universities or large corporations. Enloe and Lewin's (1987) study of repatriating Japanese found that many repatriates were regarded as foreigners in their home country and viewed as having lost their 'Japanese purity' (p. 224) during their international sojourns.

In sum, these studies, regardless of the repatriates' host and home countries, identified that the skills returnees acquired overseas were under-valued or ignored in the workplace, and signs of 'foreignness' were disadvantageous. For many repatriates, the experience of rejoining the workforce was a lonely and isolating one, where neither managers nor colleagues showed interest in, or support for, their overseas experiences. For some Japanese repatriates, international experiences were regarded as dissolving their cultural purity in the eyes of their peers and colleagues.

Housing conditions

According to Gregersen and Stroh (1997), acquiring suitable and affordable housing on returning home significantly affected the general readjustment of returnees. Kendall (1981) argued that most repatriates experienced severe disruption in housing upon repatriation, because many did not know what housing was available to them, whether housing would be affordable and, if available, comparable to housing in their host country. For some repatriates who sold their homes before taking an overseas assignment, coming home meant they were temporarily homeless. They often faced housing shortages or spiralling costs as house prices had increased while they were away. Butcher (2002) reported that for younger, single repatriates, the most challenging re-entry issue was often returning to live in the parental home after living independently abroad.

Importance of maintaining networks

There is considerable agreement in research findings that sojourners who had maintained contact with members of their home culture and were kept informed regularly about matters relating to their home environment, experienced fewer repatriation surprises and unmet expectations on their return (Adler, 1985; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Black et al., 1992; Cox, 2004; Klaff, 2002; Westwood & Leung, 1994). In terms of the professional work environment, Adler (1981) posited that organisations had a responsibility to understand the importance of staying in contact with staff members who were overseas, of planning for their return and of recognising the value of their overseas experience. Klaff (2002) recommended that open discussions about returning home should commence with returning employees six to eight months before an assignment ended. Managers should attempt to place returnees in positions that allowed them, where possible, to conduct business with clients from the country where they had lived. Communication with expatriates by way of intranet,

newsletters and occasional visits from home-based employees were recommended as important strategies for keeping expatriates connected, ensuring expatriates completed overseas assignments and were retained by organisations after they returned home (Klaff, 2002).

Cox (2004) too advocated that mediated forms of communication, such as the internet and email, were as satisfying for individuals on overseas assignments as personal visits. The emergence of technologies had potential to provide effective communications between expatriates and home country contacts, including family, friends, colleagues and employers. While Brabant et al. (1990) and Gregersen and Stroh (1997) suggested that regular home visits alleviated potential communication problems for expatriates with friends and family at home, the emergence of technologies, particularly during the 1990s, gained favour as efficient, cost effective strategies to address this issue.

The literature shows broad agreement that keeping contact between sojourners and individuals and organisations within their home country aids repatriation, as it can influence the development of more realistic expectations for sojourners. The potential of technology to aid communication between sojourners and their home countries is a topic for further research.

Transition strategies

Howard (1980) underscored that US American managers reported feeling they were in alien environments after returning to their homeland. This situation was partly explained by the finding that only two of the 27 multinational companies involved in their study had formalised plans to assist repatriates to reintegrate and reassimilate into US American society. Informants suggested that special reorientation and counselling might have assisted their readjustment.

Hammer et al. (1998) supported the notion of reorientation training, arguing returnees were likely to use this to align their expectations with the situations they were likely to encounter on returning home, both within the organisational context and social milieu. Cox (2004) concurred that it was important to reactivate the social and cultural skills repatriates required during readjustment. Reorientation training and debriefing helped participants to identify better (cognitively) with their home cultures, but did not significantly lessen the emotional distress and social difficulty (behaviourally) of repatriation. He recommended ongoing support to alleviate problems around re-entry distress.

Black and Mendenhall (1990) posited that reorientation training programmes should include information about the repatriation process, problems returning sojourners were likely to encounter and strategies for dealing with these challenges. Gaw (2000) suggested that repatriates should be offered psycho-educational programmes that included support and discussion groups, social functions and opportunities for repatriates to share their overseas experiences through organised and structured events. Kim (2001) purported that it was important for sojourners who were close to departing their host countries to have the opportunity to close relationships with members of the host community. Kim (2001) underscored the significance of saying ‘good-bye’ as a way of closing personal and professional relationships; thereby raising awareness to impending departure.

In sum, the literature urged the development of reorientation training as a strategy to reactivate important social and cultural skills, lessen re-entry distress and assist sojourners to overcome some of the uncertainty they were likely to feel on returning home.

Conclusion

This chapter examined literature on repatriation, a term used to describe the return of sojourners to a familiar place after residing overseas for a period of time. It discussed the

repatriation process, or what it means to come home and sojourners' expectations of homecoming. The literature challenged the assumption that returning home should be easy and portrayed repatriation to be far from easy for many sojourners with a range of individual and situational variables found to impact on returnees' experiences. Theories on repatriation were built around three functional categories: affective, behavioural and cognitive. Suggestions identified from the literature to assist in the repatriation experience focused on maintaining networks while in the host country and developing strategies for improving the transition process. Given the cross-cultural nature of most sojourning experiences, culture and cultural identity are explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Culture and cultural identity

This chapter explores the concepts of culture and cultural identity. It begins by examining some of the definitions of culture that shaped understanding and interpretation of culture in this study. An explanation of the social work literature that influenced the approaches taken to bridge cultural differences is offered. Theories that explore cultural differences are compared, leading to a discussion of how these theories were applied to redefine culture in the context of this study. The latter part of this chapter contains an overview of theories about cultural repatriation and a comprehensive exploration of Sussman's (2000) Cultural Identity Model, the conceptual framework for this study. The final section provides an explanation of how significant works informed new insights about culture and cultural identity. Because I used the theories and studies outlined in this chapter to develop my own approach to understanding and working with cultural differences, I have presented some parts of this chapter in the first person.

Definitions of culture

There have been many attempts to define culture and, although there is general agreement about its importance, there is also considerable debate on how it should be defined. Williams (in Pon, 2009) asserted that culture is one of the most complicated words in the English language, while Gross (2000) declared that as 'elusive as culture can be, especially the culture of "others", there is little that is more important. Culture composes one's humanity' (p. 61).

From an anthropological perspective, Geertz (1973) wrote 'Man (sic) is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun ... I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be ... an interpretative one in search of meaning' (p. 5). He continued, 'Understanding a people's culture exposes their normalness without reducing their particularity. It renders them accessible to settling them in the frame of their own banalities, it dissolves their opacity' (p. 14). For Geertz (1973) culture constituted a symbolic system comprising elements with internal relationships to one another. Culture surfaced when these elements were viewed as a whole system with core symbols, underlying structures and ideological principles. He recognised the importance of a historically transmitted pattern of meaning embodied in symbols through which people communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about, and attitudes towards, life.

Yon (2000) was critical of anthropological theories that objectified and fixed cultural differences, while applying Western-centred assumptions on non-Western contexts. He argued that modern anthropology adopted a theory of culture that described the attributes and distinguishing features of communities and then recorded and analysed these traits to differentiate them. Park (2005) too was critical, asserting that the anthropological view was about the etymology of culture rather than a definition of it. She argued that this perspective explained culture as a set of commonalities around which values, norms, styles, roles and behaviours were constructed. This, she claimed, was a distinct departure from the idea that culture *is* values, norms, styles and roles. Further, she underscored that the anthropological standpoint failed to define what the commonalities referred to were and failing to do so invited ambiguity.

Sowers-Hoag and Sandau-Beckler (1996) described culture as a matter of personal identity and an essential ingredient for individual dignity. This implied that through developing cultural competence, one demonstrates a commitment to preserving not only the

dignity of the person, but also their culture. In fact, recognition of culture was an essential part of respecting human dignity. Pon (2009) believed that cultural competency discourse must also consider the implications of power. Failure to do so might result in a new racism, which involves exclusionary practices based on culture, rather than the marginalisation that has traditionally occurred on a biological basis. Triandis (1989) believed culture was about learning skills and behaviours to be remembered and reapplied later:

Culture is to society what memory is to the person. It specifies designs for living that have been proven effective in the past, ways of dealing with social situations and ways to think about the self and social behaviour that have been reinforced in the past (p. 511).

Arriving at an agreed definition culture is difficult. However, there is little disagreement on its importance. As Ling (2008) noted:

Culture shapes our world view; the way we relate to people, the way we communicate, the way we engage with nature, our perception of human nature, our conception of knowledge, our beliefs about what can and cannot be known and the way we view life and existence (p. 99).

Contextualising culture

In searching for empirical work on culture and cultural identity, I became aware of the social work literature on cultural theories and approaches. These influenced my thinking on the contextualisation or localisation of culture and rejection of fixed differences. Some of these empirical studies supported my tacit knowledge about effective and respectful ways of engaging with diverse groups of people. They included theories that emphasised the importance of flexibility, willingness to learn and, above all, respect for those we hope to engage. On the basis that social work literature fit well with the values underpinning this

study, below I present my understanding of culture and cultural identity from a social work perspective.

When attempting to work cross-culturally, it is critical to take into account the diversity and heterogeneity within and across cultures. Ling (2008) suggested that every encounter was an intersection of different cultures and working effectively in a cross-cultural environment required a willingness to learn. She underscored that, in this modern world, all cultures were influenced by other cultures, with the regular movement of people resulting in multicultural viewpoints, deviating opinions, conflicting values and contradictory perspectives. This 'pluralisation' meant cultural appropriateness rested on openness to this multiplicity and diversity. As such, culturally appropriate practices required multiple understandings and ways of working with others, underpinned by respect for people as individuals. It invited individuals to interpret their culture, while rejecting generalisations, prescriptions or stereotypical interpretations of ethnic or religious affiliations.

Nimmagadda and Martell (2008) discussed the concept of 'localising' social work as a strategy for developing effective cross-cultural understandings and working relationships. Localised social work required practitioners to use their own cultural framework to focus attention on the local meaning of experience and to use the local context to shape possibilities, devise interventions and generate solutions. This local emphasis embraced context-specific culturally relevant local knowledge comprising four essential ingredients: cultural authenticity, use of local knowledge, creativity and connectedness:

1. *Cultural authenticity* draws on principles of 'being with the client' and 'starting where the client is'. It requires attentive listening, so that context, meaning and culture are understood. It necessitates one to develop self-awareness to one's own culture and to become familiar with the culture of others to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations.

2. *Use of local knowledge* acknowledges that there are differences even within local cultures and that all voices have a place. Authentic practice is built on local knowledge, in particular, diverse local knowledge. Its style is participatory and solutions to issues are generated through locally instigated strategies. It requires practitioners to be open-minded and willing to listen.
3. *Creativity* requires practitioners to think innovatively, often outside their normal frames of reference. It involves inventiveness, flexibility, sound judgement and the use of tacit knowledge.
4. *Connectedness* requires the development of culturally sensitive relationships and working in ways that suit the client group. This means working flexibly so that the delivery of services is tailored to fit the local environment.

Although Nimmagadda and Martell's (2008) study reported on an intervention conducted in India around the prevention of alcohol abuse, its relevance has broad application. It raises awareness to the potential for using a framework that involves original knowledge, or local wisdom when attempting to work in a cross-cultural context. Their intervention harnessed the four ingredients of localised social work to modify a Western-style intervention so that this strategy was delivered successfully in a non-Western context. How was this achieved? By using *cultural authenticity*, the practitioners recognised that, for the host community, duty and obligation to family overshadowed individual goal attainment. In order to achieve results, they therefore needed to commit to building relationships with their clients, founded on trust. This required flexibility in their approach, affirmation of non-Western practices and commitment to understanding and working with host community expectations. They used *local knowledge* by inviting the participants of this intervention to contribute culturally sensitive ideas for generating strategies that would achieve results. They also used their own knowledge of non-Western, collectivist societies in formulating tasks so that the participants

would feel comfortable in responding to the issues they were asked to consider. They applied *creativity* by inviting the young participants to contribute to group discussions in culturally sensitive ways. They achieved this by providing participants with signals, when it was their turn to speak during group discussions. Working in this way overcame the participants' reluctance to debate issues and affirmed their values around respect for others' opinions and ideas. Finally, they *connected* by acting flexibly when making contact with the families involved in the study. This required home visits to build relationships with the parents of the participants and rethinking rigid Western-style rules around exclusion from participation if family duty were prioritised over responsibilities relating to the intervention.

Although their study was based on a successful practice intervention, I considered it relevant for working cross-culturally in the research context. The underlying principles or four ingredients of localised social work – respect for clients, openness to learn, willingness to accept different opinions and ideas, readiness to act flexibly and with sensitivity to the local context – provided a sound framework to bridge cultural differences and reduce the possibility of misunderstandings and miscommunications in this study. Further, the opportunity for a 'two-way exchange' of knowledge recognised that, although social work originated in the West, non-Western perspectives and experiences had the capacity to enrich, enhance and transform cross-cultural interactions.

The emergence of social work practice: A Western phenomenon

The social work profession first emerged in advanced industrialised countries, such as US America and Europe, and subsequently spread to other societies (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2001). At the core of its teaching, research and practice are assumptions about the primacy of the individual: that include Maslow's hierarchy of needs; Mahler's concept of separation, individualism and autonomy; and Erikson's views about the importance of individual

autonomy, notions that are embedded in Western individualist cultures (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003).

Social work is thus described as ‘essentially a modernist Western invention’ that has spread Western thinking across the world into different cultural contexts (Gray, Coates, & Yellow Bird, 2008, p. 1). Despite rhetoric declaring cultures to be equal (though different), there is evidence that the concept of culture has been employed largely to differentiate those on the inside of the margins from those on the outside (Park, 2005). As such, Park (2005) asserted that culture worked as a marker for difference to underscore deficit and characterise minorities. She argued that culture had replaced race and ethnicity in reinforcing the subjugating Eurocentric paradigm, while Graham (1999) contended that the core Western principles guiding social work intervention, such as social justice, equity and self-determination, were difficult to operationalise in diverse contexts. Consequently, there was scepticism about alternative points of view, with the ‘other’ tending to be silenced, unrecognised or marginalised.

In the 1970s, the multicultural and multiracial nature of social work practice began to receive attention. During the following two decades, there was a considerable amount of research on the problems of adapting social work practice to societies geographically outside, or on the periphery of, Western culture (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2001). This research comprised three main areas: (i) the difficulties of attempting to adapt Western principles of intervention to the issues confronting non-Western societies; (ii) how practitioners applied the profession in different countries; and (iii) the indigenisation of social work knowledge and skills (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2001; Gray et al., 2008). This was consistent with recent applications of postmodernism in that it provided opportunities for minority voices to be heard and promoted local knowledge.

Postmodern perspective

Yon (2000) noted that, in the 1980s, a new phase of cultural theory emerged from social work with the 'postmodern turn'. Postmodernism shifted understanding of culture as a stable and knowledgeable set of attributes to a far more uncertain and subjective position (Pozatek, 1994). It required social workers to adopt a position of not knowing, to rethink previously accepted beliefs and assumptions and to take into account the context of relationships. Postmodernism represented a movement away from the modernist perspective that favoured an objective view of reality based on knowable, measurable and predictable truths (Pozatek, 1994). The modernist era was a time in which society was committed to the notion of progress as a predictable feature of existence, based on universal and standardised assumptions (Crawford, 1997), while the postmodernist era is characterised by its reflection on the many different ways we exist and relate to others.

Culture assumes a privileged position in postmodernism, as it recognises the multiplicity of cultural determinants and the degree to which our lives are impacted by cultural difference. It gives central importance to cultural identity: culture is who we are. Hence awareness of our own cultural experience and that of others requires privileged status (Pozatek, 1994). This demands that each of us holds an open space to ensure that, when dealing with others, we do not marginalise or disqualify aspects of their story. It emerges from a value-based spirit of open inquiry rather than from the certainty that all human beings have shared attributes and experiences. It makes each individual an expert of his or her own experience (Crawford, 1997) and, as a consequence, is seen to represent a more respectful approach to cultural difference. To achieve the position of open inquiry requires asking 'experience' questions in order to be invited into the other's life story (Pozatek, 1994). This allows access to private information and invites the other to collaborate on developing meaning associated with their experience. By adopting a position of uncertainty or 'not

knowing', we are asking to be informed (Pozatek, 1994). Underlying this position is respect for what all parties bring to the interaction and raises appreciation of the many, often subtle ways, power can be exerted and experienced (Pozatek, 1994). Postmodernism is about tuning in with the time, place and context in which an interaction takes place. It requires acknowledgement that one can never be in control of another's life (Crawford, 1997).

Social work in the Arab world

The development of social work in the Middle East and Arab world occurred largely through the influence of Egypt (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003), which, in 1935, became the recipient of a predominantly US American model of social work education and practice. By the 1960s, Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, had designed and implemented their own education programmes, based on a US American model of practice, with the assistance of Egyptian-trained social work educators (Al-Krenawi & Graham, 2003). This included a code of ethics couched in a Western value system that was incompatible with local cultural, religious, economic, political and social realities and included Western assumptions regarding human nature and social problems (Holtzhausen, 2011). Despite social work emphasising culturally competent and sensitive practice, Marais and Marais (2007) argued that local values were not always recognised in this process.

Graham (1999) asserted that social work knowledge and practice was dictated by worldviews based on individual needs, feelings and thought processes. Those potentially conflicted with Middle-Eastern societies that were more collective in nature and discouraged individual needs and feelings in favour of a more submissive approach to the will of the family and social group; where family unity, closeness and solidarity were valued over friendships and work life; and daily life was guided by the Qur'an (Dwairy, 1999).

When working with Muslim communities, Barise (2005) argued that it was essential for social workers to understand the importance of the family and community. Islamic teachings link the individual to the group in terms of accountability, responsibility and meeting of needs and the community depends on mutual interdependence between members. The role of the family in Islam, according to Barise (2005), goes beyond reproduction to the provision of an environment encompassing the qualities of unity, love, harmony, tranquillity, happiness, compassion and equality. For many devout Muslims, dominant views within social work are incongruent with their understanding of Islam. For example, Arabs believe that all knowledge is subservient to, and consonant with, Qur'anic revelation and this leads to uneasiness around Western codes of ethical practice (Holtzhausen, 2011). It is therefore important to find common ground, derived from Arab cultural and religious practices, so that a responsive, culturally appropriate model of social work might be applied to the Arab world. In their anthropological study involving Arab social workers, Al-Makhamreh and Lewando-Hundt (2008) concluded strategies for successful engagement within Arab communities included a client-centred philosophy that frames encounters within local religious and cultural vernacular and norms of accepted behaviour.

Rejecting fixed differences

Culturally appropriate social work emphasises responsiveness to local contexts and cultures and, in doing so, questions the dominance of Western values and the idea of a universal ethical code (Gray & Coates, 2008). Definitions of culture that identify people through their core cultural attributes raise the notion of 'fixed differences' and can be used, once identified, to work with those who do not share the same cultural background. These types of definitions serve to commodify culture in ways that build banks of knowledge to be studied, acquired and disseminated (Gray & Coates, 2008; Marginson et al., 2010; Park, 2005). Sundar, Sylvestre, and Bassi (2013) encapsulated this when they described the goal of identifying

‘fixed differences’ as a means for *us* to get to know *them* to provide support. This approach homogenises individuals within groups and fails to recognise unique individual needs. It also promotes the idea that individual needs can be met using a standard set of strategies. Judgements are then made on the basis of common stereotypes. This approach fails to acknowledge that culture is not static, but ever changing, and people as individuals retain differing levels of association with their respective cultures (Marginson et al., 2010; Park, 2005).

Bridging differences

Sundar et al. (2013) asserted that there were times when race and culture were critically important to issues under discussion and, by inference, times when these differences were of little importance. When these differences were important, it was *how* they were relevant that mattered for individuals. Further, the degree of importance around differences could shift from encounter to encounter. In these circumstances, Sundar et al. (2013) posited that it was less important to be competent about someone’s culture and more important to be competent in working with individuals to recognise how they wished to be understood and supported. As such, the challenge was not to work across differences, but rather to learn how to work through differences as they arose. In this way, differences were acknowledged, then either addressed further or put aside. Their emphasis was the individual and establishing rapport and mutual understanding to work through differences.

Other influences that shaped the interpretation of culture in this study

While the social work and anthropological literature significantly influenced and shaped the way culture was defined and approached in this study, there were also other influences that described culture from a more standardised, fixed viewpoint, which seemingly contradicted the position espoused by some of the social work literature (Hofstede, 1984, 1986; Triandis,

1989). However, this literature contained valuable underlying concepts and insights, which provided starting points and signposts for some of the questions I asked in attempting to better understand culture and cultural differences in this study. I used ideas from this literature to develop interview questions and to enhance understanding about the principles underpinning thinking around culture. I was particularly interested in Hofstede's (1984, 1986) Four Dimensions of Cultural Difference Model, which provided interesting insights into how individuals within societies might think and act. I was especially curious to explore with this study's participants the dimension of individualism and collectivism and, to a lesser extent, the dimensions of power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculine-feminine societies. I examined Church et al.'s (2005) study that involved participants from US America, Australia, (individualist cultures) Mexico and the Philippines (collectivist cultures) noting that individuals can have both individualist and collectivist tendencies. I also noted from this study that individuals in all cultures can believe in the importance of traits and context and that both traits and contexts need to be taken into account in understanding and predicting behaviour. Triandis' (1989) work exploring transitions between tight and loose societal structures and degrees of flexibility within cultures to tolerate deviation from norms was also highly relevant within the context of repatriation in this study. Table 1 presents a comparative summary of the dimensions and categorisations of culture described by Hofstede (1984, 1986) and Triandis (1989). It also contains references to other relevant studies that contributed to a better understanding of the meaning of culture and interpreting cultural differences.

Table 1: Summary of the dimensions and categorisations of culture

Source	Dimension	Description	Category	Associated publications
Hofstede (1984, 1986)	Four dimensions of culture: 1. <i>Individualism-Collectivism</i>	Degree of pressure exerted for individualistic versus group achievement	<i>Individualist</i> Priority given to personal matters and goals; mobility is important <i>Collectivist</i> – Individual and group goals coincide; strong pressure towards conformity; sharing of resources; distrust of out-group members; individuals support and maintain integrity of in-group; identity is defined through relationships	Bontempo, Lobel, and Triandis (1990) Hart and Poole (1995) Hofstede (2005) Hui and Triandis (1986) Triandis (1972, 1984) Triandis, Marin, Lisansky, and Betancourt (1984)
	2. <i>Power distance</i>	Defines extent to which the less powerful in a society accept inequality in power and consider it normal		Triandis, Brislin and Hui (1988) Hui and Villareal (1989)
	3. <i>Uncertainty avoidance</i>	Extent to which people in a society are made anxious by situations they perceive are unstructured, unclear and unpredictable		Triandis, Bontempo, Villareal, Asai, and Lucca (1988) Triandis, McCusker, and Hui (1990)
	4. <i>Masculine-Feminine</i>	Social roles attributed to men. In feminine cultures relatively overlapping roles for the sexes	<i>Masculine cultures</i> - Assertive, competitive, ambitious <i>Feminine cultures</i> - Respect small, weak, slow	
Triandis (1989)	<i>Tight- Loose</i>	Similar to homogeneous - heterogeneous involving level of agreement on conformity to norms, expectations, and values	<i>Tight</i> – Avoidance of self-disclosure to avoid criticism; people act ‘properly’; anxiety results when deviation to social norms occurs <i>Loose</i> – Tolerance of difference and diversity	

Theoretical models of cultural repatriation

Since Gullahorn and Gullahorn's (1963) study, there has been recognition that psychological distress accompanies repatriation. However, according to Sussman (2000), studies in this area have remained limited in number and descriptive in type. In order to learn more about the impact of repatriation on returning sojourners, Sussman (2000) developed a new theory – the Cultural Identity Model – which emerged from three disparate perspectives on repatriation theory:

1. The *reductionist* perspective considers all transitions, adjustments and adaptations to be variants of the same process. In this theory, the underlying mechanisms for overseas repatriation and domestic geographic transitions are equivalent. Black et al. (1992) espoused this theory in their study of corporate sojourners. Other reductionists, for example, Anderson (1994), consider cultural transitions to reflect any stressful environment where psychological adjustments and coping strategies are required.
2. The *subjective* perspective recognises the unique qualities of the repatriation process and acknowledges the complexity of repatriation. It assumes that repatriates are aware of the adjustments they will be required to make before the transition, a proposition not supported by the literature (Martin, 1984; Storti, 1990; Sussman, 2001). From these works also emerges the notion that repatriates are required to make multiple adjustments within the general, interpersonal and professional spheres. In acknowledging the discrepancy between subjective expectations and experiences of repatriation, Martin (1984) reiterated the uniqueness and complexity of repatriation.
3. The *contingent* perspective distinguishes cultural transitions from all others, but regards entry and re-entry transitions as similar. This model emphasises the responses made to changing environments, loss of social cues, changes in relationships and different ways of communicating. Storti (2001) exemplified this paradigm when he

talked about the meaning of home, which he described as having three main components: familiar places and people and routines or predictable patterns of interaction. He asserted that these three components made possible feelings of security, understanding, trust, safety and belonging. He underscored that entry and re-entry transitions disturbed one's sense of what it means to feel 'at home'.

Sussman's (2000) model drew on the notion that cultural identity was a critical element of self-concept within the sojourning environment, with both individual and cultural factors influencing the extent of adaptation to the host culture. The model suggests that, as a result of cultural adaptation, the self-concept is disturbed, leading to changes in cultural identity becoming salient on the commencement of repatriation. During the process of repatriation, returning sojourners evaluated their personal values, cognitive maps and behaviours against the prevailing cultural practices within their home country environment. For many repatriates, their newly formed cultural identities and home culture no longer provided an 'acceptable fit'. This resulted in the repatriate identifying as a member of a new 'out-group' within their home country. The perspective offered by Sussman's (2000) Cultural Identity Model asserts that, as sojourners adapt to a new culture by successfully modifying their behaviours and thoughts, their cultural identity changed. The new cultural practices they adopted to enable them to fit more appropriately into the host environment were not always appropriate on returning home.

Cultural Identity Model

I chose Sussman's (2000) Cultural Identity Model as the conceptual framework for this study because it offered a tool for organising my thoughts and perceptions and explaining how I made sense of what I was doing and the processes involved. According to Nimmagadda and Martell (2008), frameworks act as lenses through which one is able to view activities. The

main purpose of framing this study was to set boundaries or parameters for my understanding and the activities in which I chose to engage.

The Cultural Identity Model uses a social-psychological framework that focuses specifically on the relationship between self-concept and cultural identity. It comprises three main elements: identity salience, sociocultural adaptation and self-concept cultural identity changes. These features interact within the broader cyclical framework of cultural transition to predict consequences during repatriation.

Sussman (2000, 2002) proposed that the repatriation experience could be predicted largely by the intersection of three variables: two psychological constructs, cultural adaptation and identity change, and one situational variable, cross-cultural difference in tolerance for cultural identity variability. This variable was conceptually similar to the notion of tight and loose cultures proposed by Triandis (1989). Sussman (2002) referred to the core tenets of the Cultural Identity Model:

1. Cultural identity is a critical but latent aspect of self-concept.
2. The importance of cultural identity is largely a consequence of the commencement of cultural transition. In other words, we become aware of our cultural identity when we are placed in a position that involves transitioning between cultures.
3. Cultural identity is dynamic and can shift as a consequence of the overseas transition and self-concept disturbances.
4. Movements in cultural identity occur when we have experience of cultural adaptation that is followed by repatriation experience (p. 394).

I chose this framework for this study for three main reasons. First, it explored the assumption that repatriates underwent a profound personal transformation during overseas sojourns, which affected their self-concept, cultural identity and sense of belonging or attachment.

Secondly, it recognised a direct positive association between overseas adjustment and repatriation experience. Thirdly, it proposed a broad and integrated theory of the transition cycle that specifically focused on self-concept and cultural identity. As noted by Sussman (2002), few empirical studies have investigated the whole transition cycle, or explored the relationship between the various aspects of the cycle. Among the relatively small number of studies conducted, a primary assumption has been that the expatriate experience is related to repatriate outcomes. There are, however, disagreements as to the direction of the relationships: One view predicts a direct, positive association between overseas adjustment and repatriation experience, i.e., successful adaptation to a host country indicates an equally successful repatriation experience. The opposing view suggests an inverse relationship between positive overseas adjustment and repatriation (Sussman, 2000, 2002). The Cultural Identity Model – encompassing four types of post-adaptation identity: affirmative, subtractive, additive and global – provided scope for repatriates to reflect broadly on their expatriate and repatriate experiences and accommodated opposing views about overseas adjustment and repatriation outcomes. This enabled the construction of four groups based on responses to repatriation experience:

1. *Affirmative identifiers* were those for whom the overseas sojourn affirmed their home country identity. Affirmative identifiers consolidated strong common bonds with colleagues and retained positive feelings about their home country identity during the transition cycle. They were characterised by two critical internal variables, high cultural centrality and low cultural flexibility, which resulted in low adaptation to the host environment. Their cultural self-concept was highly stable and unambiguous, which resulted in a repatriation that was low in distress. For these repatriates, who neither adapted successfully overseas nor experienced an identity change, researchers predicted that repatriation would come as a relief.

2. *Subtractive identifiers* were those who experienced a high level of adaptation to the host country, but, unlike additive identifiers, their subtractive shift was an identity loss. This meant that subtractive identifiers experienced distress as a result of feelings of alienation and detachment from their home country, identifying less in common with their compatriots, feeling less positive about their home country and not feeling anchored to, or embedded in, their home culture. Subtractive repatriates might seek out new relationships on their return home.
3. *Additive identifiers*, like subtractive identifiers, experienced high adaptation to the host country. However, their additive shift was an identity gain, which occurred through embracing many aspects of the host culture, including values, customs, social rituals, emotions and thoughts. High levels of repatriation distress occurred as a consequence of their engagement with the host culture. For these identifiers, their cultural identities had been enhanced and changed significantly enough so that they experienced repatriation as a negative outcome.
4. *Global or intercultural identifiers* were those who had had multiple international experiences. New international experiences enriched their sense of belonging to a global community. Repatriation for these identifiers was regarded as a moderate or positive experience.

Sussman (2002) asserted that further studies were required to test and refine the Cultural Identity Model. She identified a number of areas for investigation, including longitudinal studies to better understand the effects of changes in identity strength and the causal relationship between these and repatriation experience. As such, Sussman (2002) argued that further testing of the model might offer explanations, for example, about the experiences of sojourners who reported repatriation distress and attributed these feelings to the home culture. As part of this experience, these sojourners were likely to disparage their home culture,

resulting in a weakened identity, which was contrary to the causal chain proposed by the model. Further studies might ascertain whether cultural identity shifts or transformations could be attributed solely to the sojourn experience, or whether they were the result of processes that were already occurring prior to the commencement of the sojourn. They might also test this model with additional populations and culturally diverse samples, given that Sussman's (2002) study involved US sojourners, homogeneous in age, type of sojourn, length and destination of sojourn. She argued that it was likely that the cultural dimensions of individualism/collectivism (Hofstede, 1984, 1986) or cultural tightness and looseness (Triandis, 1989) influenced sojourner responses to repatriation. In her subsequent study of repatriates from Hong Kong, Sussman (2011) found that many of the respondents adopted an additive cultural identity profile on returning home, which contrasted with US repatriates who were more likely to adopt a subtractive identity profile. Further studies might include qualitative tools, such as interviews, diaries and autobiographical literature, to augment the measurement of this theoretical construct and investigate whether individual and situational variables affected the relationship between cultural identity and repatriation responses (as outlined in Chapter 3, pp. 56-67). In summary, these recommendations suggest that the Cultural Identity Model would benefit from further testing involving different methodologies, longitudinal studies with diverse populations and consideration of situational variables.

I found the Cultural Identity Model a compelling structure on which to base this study, primarily because it offered many possibilities to contribute to the knowledge about repatriation. However, through developing my understanding of culture and cultural identity, I also became cognisant of some of its limitations. I outlined above how I chose to adopt a position of openness, which required me to value the individual perspective. I rejected fixed differences and classifying individuals because they shared a culture of origin. Yet, in adopting the Cultural Identity Model, I risked being blinded to some of these influences and

from seeing other possibilities. This required me to remain mindful of hearing what the study's participants were communicating, to question and clarify information so that I did not attempt to approach the analysis of the participants' experiences with preconceived ideas, or to 'carve off' those aspects of their experiences that did not fit the four types of post-adaptation identity. I used this theory as a basis for developing my understanding of the types of responses repatriates were likely to undergo on returning home, but I did not limit my thinking to the four identity types. I kept an open mind and explored experiences with the participants so that I remained alert to information outside the Cultural Identity Model types.

Towards a redefinition of culture: Finding common ground

Because of the central position culture assumed in this study, it was important for me to examine culture and cultural identity from a number of angles and through a variety of lenses. Below I present the common ground, or the overall picture I arrived at in bringing all I read, learned and practised together. Like Gross (2000), I found culture a difficult term to define. Perhaps this is because culture is all embracing and goes to the essence of who we are. Any attempts we make to capture and dissect it, somehow demean its value and restrict its power. So in attempting to present my redefinition of culture, as applied to this study, I feel limited in my capacity to provide more than the key concepts that have influenced my thinking.

I used the insights of scholars like Geertz (1973) and Park (2005) to assist in defining and consolidating my thoughts around the meaning of culture. Although Park critiqued the anthropological approach (which Geertz promoted), I was influenced by both perspectives. I was persuaded by Geertz (1973) when he talked about the importance of culture as a search for meaning and described it as a symbolic system with related core symbols, underlying structures and principles, rather like a web in which each element has significance. I was attracted to Geertz's (1973) explanation of culture as 'exposing normalness' (p. 14) and

‘dissolving opacity, while not reducing particularity’ (p. 14). Like him, I see culture in this light. It is about normalness, whatever that normalness is, and it is the search to understand the normalness of others that has driven this process of inquiry, to some extent. I was also drawn to Park’s (2005) emphasis on the evolving, ever-changing, dynamic nature of culture and her rejection of the notion of culture being about fixed differences, ingrained in history and the past, as the modern world encourages us to acknowledge the diversity and heterogeneity within and between cultures. As Ling (2008) argued, every interaction is cross-cultural and results in shifts and diversification of thinking. Working cross-culturally, therefore, requires adopting a position of respect for individual dignity (Sowers-Hoag & Sandau-Beckler, 1996). It challenges us to assume a position of not knowing, to put aside the stance of expert, to be open to hearing others’ stories and to be willing to collaborate rather than dictate how things should be. This approach asks us not to disqualify or marginalise others’ experiences but rather to acknowledge and embrace what others have to say (Pozatek, 1994).

In light of Pozatek’s (1994) assertion about the importance of embracing others’ stories, I was required to think carefully about the Arab world and how Western-inspired frameworks might be applied sensitively to a non-Western culture. I learned to acknowledge the importance of family and community in the lives of this study’s participants and to respect the place of religion, in particular the Qur’an, in guiding everyday life. I came to realise that the relationship that each individual had with their family, community, culture and religion was unique. Although there were some underlying commonalities in the ways the participants talked about each of these aspects of their lives, there were also differences that called for respect and understanding at the individual level.

The localisation or hand-made approach to social work discussed by Nimmagadda and Martell (2008) encouraged me to seek out cultural authenticity, use local knowledge, act

creatively and connect sensitively. These four ingredients of localising social work provided me with a framework for being with this study's participants. Drawing on the principles of 'being with the client' and 'starting where the client is' meant that listening to the participants' stories was critical in shaping my understanding of what they considered significant. By adopting this approach, I came to value their knowledge and understandings and they became more engaged in the research process, so that together we produced a document that chronicled their experiences.

In exploring cultural identity, I was persuaded by the work of Hofstede (1984, 1986) and Triandis (1989). Writing about the dimensions of cultural difference, these two scholars provided a basis for some of the content of the questions I posed to the participants during the interviews, as I attempted to explore with them the impact of living within a different cultural environment and the subsequent return to their home culture. I also used their writings to develop my knowledge and understanding of how others might see and experience the world and how cultural differences were manifested in everyday life. They challenged me to look outside my own cultural lens, to glimpse how others might interpret life events and to enhance my understanding of alternative ways of thinking and acting. Although their respective theories implied a fixed perspective to understanding cultural differences, their writings stimulated my thinking and broadened my understanding.

What did all this mean? In summary, it meant that, over time, I gained a very different view of culture. I came to see culture as a powerful driver in everyday life that has unique and very individual applications. I drew the conclusion that, to be successful working cross-culturally, one has to acknowledge one's own culture and adopt a position of openness, genuine curiosity and willingness to learn about others. Cross-cultural interaction is about collaboration, but most of all respect. It is when this position is embraced that real dialogue takes place, real learning begins and opacity dissolves.

Conclusion

In conclusion, in this chapter I have attempted to describe and explain the influences that guided the development of my understanding of culture and cultural identity. I have used this chapter to justify the approaches I took to working through cultural differences by identifying the key scholars who influenced my thinking. I have attempted to bring together all the influences that have assisted me to find my place within this study. In the next chapter, I focus on the methodology applied to this study, describe the processes I employed and provide justification for the methodological choices I made.

Chapter 5

Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the study's methodology. The chapter begins with a justification for choosing a qualitative approach before explaining why and how relationships were developed between the researcher and the study's participants and the impact of these relationships on the research process. The data collection process is explained through a series of steps that include: the recruitment of participants; data collection and analysis; and reporting and sharing of findings. The chapter concludes with a discussion about how the research process addressed trustworthiness and validity. Parts of this chapter are presented in the first person in keeping with the researcher's active involvement in the activities surrounding the choice of methodology, sampling and data collection and analysis for this study.

Choosing a qualitative methodology

I chose a qualitative methodology largely because it suited the research topic and was congruent with my professional experience (Creswell, 2003; Peshkin, 1982). Peshkin (1982) posited that, through qualitative research, the close association between the four Rs of research were acknowledged, including: (i) the personal qualities and experiences of the researcher (researcher); (ii) what is being studied (research); (iii) how the research is conducted (researching); and (iv) what is found in the data (results). Brodsky and Faryal (2006) asserted that qualitative methods positioned the researcher quite closely to the raw words and real-life experiences of informants and, through this process, issues of diversity were most directly manifested. I chose a qualitative approach on the basis that this study

relied on the participants' understanding of their experiences, took into consideration their specific cultural and historic contexts and recognised how the researcher's personal, cultural and professional experiences shaped and influenced the direction of a study (Creswell, 2003). Gilgun (2006) underscored that the key purpose of qualitative research is to gain understanding of participants in their own terms and create an opening for the researcher to hear participants' views, take into consideration the participants' cultural and religious beliefs and practices and obtain data rich in detail.

This study was exploratory and descriptive, as there was little previously written about the topic and population under investigation. Knafl and Howard (1984) asserted that these types of studies have the broad purpose of *sensitisation* of the reader in that they report descriptively on the experiences of representatives of a broader target group and provide a summary of themes that might be used for future research and practice. Because of the exploratory nature of this study, I considered in-depth interviews the most suitable method for collecting the data (Liamputtong, 2009).

Researcher–participant relationships built on trust

During this study, I sought to listen to informants to build a picture based on their ideas (Creswell, 1998; Knafl & Howard, 1984; Padgett, 1998; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). I acknowledged that, when investigating culturally different communities, it was important to adopt an approach that is long-term, in-depth, personal, intensive and encompassing to ensure the development of mutually respectful research relationships (Armour, Rivaux, & Bell, 2009; Peshkin, 1982). Rubin (2000) suggested two key issues in qualitative research: trustworthiness and credibility, which are achieved through long engagements involving lengthy initial interviews, follow-up interviews and long periods of time spent on building trusting relationships with participants. For this particular study, which involved working

cross-culturally, building trusting relationships with participants was a key element in obtaining the best quality data (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Liamputtong, 2009; Smith et al., 2009). It was also important, in some instances, to gain approval – and trust – from the husbands of the participants, who acted as ‘gatekeepers’ for their wives. On numerous occasions I spoke with husbands about the study before their wives began participating, even though I had developed relationships with the women and had received expressions of interest from them about their involvement. Once the husbands were satisfied with the purpose of the study, women interacted freely and provided information as requested.

Acknowledging and understanding culture and cultural identity was a key element in developing this study and was at the forefront of all my actions. I became aware soon after the study began that, in order to build trusting relationships with the participants, I would be required to engage in activities outside the research process and that acts of reciprocity were critical (Agostinone-Wilson, 2012). For example, I attended *Iftar* dinners during Ramadhan, visited the participants’ homes, assisted in connecting informants to services and support within the university and provided information about local customs and behaviours. This relationship building was regarded as an important mechanism for establishing trust that ultimately would optimise learning from informants (Armour et al., 2009; Creswell, 2003; Padgett, 1998). Liamputtong (2009) asserted that through reciprocity, participants gained from the research experience and, by researchers returning something for receiving information, power inequality between the researcher and the informants was reduced. I was careful however to ensure that, during interviews, our conversations did not develop along the lines of a discussion between friends, but rather maintained the purpose of gathering information on the interviewees’ ideas, opinions and personal experiences of repatriation. I kept the attention focused on those being interviewed and away from myself.

It was also important to recognise my outsider status, acknowledging that gender, age, religion, status, or political beliefs could facilitate or restrict access to participants and, therefore, required particular attention from the outset (Armour et al., 2009; Donohoue Clyne, 2001; Zinn, 1979). I recognised that I was attempting to cross the boundary between insider and outsider. This required due respect for the beliefs of the participants, an acknowledgement of my outsider status and for me to make clear the purposes of the research at the commencement of the study (Mograh, in Donohoue Clyne, 2001). There is some discussion in the literature about the advantages and disadvantages of being an insider or outsider when conducting cross-cultural research. Lempert (2007) posited that, although there are some advantages in having insider status, there are also benefits in being an outsider in that informants are likely to provide more information, because they assume that an outsider does not understand their perspective. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) referred to the advantages of naivety when conducting research in that it encourages interviewees to explain and describe the phenomenon in question in greater detail.

I demonstrated an interest in the participants, listening and paying due respect (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Hofstede, Pedersen, & Hofstede, 2002; Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This required the interview questions to be structured carefully and presented in an indirect manner, consistent with Arab discourse (Meleis, 1982). I also acknowledged that unconsciously I brought my cultural frame of interpretation to any engagement. As summarised by Brislin et al. (1973), researchers working in their own culture are able to interpret meaning because of familiarity with that culture, but for researchers working in another culture it is not always possible to have that knowledge of meaning.

Challenges to relationship building

A sensitive ethical issue uncovered during the research process concerned the participants' religion. Three of the participants were Shi'ite, while the remaining three participants were

Sunni Muslims. It was extremely difficult for me to understand the relationship between these two groups. At times, it appeared they remained quite separate to each other, did not socialise together on campus and did not acknowledge a relationship. At other times, often quite unexpectedly, a reference would be made, which led me to believe there was a relationship and that this relationship was superficially amiable and sociable. There was, however, a perceived tension between the groups that was a difficult boundary for me to cross. To address this issue, I chose to disclose my relationship with each group, but met with individuals from each group separately.

Conceptual evolution of this study

Figure 1 outlines the evolution of this study, beginning with the initial proposal. It depicts two main streams of early activity: a literature review of studies and current research on the topic of repatriation and a literature review of the context for this study, the country of Saudi Arabia.

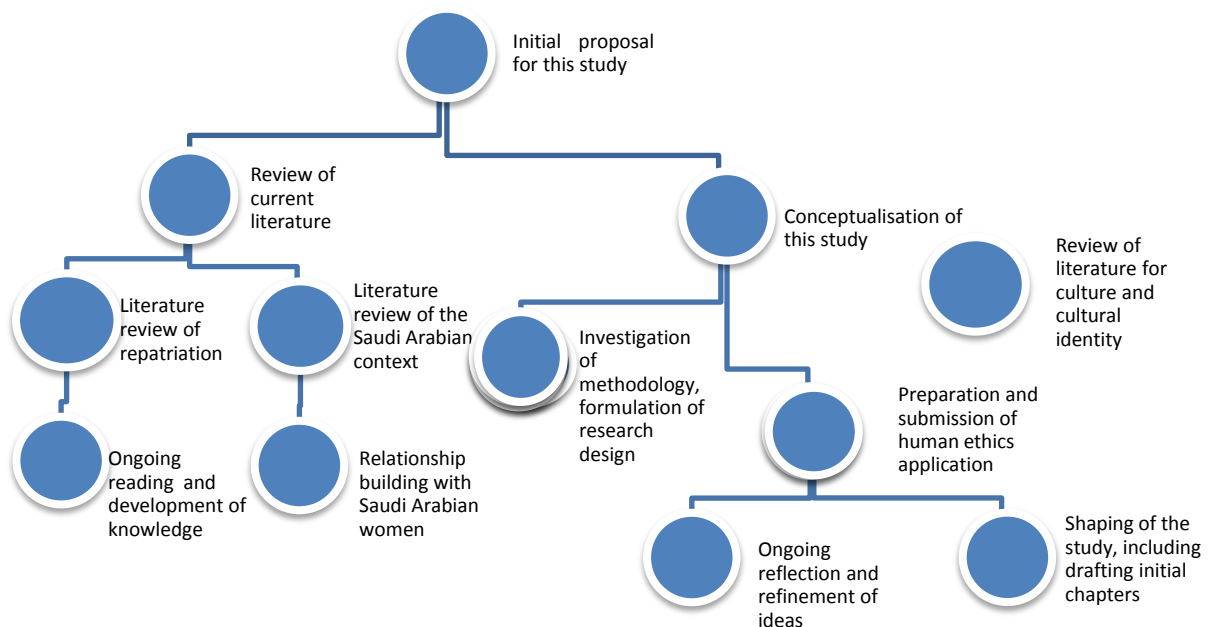


Figure 1: The conceptual evolution of this study

I began to conceptualise this study by using the information gathered through these literature reviews. I then shifted focus to identify an appropriate methodology, one that suited the purpose and scope of the study and was congruent with my professional experience. Once this information had been gathered, I used it to form the basis of the human ethics application. I emphasised that this information formed the basis of this study and that I would continue to read and refine my thinking as the study progressed. Human ethics was an important part of this research as it required me to draw together the fundamental components of the study and assisted me in clearly defining its purpose, shape and limitations.

Figure 2 describes the process I used to develop the methodology for this study. It was largely a lineal process, although data collection took several forms and continued over an 18-month period.

Research process

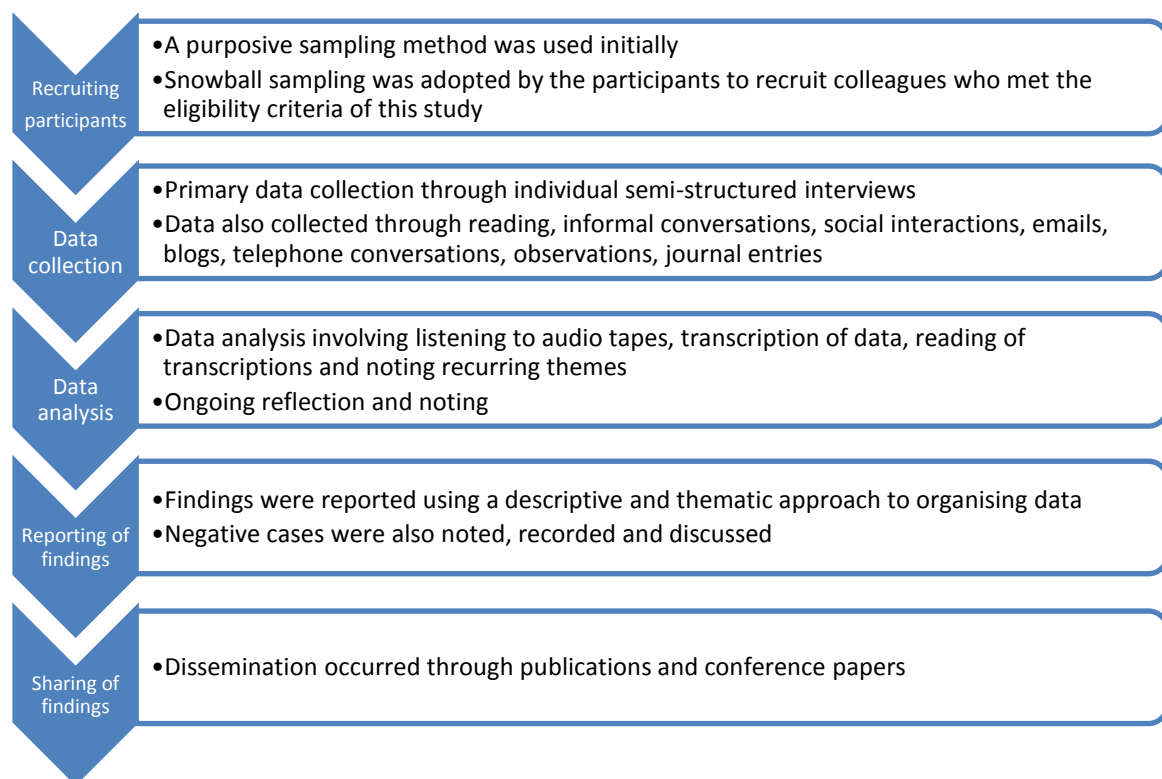


Figure 2: Flowchart showing the research process

Ethical issues and challenges

There were three main ethical issues that required careful management:

1. *Respect for difference* was very important throughout this study. I remained mindful of potential cultural differences and ensured that appropriate language was employed, question content was carefully considered and respect was shown for the participants' religious and cultural practices, such as avoiding prayer times to conduct interviews. What I attempted to do in respecting difference throughout this study was summarised by Holtzhausen (2011) in reference to Anthony Weston's work in which he talked about the importance of living mindfully and taking care about the way we act and feel.
2. *Building trusting relationships* with participants, while observing the need for boundaries, was important to ensuring that these relationships, though personal and friendly, were founded on mutual understanding about our respective roles within this study.
3. *Western worldviews*, including assumptions, values and beliefs, and adopting a position of uncertainty, were important in respecting the multiplicity of participant experiences and being open to new interpretations of meaning. I did this by seeking clarification from the participants, asking questions to ensure I had understood their meaning during interviews and reading widely on issues pertaining to Middle-Eastern values and beliefs. I found ethical issues such as confidentiality difficult to explain to potential participants, even though they had lived in Australia and had attended university there for a number of years. I am unsure how the participants regarded Western views of confidentiality and legal obligations to keep information private, when, as diligent Muslims, they were likely to trust the moral laws of Islam whereby confidential information was 'kept in the heart' and left to the 'care of God'

(Holtzhausen, 2011). I did not discuss this issue with the participants, but explained my obligations in keeping with University policy. I have included this issue here, however, to demonstrate one of the many challenges while conducting this study.

Human ethics approval

The Human Research Ethics Committee of the University of Newcastle granted permission to conduct this study. Informed consent was sought from each participant prior to the interviews. This involved a detailed verbal explanation of the purpose of the study and the themes to be explored during discussions. Informants were assured that their participation was voluntary and they could choose to withdraw from the study at any time, without affecting their studies at the University of Newcastle or their participation in the Muslim Women's Group. Each participant was provided with an *Information Statement* (see Appendix 2) that contained detailed information about the research and a *Consent Form* (see Appendix 3). On completion of this study, each participant was entitled to receive a copy of the findings as a gesture of appreciation for their contribution.

Research design

The primary concern of this study was to obtain a detailed account of individual experiences, with a focus on quality rather than quantity (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). Smith et al. (2009) asserted that the complexity of human phenomena requires a concentrated focus on a small number of cases for the development of meaningful comparisons between participants, without being overwhelmed by the amount of data generated. Interviews were chosen as the main method to capture participants' stories based on the assumption that they were the experts of their own experience (Liamputtong, 2009). The process of meaning-making starts as a partnership between the researcher and the participants and necessitates questioning and active listening (Liamputtong, 2009).

Sampling

A purposive sampling method was used to capture a group of participants who possessed certain traits or qualities and specific characteristics that enabled detailed exploration of their lived experience as female, international students and graduates of the University of Newcastle. It allowed the researcher to exercise choice in selecting the study sample in accordance with the study's purpose to capture a full and descriptive account of the lived experience of the participants in line with qualitative research practice (Koerber & McMichael, 2008). However, it could also be regarded as a limitation of the study since it decreased the generalisability of the findings, though Maxwell (2002) argued that the strength of qualitative research was precisely its lack of external generalisability given its contextual and subjective nature as distinct from the generalisability and objectivity of quantitative research (Whittemore, Chase, & Mandle, 2001).

The participants sought for this study were Saudi Arabian, female postgraduate students, who completed their studies during 2011-2012. Potential participants were identified through the University's student records systems. I sought the cooperation of a minimum of four and a maximum of 10, in a total population of 22 eligible international students. I considered this sample size diverse enough to capture the data required for this study. The recruitment process took two forms:

1. The International Student Advisor (Scholarships), who administered scholarships for students from Saudi Arabia, identified potential participants and sent an invitation to eligible students requesting their participation in the study. This invitation, along with the *Information Statement*, was attached to an email explaining the purpose of the research developed by the researcher. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and Global Relations approved the International Student Advisor (Scholarships) taking this action on my behalf.

2. The Community Liaison Officer (female) for Middle-Eastern students issued an invitation and *Information Statement* on my behalf to potential participants through the University's Muslim Women's Group that operated on a weekly basis.

Participants who wished to respond to these invitations were provided with instructions to reply directly to me by email or telephone. In addition to these recruitment strategies, a type of snowball strategy occurred after two participants responded to the invitation to participate, with each of these participants then inviting their colleagues to be part of the study. I did not instigate this. It was initiated by the participants. It was successful in terms of delivering the right number of participants who fit the eligibility criteria for the study. Liamputtong (2009) commented that some groups would not respond to advertised recruitment strategies and it was common practice for researchers to employ a variety of methods to gain access to research participants. Using a range of sampling methods to ensure that as many potential participants as possible were invited to participate was considered an important aspect of this study. It contributed significantly to the study's integrity by demonstrating the relationship between the richness of the data collected and the breadth and scope of the conclusions drawn (Abrams, 2010; Padgett, 2009).

After receiving a reply from potential participants, I arranged a time and location suitable to each to discuss the research and answer any questions they might have (Agostinone-Wilson, 2012). Following this initial meeting, presuming the participant was willing to proceed, I began to develop an appropriate relationship with her, in line with cultural expectations. In some cases, it was important at this time for me to meet the potential participant's husband to explain the purposes of this study, what his wife was being asked to commit to and, in doing so, gain his approval to proceed. I then arranged a date and time to conduct the first interview with each participant. Prior to the commencement of this interview, I asked each participant to read and sign a *Consent Form*. Each participant was

also asked to provide personal information (marital status, number of children, postgraduate programme, time spent in Australia, number of trips home and contact with home country). This information was used to inform the individual and situational variables of repatriation outlined in Chapter 3 (pp. 56-67).

Data collection

The study involved participants agreeing to engage in three semi-structured interviews each of about one hour's duration (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) over a period of approximately 12 months. Data were collected from April 2011-November 2012. The first interviews took place approximately four to six months before each of the participants anticipated completing their studies, the second approximately one month prior to their departure and the third and final interviews approximately six months after their return home. The timing of the third interviews was deliberate and in line with some of the literature indicating that sojourners were likely to have recovered from the most significant highs and lows of adjustment by this time and would be able to reflect more objectively on the process of repatriation (Adler, 1981).

The first two interviews were conducted face-to-face with each participant in a variety of settings that included quiet, private spaces on the university campus and in a home setting so that the informant could care for her young baby during the interview. Smith et al. (2009) recommended that informants be consulted about the setting for interviews, with preference being given to quiet, comfortable and familiar sites free from interruptions. I negotiated the timing for interviews with each participant (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992) and remained mindful of religious needs, such as prayer times.

It was important to consider that informants might not be willing to disclose some information, if they believed that their experiences or opinions differed from others, leaving

them open to criticism. To overcome these perceived challenges, I undertook several strategies:

- I looked for signs of anxiety in the respondents during interviews to ensure that questions were comfortable and not overly invasive.
- I explained to the respondents what would happen with the data to ensure they understood how confidentiality would be observed.
- I commenced each interview with an informal conversation about everyday matters, as was expected in Arab culture, reflecting carefully on the types of inquiries I made, the language I used and the respect I conveyed through modest dress and appropriate body language (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992).

The third interviews were challenging to organise for numerous reasons. First, travel advice issued through the Australian Government cautioned against non-essential travel to Saudi Arabia throughout 2011-2012. The political and social disturbances in countries surrounding Saudi Arabia, including Bahrain and Syria, heightened my awareness of safety, when considering travelling to the Middle East to attempt to conduct interviews with the participants, although in my original research proposal I had indicated that this was my intention. I carried out an investigation through a travel agent regarding the likelihood of being granted a visa to travel to Saudi Arabia, but was advised that it was very difficult to obtain a visa and that sponsorship from one of the participant's families would be required for this to be considered. A restriction on women entering the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia alone was also a consideration that militated against pursuing this travel plan. The situation was further complicated by three of the participants being Shi'ite Muslims, which prevented them from travelling to Bahrain to meet me. This restriction was a direct result of the disturbances in Bahrain during 2011-2012.

After careful consideration of what was possible in terms of travel logistics, I decided that the best course of action was to travel to Dubai and invite two of the Shi'ite women to meet me there. This overcame issues of obtaining visas, allowed face-to-face interviews to take place and ensured the safety of all parties. Only one woman was able to take up this offer and she came to Dubai for two days accompanied by her husband. The second woman, who is single, was unable to obtain permission from the male members of her family to come to Dubai. Despite initial disappointment at this decision, I found that the communication I had established with this woman actually increased as a result of this invitation. I also found that having two days with the other woman and her husband developed our relationship considerably. The other participants, being Sunni Muslims, posed fewer problems in terms of travel restrictions, but given that they lived in the Makkah province, the distance to reach Dubai was far greater. This was resolved by conducting their interviews via *Skype* from Australia. Given that three of the participants had completed their studies between September and November 2011, the timing for these final interviews required contact to be around March-April 2012. This was not possible as the visit to Dubai was scheduled for December 2011. Using *Skype* to conduct four interviews was an adequate tool, although face-to-face interviews would have been preferable. *Skype* was useful in that I was able to see the participants in their natural environments, speak with them in a familiar way and observe their body language during the interview. One of the participants did not respond to requests for an interview once she had returned to Saudi Arabia.

The difficulties in obtaining visas for travel to Saudi Arabia and the travel restrictions on the Shi'ite participants provided an insight into life in the Kingdom. They demonstrated that, for both foreigners and Saudi Nationals, limitations (as identified by Adelman & Lustig, 1981) still prevailed when attempting to travel freely and conduct research within the Kingdom.

Interview questions

The aim of facilitating interviews was to attempt to enter the participants' world and provide a comfortable space for them to recount their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Smith et al., 2009). The *Interview Schedule* was designed to prepare the content of the questions that would be asked, plan for difficulties that might arise and ensure the appropriate phrasing of questions (see Appendix 1). It was acknowledged that, while an interview schedule might shape the discussion, it could not guarantee the content or quality of the information gained and, despite the best attempts, the possibility existed that participants' perspectives might not be expressed (Maxwell, 2002).

The interview questions were open-ended with the aim of inviting the participants to elicit their views and opinions and recall aspects of their lived experience. Each interview contained four to six key questions, with follow-up probes, to encourage participants to elaborate on their initial responses (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). Although the participants were completing postgraduate studies and had developed proficiency in English, the questions contained simple, straightforward language that avoided slang and local colloquialisms (Church, 1982; Patton, 1990). This was done to assist the participants to feel more relaxed and comfortable with the process, given that, for the majority of informants, this was their first experience as an interviewee. I was mindful of maintaining rapport with the interviewees throughout the process and ensured that at all times I remained sensitive to their verbal and non-verbal feedback. I began each interview with some general conversation (sometimes we would have coffee and chat), before making some opening remarks about the questions that would be asked during the interview session so the interviewee was alerted to the nature of the questions to follow (Liamputtong, 2009; Patton, 1990). I did this to focus their attention, to assist them to organise their thoughts (even for a few moments) and reassure them about what was to come.

The content of the interview questions was also carefully crafted to provide opportunities for the participants to discuss changes in their lives that involved personal goals (Questions 1, 3, 7, 8, 12, 13), changes in relationships (Questions 2, 4, 9, 10, 11) and indicators of behavioural changes (Questions 5, 6, 9). An additional question was included in the interview schedule about advice the participants would offer to host organisations, including universities, about preparing sojourners for returning home.

Interview process

Each interview was recorded on audiotape. The reasons for doing this were explained to the participants prior to the commencement of the interview and I included an explanation of what would happen to the data after it had been recorded (Liamputtong, 2009). It was particularly important to reassure the participants that confidentiality would be observed. At first, several of the participants seemed hesitant about speaking, but as the first interview evolved, they visibly relaxed and spoke more freely. The first question of the interview schedule was deliberately designed to relax the participants in that it required them to provide reasons for choosing Newcastle as a study destination and to recall their early days at the university. It did not probe their feelings, or ask them to interpret their experiences in any way. I followed Patton's (1990) suggestions on sequencing the questions by beginning with an inquiry about non-controversial behaviours, activities and experiences. Further, I included a range of question types that probed interviewees' knowledge, feelings, behaviours, experiences, opinions and values (Patton, 1990). I also collected demographic data for all interviewees. At the conclusion of the first set of interviews, several of the participants stated that they had enjoyed the experience.

I was mindful throughout this process that cross-cultural interactions were likely to encounter misunderstandings, misinterpretations and miscommunications (Patton, 1990). To ensure the best possible outcomes, I prepared thoroughly for facilitating the interviews by: (i)

reading widely on the culture of Saudi Arabia so that I would be well placed to understand the meaning and significance of words used by the interviewees; (ii) remaining totally focused on each informant during each interview so that I could interpret verbal and non-verbal cues; and (iii) seeking clarification during the interview if I did not understand what the interviewee was saying. I attempted to show special sensitivity and respect for difference throughout this process, as suggested by Patton (1990).

I concluded each interview by asking the participants whether they had anything further they wished to add, or whether they wanted to change any statements they had made. After concluding the interview, I stayed with the participants for a short while so they could de-brief if they chose to, but mainly to ensure that they left with good feelings (Liamputtong, 2009).

Other data collection methods

In addition to collecting data during audio-taped interviews, I regularly read news online from the Saudi Arabian *Arab News* and *Saudi Gazette*. These newspapers provided a source of local interest stories and current events in English. They also contained blogs that were useful for following how the local population responded to news items. I keenly read stories that featured women, especially in regards to employment, relationships, rights, education, religion and health. This information kept me informed about current issues affecting Saudi women and strengthened my knowledge about the culture and religion of the Kingdom. It also kept me updated about the context into which the women would be returning.

Developing relationships with the study's participants required me to attend special events, such as *Iftar* dinners, from time to time. During these events, I observed a range of behaviours and engaged in informal conversations with Saudi women, beyond those who participated in this study. During these conversations, I gained new insights into their culture.

For example, I observed how the women quietly removed themselves from events to pray, how they related to their children in a social context and how they negotiated relationships with their friends and colleagues. I discussed with them the workings of effective relationships by sharing with them some of my beliefs and, although I did not use this information directly in my writing, it added richness to my understanding of the women's lives.

At the outset of this study, I began to write a comprehensive list of the beliefs, values, biases and assumptions I held about the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, women, Islam and more generally about the Middle East. I added to this list during the study as I became more aware of my role and its impact. The purpose of this list was to acknowledge my position as the primary data collection instrument and the contribution I made to the research setting. I also kept a journal during the study, in which I noted my feelings and responses to various situations and events. The purpose of this journal was partly to alleviate the anxiety I felt at challenging times during the process and to ensure that, as the research progressed and challenges were overcome, there was evidence of what I was feeling at key stages of the study. I included in the journal some reflections on the interviews that I had facilitated with participants. These reflections captured observations made during the interviews, how participants responded to the various questions and what I felt about the tone of the interaction between myself and the interviewee.

In an attempt to keep the relationships with participants alive after they had returned home and to follow their readjustment process, I sent regular emails to repatriates and made telephone calls using *Skype*. During these communications, I made friendly inquiries about their day-to-day activities and sent informal news of the university and my own activities. The responses I received varied in length and content, but were valuable in keeping me engaged with the challenges the returnees were experiencing and the highs and lows of their

repatriation. I used some of this information to refine the questions asked during the third interviews, especially in relation to the events and emotional responses to these events that the women wrote about during the early days of their return.

Data analysis

The process of data analysis involved several steps. Although these steps have been presented in chronological order, I was required to move back and forth in a process that involved description, reflection and interpretation.

Step 1: Extracting demographic data

I transferred all demographic data from the handwritten templates onto an Excel spread sheet. This made the information easy to read and, at a glance, I could see comparisons between the informants' data. I also wrote observations and reflections about each interview into my journal.

Step 2: Listening and noting

I listened to each interview several times, as soon as possible after taping, to ensure that I had understood its meaning. I particularly listened for intonation, pauses and expressions of emotion, such as laughter (Bryman & Burgess, 1994) to gain an overall picture of the interview content and the tone of the discussion. I noted in my journal comments about each interview, including how I felt the informants had responded to particular questions, the overall tone of the interview and any statements I wanted to follow up during subsequent interviews.

Step 3: Reading and noting

I downloaded each interview soon after completion and sent each to be transcribed. Transcription took about five days. As the interviews were often weeks apart, I dealt with

each transcript individually, which allowed me time to immerse myself in the data and to make each interview the focus of analysis. I began the analysis early, regarding it as a central part of the continuous process of doing research (Bryman & Burgess, 1994). I listened to the audiotape while following the written transcript. Occasionally a participant's words were difficult to understand and this process assisted in deciphering these words or phrases.

Step 4: Organising the information

I began by writing the questions that I had asked each participant at the interview. Under each question, I carefully recorded verbatim what each participant had answered. I used different coloured inks to distinguish one informant from the other. In some situations, this required me to record the same information more than once, as the answers the informants gave often related to more than one question. After recording all this information, I read and re-read the information to obtain an overall picture of the main ideas. I used this as a cross-case analysis, as described by Patton (1990).

Step 5: Developing emergent themes

This part of the analysis involved *coding* or organising the information into 'chunks' (Creswell, 2003) by taking words, sentences and paragraphs and labelling each of these, with a term or category. The informants' language was used to determine the terms or categories. During this process, I wrote notes about emergent themes and focused on the language that participants used to describe their experiences. I formed these *describing* words into a list and then looked to see whether there were patterns in the participants' experiences, where they used these emotive words. For example, I found that the informants' experiences of living in Australia were broken into three distinct phases, namely: early arrival, during their sojourn and pre-departure, and that they used different words when describing their experiences in each of these phases.

I made a list of all the themes from each interview and, as a new interview was completed, I added information from it to this list. I sorted the information into major and minor themes and kept a list of themes that did not fit into either category. I labelled each theme with a word that was either chosen from the interviewees or captured the central idea. For example, the participants frequently cited examples of activities in which they had engaged in Australia commenting that they were unable to engage in the same activities at home. They talked about how they felt about living a different kind of life in Australia. Out of one of these descriptions came thematic labels, such as *feeling powerless* and *personal growth*.

Step 6: Adding and coding new data

I listened to the tapes of the second and third interviews of each participant. I sent the tapes to be transcribed. On their return, I read the transcripts and I listened to the taped interviews simultaneously, as described in steps two and three. I repeated step four for all new interviews. At this stage, I read my journal notes and identified statements I would need to include. I also printed the email communications and notes taken from telephone conversations with the participants after their return home. I looked to see whether the content of these communications fit the existing codes. Where they did, I inserted them and where they did not, I made a list that would form the content to a section of the writing that dealt with *exceptions* (Li & Seale, 2007). I also investigated how themes connected and shaped these connections into general descriptions.

Step 7: Rewriting

During this step, I reread the codes from all interviews, which I then incorporated into the writing process.

Trustworthiness and validity of findings

A *trustworthy* study is one that has been carried out ethically and represents findings in ways that convey the experiences of the participants as closely as possible (Padgett, 2009). It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure the study is carried out as rigorously as possible and to give a faithful account of what happened. Lincoln and Guba (1985) asserted that activities, such as prolonged engagement, persistent observation and triangulation, increased the probability that credible findings would be produced. Prolonged engagement provided an opportunity for building trust between the researcher and informants. It was a developmental process to demonstrate that the confidence placed by participants in the researcher was honoured, participants' interests were respected, participants had influence over the inquiry process and confidentiality was observed (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Prolonged engagement was critical if trust and rapport were to be established. Persistent observation identified those elements most important to the study and focused on them in detail. Persistent observation also added depth to the findings, while triangulation required the use of different methods, various sources and sometimes multiple investigators (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). These activities were woven into this study by engaging the participants in casual conversations, attending social events, sharing food, exchanging information and showing support and friendship over time.

According to Whittemore et al. (2001), in qualitative research, credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity were primary criteria, while explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence and sensitivity were secondary. While primary criteria were necessary to all qualitative inquiries, secondary criteria provided additional benchmarks of quality. *Credibility and authenticity* referred to conscious efforts to establish confidence and accurate interpretation of the meaning of data (Whittemore et al., 2001) and required reflection on:

1. The results, to establish whether they represented the experiences of the participants, or the context in a believable way.
2. The explanation and description, to establish whether they fit appropriately.
3. Interpretations, to ensure they were trustworthy and revealed truth.

In this study, I incorporated techniques of extended engagement, member checking and debriefing with my supervisors. Given data collection took place over an 18-month period, there were many opportunities to build relationships with the participants. Meeting them socially and assisting with information and practical support provided opportunities outside the research process for engagement to develop. Further, in facilitating three individual interviews with each participant, I was able to connect and learn about their experiences over a period of time. I also collected information in my journal and through emails.

I used member checking as the interview process unfolded. This required me to ask the participants to verify and amend the interpretations and conclusions I had drawn. I was able to do this by taking information from the first interview to subsequent interviews and discussing with interviewees what they had told me previously.

Throughout the study, I engaged in regular debriefing sessions with my supervisors to examine biases and my interpretations of the data. Rather than engaging with peers, I chose to discuss the progress of this study with my supervisors.

Criticality and integrity referred to the differing interpretations, assumptions and knowledge background of the researcher that could potentially influence the research process. Integrity and criticality were represented through recursive and repetitive checks of interpretations and presentation of tentative findings (Whittemore et al., 2001).

During this study, I wrote a comprehensive list of the assumptions that might have influenced my interpretation of data. I referred to this list, so that preconceived ideas did not

interfere with the data I was collecting. I also acknowledged my professional background and its relationship to international education. I wrote my reflections and observations in my journal, used member checking and debriefing with my supervisors as the study progressed to address this issue. I outsourced the interviews for transcription and requested that they were transcribed verbatim. By listening to the interviews and reading them at the same time, I was able to ensure that I had captured and understood the participants' words and intonation.

According to Whitemore et al. (2001), secondary criteria for validity include explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence and sensitivity, all of which contribute to the development of validity in qualitative research.

Explicitness was an important criterion for defending my methodological decisions. To demonstrate explicitness, I referred to the literature and related the methods I used in this study to it. I justified why I had chosen particular pathways, by making clear that alternatives would not have served my purposes and brought about desired results. For example, I chose a qualitative method for this study and justified this choice on the basis of its applicability to the study's topic and my own professional experience.

Vividness involved the presentation of thick and faithful descriptions with imagination and clarity (Whitemore et al., 2001). I used the participants' words to create vividness in my descriptions and endeavoured to use language that was as rich and clear as possible.

Creativity required flexibility in the interview schedule, which contained specific research questions. I demonstrated this by preparing and posing carefully crafted research questions and allowing for flexibility as the schedule unfolded. I added a new question to the final interview and, based on what the interviewees said, I emphasised some questions over others through probing during the interview process. I did this when I realised the participants had little knowledge or experience to address the question. For example, I found that the

informants had very little professional experience prior to coming to Australia and hence little knowledge to contribute in this area. However, I continued to pose this question to all participants to ensure that, should one of them have a different experience, it would be captured.

Thoroughness referred to sampling and data analysis, as well as comprehensiveness of approach and analysis. It implied attention to connections between themes and full development of ideas. I attended to this aspect of validity by explaining why I had chosen a purposive sampling method for this study over other methods and how this method suited the study's purpose. In my data analysis, I attended carefully to the answers of every interview question and attempted to report these answers as convincingly as possible.

Congruence required connections between: the research questions, methods and findings; data collection and analysis; the current study and previous studies; and the findings and practice (Whittemore et al., 2001). I noted through the literature review that gaps in knowledge existed around my research topic. For this reason, I chose to label this study exploratory as it provided data that could be used in future research. I presented the findings as reflecting the experiences of a small group of postgraduate women and I emphasised caution in generalising the study's findings beyond this group and context.

Sensitivity ensured that the research was undertaken in ways that were sensitive to the nature of human, cultural and social contexts. It shows a concern for human dignity and respect for participants. In this study, I endeavoured to read widely about theories of culture, cultural identity, as well as the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Islam, to develop sensitivity to cultural and religious beliefs and practices, prior to facilitating interviews with the participants. I did this for a number of reasons: first, so that I would better understand the participants' responses to my questions; secondly, so that my own cultural framework would not override my understanding of the information the participants were providing; thirdly, so

that I would ensure culturally sensitive behaviours when meeting with participants; and finally, to use this information to assist in the process of building rapport with potential participants. I continued to read a range of articles, newspapers and published works throughout the study and, as my knowledge deepened, I cross-checked one source of information with another in an effort to find common ground. Where anomalies remained, I noted them, and kept them as useful material that presented an alternative point of view.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the study's methodology with particular reference to the qualitative approach taken; the relationship-building process developed between the researcher and the study's participants; the research design; data collection and analysis; and how validity and trustworthiness were embedded into the study. In the following chapter, a description of the participants' international experiences in Australia is presented. The purpose of this description is to provide an introduction and context to the findings presented in Chapter 7.

Chapter 6

Findings Part 1: Descriptive overview of the participants’ international experience

This chapter describes the participants’ international experiences of living and studying in Australia. The purpose of this description is to contribute context and add depth to the thematic analysis of data that is presented later. It begins with a profile of the participants. This is followed by an explanation of the decision-making processes that brought the participants to Australia, before describing the significant events that influenced and shaped their international journeys. The main sources of data for these findings were in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted prior to the participants returning home. The full interview schedule can be viewed in Appendix 1. The participants’ quotes are exact and corrections have not been made for grammatical mistakes on the part of the interviewees. Although this might slightly impair clarity, it was considered important to report the thoughts and sentiments of the participants in their own words. The participants’ names have been changed to protect their identities.

Table 2: Profile of participants

Participant	Marital status	Date of arrival in Australia	Date of departure from Australia	Studies in Australia	Contact with family and friends	Number of visits to KSA while in Australia	Overseas travel	Housing on return to KSA
Medina	Married with children	2009	2011	ELICOS + Master Science Education	Email, Text, Phone	Two	Malaysia	Own home
Maymuna	Single	2009	2011	ELICOS + Master of Marketing	Facebook, Email, <i>Skype</i>	Two	Malaysia	With family
Rania	Single	2009	2011	ELICOS + Master of Marketing	Phone, Text	Two	Lebanon, UAE, Syria, Iran, Bahrain	With family (separate apartment)
Noor	Married with children	2008	2011	ELICOS + Master Education Studies	Phone, <i>Skype</i> , Facebook	Two	Bahrain, Malaysia	Own home
Sara	Single	2009	2012	ELICOS + Master Social Science	<i>Skype</i> , <i>Tango</i> , <i>Viber</i> , Email	Four	Philippines, UAE, Bahrain	With family
En	Married with children	2008	2011	ELICOS + Master Science Education	<i>Skype</i> , Phone	Four	USA, UK, France, Egypt, UAE, Lebanon, Malaysia, Switzerland	Own home

Participants ranged in age from 25 to 31 years.

Choosing a study destination

Most of the participants relied on the advice of family members and trusted colleagues to choose a study destination. Husbands took responsibility for their wives and families, and mothers exerted power over decisions concerning their adult children:

After my sister had been here for one year I came to Newcastle to live because my mother doesn't want me to go somewhere different (Maymuna – interview 1).

My husband came on a friend's advice. He is from the same college in Jeddah; he was here before us. So he told him it is quiet city, it's a good city, and it's a good university (En – interview 1).

Choosing a lifestyle was more important than academic considerations when deciding on a study destination. As one participant explained:

More concerned about lifestyle ... Because if I'm very comfortable in my lifestyle my study is good also (Rania – interview 1).

Having contacts from within the Saudi student community already familiar with Newcastle, influenced the participants' choice of destination. They also leveraged these relationships to ease some of the challenges associated with settling in to a new city:

He keep his house for us, so when we come we live in his house. I lived just two days in a hotel, and then we got the house and the car (En - interview 1).

Only one informant came to Newcastle without relying on the advice of family or friends:

We did not choose Newcastle. My husband and I wrote three options on our application to the Cultural Mission – Canada, America and Australia. The Cultural Mission chose Australia for us. It was our third choice. We did not choose anything (Medina – interview 1).

The informants were largely pleased with the experience of living in Newcastle, although one unmarried woman would have preferred to live in a larger city, such as Sydney, for lifestyle reasons:

I think it is actually good for study ... Yeah with the university but living maybe not very much for me. It's good but if I have choice I will choose Sydney ... I like big city ... yeah a lot of activities there (Maymuna – interview 1).

Studying in Australia

All the participants commenced their studies with an English language course facilitated by the language centre based at the University. One participant said she accompanied her husband, who was awarded a scholarship. Her plan was only to improve her English language proficiency. However, after completing studies at the language centre, she was awarded a scholarship to proceed to a postgraduate degree. Studying in the faculty was an unexpected journey for her. The other participants came to Australia with the intention of undertaking postgraduate degrees. After completing the English language course, the participants progressed to postgraduate coursework degrees in the Faculties of Education and Arts and Business and Law. Their experiences of studying in the faculties were challenging:

In general it is okay, but each semester I have got a bad experience with one course, one lecturer. The first semester I did one course. It was not helpful for me. I did the presentation and it was completely wrong. The lecturer blamed me in front of all the class. So it was a bad experience for me and I'm trying to rebuild myself and get on board again (En - interview 1).

The problems I have had are with language. I can't write well academically. I need more time to learn to write very well ... At home I just copy and paste from a book. Here it is a new style for me. And the references, they're different. The structure for the assignment is difficult (Maymuna – interview 1).

However, the participants had some positive comments about the support offered by University staff:

The system in the University, I mean the teacher. Every teacher I think is very good and helpful for the students, very helpful and very cooperative with the students (Medina- interview 1).

Observations about the local environment

Most of the participants commented positively on the physical environment in Australia, which they linked to the activities they enjoyed, such as shopping:

But the ocean here is amazing. The green, the quiet, all this stuff, shopping in Woolworths (Rania – interview 1).

Although Newcastle is a very quiet city and very small city, because my house is next to the shopping centre I like to buy what I need by myself (En – interview 1).

The informants used the word ‘quiet’ and ‘good for study’ to describe Newcastle, with the inference that, because there were few distractions, they were able to concentrate on their studies:

It’s a good place to study because it is quiet and is a good place to live because still quiet and friendly and good environment, so yeah, that’s all (Noor – interview 1).

For studying it’s a good place because it is relaxed and quiet and also there are some interesting places like the ocean and some parks and Lake Macquarie ... the general environment is pretty good, but the shopping – shopping not really very good (Medina – interview 1).

They also linked the physical environment to lifestyle, the local people and, in particular, to the concept of freedom:

It’s really nice, really clean, fresh air, friendly people, freedom (Noor – interview 1).

They made numerous observations that compared life in Saudi Arabia and Australia, including the ease of getting things done in Australia, the availability of public transport and levels of service:

Or I get a coffee with my friend – so it’s easy here now but in Saudi Arabia if I have all the facilities from private driver and private car (En – interview 1).

You can travel easy because you have public transport, but there, none (Sara – interview 1).

One participant talked about differences in levels of service between Australia and Saudi Arabia. She said that at home she had to wait to receive assistance in shops or offices and, sometimes when the assistance came, it was delivered in an unfriendly or unhelpful way.

How locals responded to their presence

Although the participants found local people friendly and kind, there were some aspects of living in Newcastle that had a negative impact on their experiences:

The teenagers, they start to recognise us, like they don't need these people in our country. So they attacked us sometimes or tried to do some bad things ... I have to ride a bus to go home if my brother is busy or something like that. I recently am afraid to catch the bus at the late time. They're young but they act and they talk and make me uncomfortable (Rania – interview 1).

Sometimes you didn't feel safe ... Even in the house I am scared ... I heard lots of stolen houses, that's why I don't feel safe sometimes (En – interview 3).

It took time for the participants to adjust to the host environment and lifestyle:

I think sometimes there are problems with the hospital and the appointments. I think the appointments take a long time. Sometimes the children are very weak, very sick. I don't know where to go, everything need an appointment (Medina – interview 1).

I love shopping here, but the time limit for shopping is really bad (Noor – interview 1).

Despite these issues, the informants were committed to staying until the end of their academic studies. Harassment by teenagers and feeling unsafe at times did not increase their desire to return home. They described the less favourable aspects of living in Newcastle as challenges in learning to adjust to a 'different lifestyle'.

Adaptation strategies

In an attempt to adapt to life in Australia, the participants adopted various strategies to reconcile sociocultural differences between their home and host country. In some instances, they chose to adopt the lifestyle of the host country, while in other situations they held fast to their previous way of life. Mostly, they chose to combine these two strategies, drawing on some Australian ways of doing things, while still maintaining many of the behaviours and values associated with their home culture and religion. En explains:

In Saudi Arabia when your friend is come to your house you have to give them all the hospitalities that they deserve; and have to order the coffee, bring the coffee and a lot of kind of desserts. But here, even if my friend, even if they are from Saudi Arabia, each one bring with them food and we share all the food ... It's very easy here to invite people – but in Saudi Arabia no not that much easy (En – interview 1).

Adopting aspects of the Australian lifestyle meant less formality in social occasions:

You can be very, you can just say to an Australian do you want a coffee and the coffee cups don't have to be all the same kind of thing ... In Saudi Arabia when I invite them I have to prepare everything it's perfect as I can (En – interview 1).

However, the participants chose to hold fast to some of the behaviours and customs that they practised in Saudi Arabia, particularly those associated with religious principles. For example, they included only *halal* (permitted) products in their diets and, although they were keen to try new foods, they read the packaging on products carefully to ensure that all the ingredients were permitted under Islam. If they were unsure, they refused foods offered by locals, to adhere to their religious principles.

Adjustment and support

The participants relied largely on Saudi colleagues or other international students for friendship and support:

I have a friend very close to me. She is my neighbour and we're always together, eat together, stay together, go and have fun together. But she's gone back to my country ... I miss her (Rania – interview 1).

I have three friends from Korea. It's a very interesting group, three girls. I met them in my class at the language centre (Medina – interview 1).

The participants expressed disappointment that they had not been able to make friends easily with Australians and described some of the difficulties they experienced in building connections:

Here it's a lot of barriers we can't find it because sometimes I speak or I talk something but they said what? what? Maybe the way I tell this information, it's not quite clear ... maybe they don't accept that or they don't want to get along. So sometimes it's a challenge (En – interview 1).

Although most of the participants made very few Australian friends, they remained positive about members of their host community:

Australians, they are friendly and I can talk with anyone. But I have just one [friend]; she is married to an Arabian guy, so I meet her with this situation (Rania – interview 1).

I have just a few Australian friends – around one, maybe two. One of them is my teacher at the language centre ... I have one other friend. She was my classmate last semester but I lost contact with her because I think she is working now. I did expect to make more Australian friends when I came. Yes, that has been a little disappointment for me. I don't know the reason (Noor - interview 1).

One participant described how she had initiated contact with an Australian woman through conversations with shop owners, or other customers, to practise English and attempt to form friendships with local people:

I have one friend and recently I got a new friend. She's similar to your [researcher's] age. Two weeks ago I was in a coffee shop with my kids and she sat next to me and I

just start to talk to her. I ask her about her hairstyle and where she cut it and she start to talk to me and I talk to her and I ask if I can get her number. Last week she send me a text message to ask to meet, and we meet (En – interview 1).

Some of the participants developed friendships with their teachers at the language centre after they had progressed to the faculties:

Not really friends, but the teacher. Some teacher I invite to my home and talking with her like a friend (Medina – interview 1).

One participant talked about a friendship she had established with a male person:

One of them is my teacher in the language centre. We are still in contact between time and time ... It is not usual actually to have a male friend ... it is impossible to have a male friend back home ... I feel like strange and sometimes a bit guilty but at the time I thought no it's okay if our friendship is just a friendship (Noor – interview 1).

This situation raised the issue of relationships between men and women in Australia and Saudi Arabia. The woman, who had developed a friendship with her male teacher, said that it would be impossible for her to have this kind of relationship at home 'because Saudi men are different from other men, so their thinking is different' (Noor – interview 1). She introduced her husband to her friend (and his family) and he supported her in developing this relationship. However, she stated that she would not have permitted her husband to have a female friend.

The difficulty in establishing friendships with Australians, the relative ease of making contact with other international students and the large number of Saudi Arabian colleagues studying at the university, some of whom were known to the women prior to their arrival, provided some explanation as to why the women reported having few Australian friends, numerous relationships with other international students and their strongest connections with Saudi colleagues. Rania summed up the importance of Saudi friends:

But maybe here we are just – we need a family. We need to meet someone from my country or something like this (Rania – interview 1).

Caring for children

Three of the participants were married with children. Two had preschool and school-age children, while the other had a two year-old son and a young baby. Two of the women had given birth to their youngest children while in Australia. The care of children was an important factor in the women's experiences and sometimes resulted in feelings of stress and guilt:

I feel sorry because my daughter has lots of cousins and I thought, always I feel like I am guilty to take her from her cousins and she really – for the first three months she was really sad, crying, always ask about her cousins (Noor – interview 1).

So the first year it's difficult to find him the child care because no more support so I can't study and he was a very little boy ... The second year we leave him with my parents back home in Saudi Arabia. So it's a hard decision but we did it ... I just dream about him. I just every day blame myself but when I heard my mother she told me he's happy, he's very enjoy – he doesn't need you, don't worry about him. He don't even say your name so don't worry about that (En – interview 1).

Medina talked about the mounting pressure she had experienced since giving birth to her second child in Australia and the stress of trying to manage all the tasks she faced on a daily basis:

That life sometimes has difficulties with children, a little boy and another one ... I cannot do this by myself, take [son] to preschool and take [son] to another preschool. Go to university and work and then come back home and then do everything, dinner and all, I cannot do everything you know ... When I came, not hard like now ... I think all the people when they come and have a baby the pressure goes up. We need someone in the house to take care of him because he is crying and need time and the assignment need time (Medina – interview 2).

Because the women did not have the support of extended family and the paid help they were used to in Saudi Arabia, feelings of pressure and stress were heightened in Australia. The women also felt distressed and guilty that they had taken their children away from their family members and for putting their own needs first. However, leaving children with parents in Saudi Arabia also caused distress and sadness at having their young children so far away.

Preparing children for returning home

Participants adopted similar types of strategies to prepare their children for returning home. They focused most attention on older children, who attended school, rather than on their younger siblings, as they believed their older children might experience more difficulties. Children of both genders were offered similar preparation by their mothers. Most of the preparation was built around emphasising the positive aspects of returning home, reuniting with members of the extended family, especially cousins and grandparents and seeing favourite places again:

Yeah every night ... Yep. Trying to prepare her and not shock her ... Just telling her a story about her family and we will go to see my granny and our aunts or uncles, we will see lots of cousins, we will see lots of children there and play with them (Noor – interview 1).

I talk to him just about preparing to go and we collect our things and we will go to our grandmother and grandfather (Medina – interview 2).

Limited attention was paid to leaving Australia and what that might mean for the children. The women did not talk to them about leaving friends and their schools, but rather concentrated on the future. As Medina says:

No, I just think in future ... I didn't talk to leave friends and preschool and teachers and no I didn't talk about this (Medina – interview 2).

Although the children told their parents that they understood they would return to Saudi Arabia in the future, they often did not know when they were likely to return and clung to the idea that their visit would be of short duration, long enough to visit family and return to Australia:

She always remembers her cousin and her grandma and her city; her father's city, so she miss her country actually, even if she like it here. But she's happy if she go for a holiday ... She knows one day she will be back home, but she doesn't know when (En – interview 2).

Professional experiences and some observations

Although the participants had completed undergraduate studies in their home country, not all of them had been engaged in professional employment prior to coming to Australia. Their experiences in this area were limited. Two participants had not been employed, while one had volunteer experience only. Two participants had been teachers, one on a casual basis in a number of private schools, the other in a school for girls in Years 7-9. Only one of the participants had a full-time position in a hospital as a social worker. She intended to return to this position after completing her studies in Australia. The women aspired to gain professional roles on their return. They shared their views on women's work in Saudi Arabia:

Being a professional woman means a more comfortable life, more travel, more shopping, more quality schooling for the children. It's about earning money. I think women are looking for a more comfortable life than they are looking to move up in their professions. Having a good job and a good salary means they can help their husbands in their lives. It's about contributing to the family. That's the most important thing for Saudi women ... Women tend to stick to their jobs. They do not give them up. It is really hard to get a job. It's hard for all Saudis to get a job, but it's really, really hard for women because men can work in any field, but women just have education or medical fields (Noor – interview 1).

Rania talked about choosing between a career and marriage:

So if I become a professional, this can make me happy and comfortable, comfortable in the financial stuff and myself, I become satisfied ... But some people they choose that life, just married and have children ... I studied all my life and went overseas to study and I need to continue what I chose to do (Rania – interview 1).

The participants asserted that Saudi women were achieving their career goals and were highly successful, but their stories were rarely told in the media and remained largely hidden:

We have many women who achieve in Saudi but they unfortunately do not get in the news or in the newspapers. The problem with the newspapers is that they focus on the singers or the football. Even if they are important woman, or man, they don't focus on them. This is a problem (En – interview 1).

During their sojourns, the women established few relationships with professional women in Australia, but made the following observations:

Who takes care of the children, making the school lunch, or breakfast? I think this is a big challenge. Also, I didn't notice any maids or helpers here for women (Noor – interview 1).

At home, the housemaid lives with us, cooks for us, prepares the house for everything, takes care of the kids, washes, so I have time to look after my study. It's easy to get a housemaid. It's very important; it's part of our family. We don't have the challenge like in Australia (En – interview 1).

There were some general observations about professional relationships that indicated the women saw the Australian workplace as more egalitarian:

Here in Australia, they're equal in everything. There is no boss and there is no worker. They all have a relationship ... but in my country there is a boss and you have to respect all these things ... In my country we have a lot of layer (Rania – interview 2).

Rania expressed the view that women should not aim for 'top jobs':

Just I had a teacher at the language centre and she talked to us about the Australian women who like to catch the high positions in the country ... I think it is not good to put women in high positions ... No, because they are not very strong (Rania – interview 1).

Synopsis of the participants' experiences in Australia

The participants' experiences of living and studying in Australia were largely positive although there were some adjustment challenges. They developed friendships with other Saudi women, some international students and, to lesser extent, members of the host community. They could not identify why they experienced difficulty in making Australian friends, although they expressed disappointment in this situation. They enjoyed the physical environment of the city and largely felt comfortable on a day-to-day basis, although one participant cited some harassment from teenagers and another recounted incidents of theft in her neighbourhood. These incidents fit with social identity theory (Dandy & Pe-Pua, 2010) that points to negative representations of Muslims in Australia, and the assertions of Dunn, Forrest, Pe-Pua, Hynes and Maeder-Han (2009) that verbal abuse and violence is commonplace for Muslims in Australia. The participants stressed the importance of being able to move around freely and identified shopping and meeting friends as enjoyable activities. Their studies presented challenges, but they were well supported by staff of the University and proud of their academic achievements.

An assumption on the part of the researcher prior to commencing this study was that the participants, having acquired undergraduate degrees, would have brought more professional experiences from Saudi Arabia (journal entry). This assumption was proven to be invalid, limiting the capacity of the participants to talk about the lives of professional women in Saudi Arabia, bring to the study vignettes from their own experiences and compare their experiences with those of Australian women. During interviews and conversations, the

participants spoke emotionally at times about their first few months in Australia, the impact of the sojourn experience and feelings about returning home. The emphasis they placed on their emotional responses to key events that occurred during their sojourns prompted closer examination as shown in Figures 3-9. The words used in Figures 3-9 are taken directly from the participants' quotes to show that, during their sojourns, events occurred that brought about oscillating emotional responses (see Figures 4, 6, 8) and indicated awareness of personal growth and identity change, explored in Chapter 7.



Figure 3: Emotional responses to the sojourn experience consisting of three phases early days, during the sojourn, pre-departure

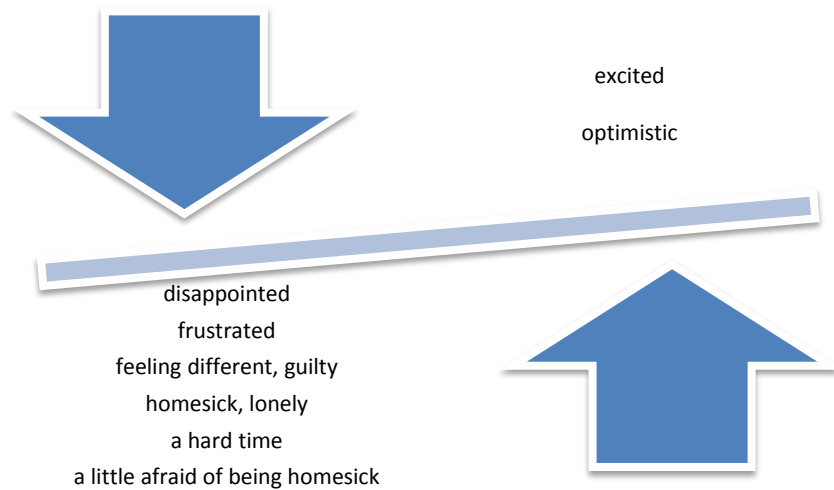


Figure 4: Oscillation between positive and negative emotions during the early days of the sojourn showed less positive than negative responses

Some emotional responses were carried by the participants beyond the early days into the duration of the sojourn, as shown in Figures 5 and 6.

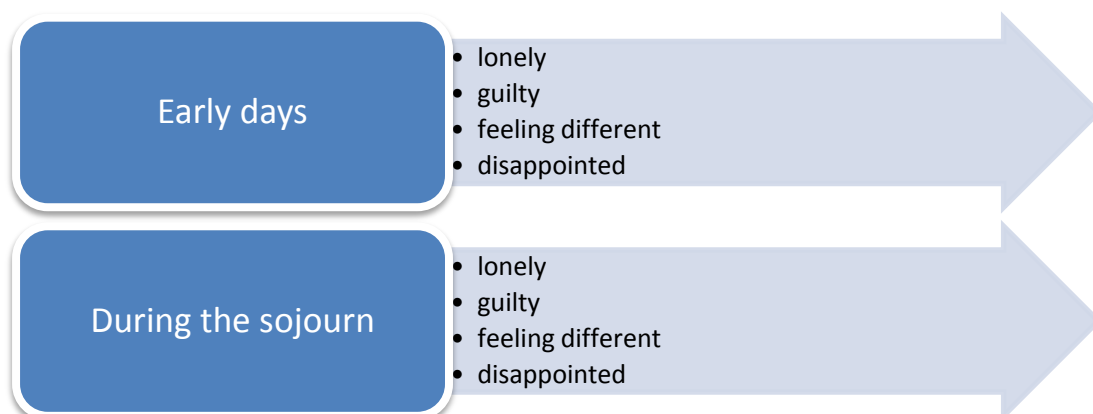


Figure 5: Emotional responses that carried over into the duration of the sojourn

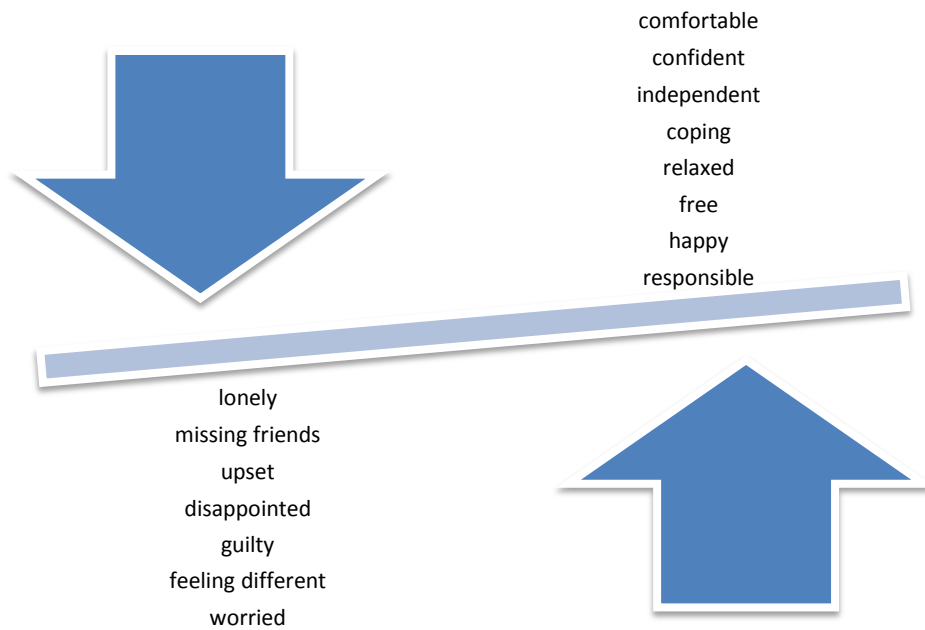


Figure 6: Oscillation between positive and negative emotions during the sojourn showing the emergence of more positive feelings

New feelings developed during the sojourn and continued to the pre-departure phase, as shown in Figures 7 and 8.

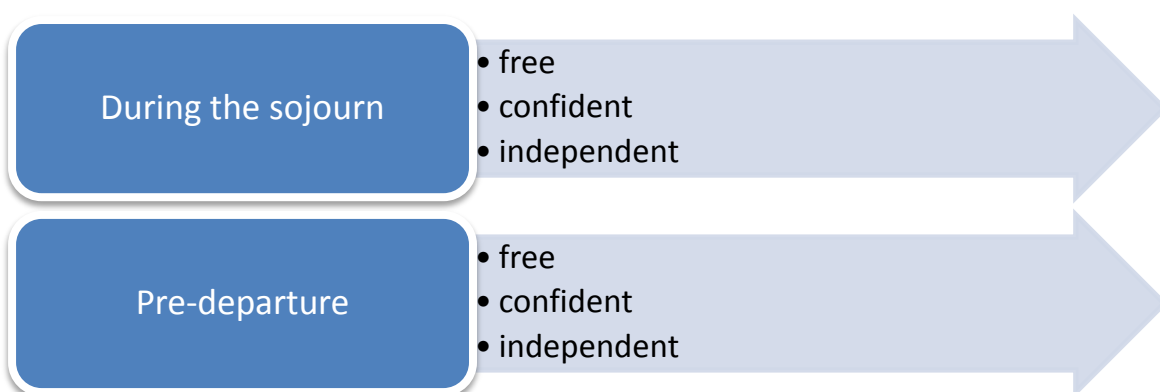


Figure 7: New emotional responses developed during the sojourn and carried over to pre-departure

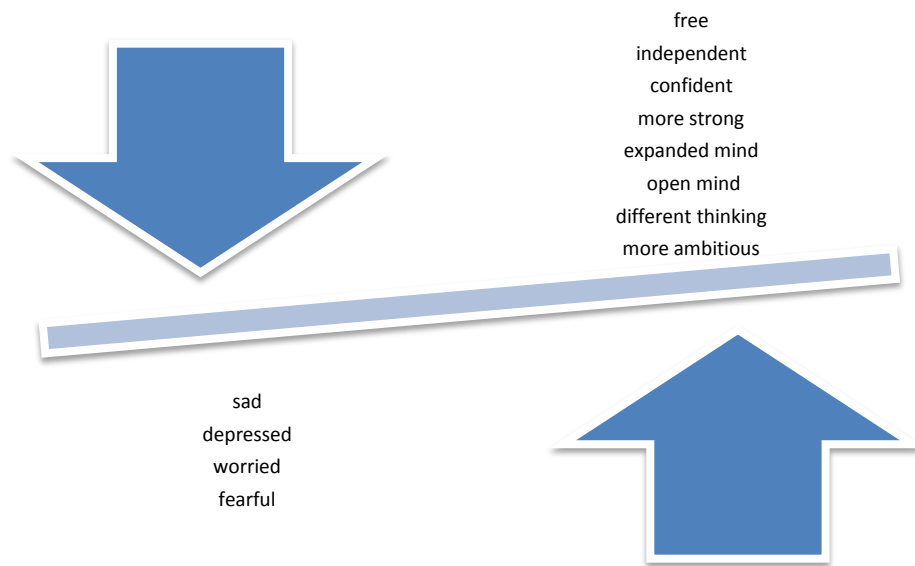


Figure 8: Oscillation between positive and negative emotions prior to departure from Australia showed more positive than negative responses

Despite expressions of fear, sadness and anxiety about leaving Australia, the participants used very different words to describe themselves by the end of their sojourns, as shown in Figure 9.

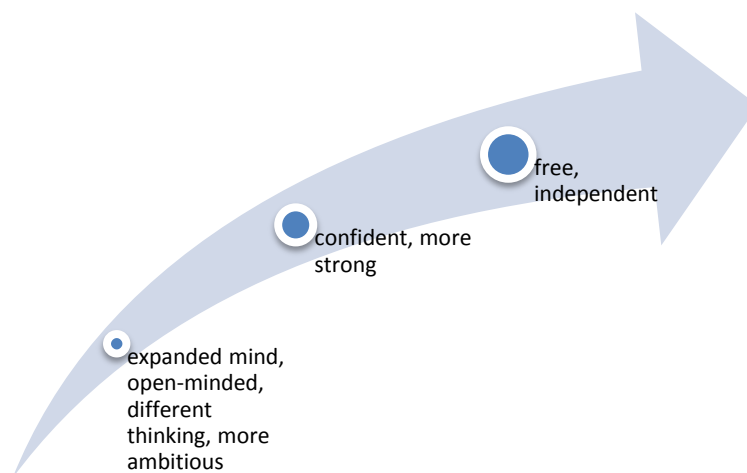


Figure 9: How the participants described themselves at the end of the sojourn

Figures 3-9 show there was a continuing oscillation of emotional responses during the sojourn experience. During the early days, the participants reported more negative than

positive emotional responses. Guilt, loneliness, feelings of difference and disappointment carried forward from the early days into the sojourn. During the sojourn, there was greater balance between negative and positive emotional responses and new feelings around confidence, independence and personal freedom began to emerge. By departure, the participants used very different language to describe their emotional responses, indicating more positive than negative feelings, with emphasis on personal growth and identity change. Although at the time of departure, the participants were worried and fearful about their futures and sad to leave Australia, there were also signs of emerging personal strengths and optimism about the future. The exploration of the participants' journeys continues in chapter 7, when they leave Australia and learn to live at home again.

Chapter 7

Findings Part 2: Repatriation experiences

This chapter documents the findings from the in-depth interviews, email communications, *Skype* conversations and journal entries regarding the participants' repatriation experience once they had completed their studies in Australia. Table 3 shows the primary and secondary themes that emerged from the data:

1. The push and pull of home is discussed in terms of:
 - a. Participants' tendency to alternate between pride in their achievements abroad and their hopes for the future: the joy of accomplishment, personal growth, plans and dreams, implementing new ideas and the pull of the family.
 - b. Their feelings of fear and powerlessness about returning home, loss of personal freedom and conflict.
2. Learning to live at home again is discussed through:
 - a. A chronicle of the events of the first few months after their return home: their homecoming experiences, emotional response to being home, how their expectations were met and the experiences of their children.
 - b. Making sense of the sojourn experience – a more reflective account of how the women attempted to put the international experience into practice, rebuild relationships with family, friends and colleagues, the support of their religion, their lasting memories of Australia, advice to prospective sojourners and how they viewed the future.

Table 3: Primary and secondary themes

PRIMARY THEMES	SECONDARY THEMES	
The push and pull of home	<p>Tendency to oscillate between:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Pride in their achievements abroad and hopes for the future <p>AND</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feelings of fear and powerlessness about returning home 	<p><i>The joy of accomplishment</i> <i>Personal growth</i> <i>Plans and dreams</i> <i>Implementing new ideas</i> The pull of the family</p> <p>Fears Feeling powerless Losing personal freedom Conflict</p>
Learning to live at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crucial first few months after their return Making sense of the sojourn experience 	<p>Homecoming experiences Emotional response to being home How their expectations were met Experiences of their children.</p> <p>Attempts to put the international experience into practice Rebuilding relationships with family, friends and colleagues Support of religion Lasting memories of Australia Advice to prospective sojourners How they see the future</p>

Figure 10 shows the relationship between these key themes, each of which is discussed below according to the structure shown in Table 3.

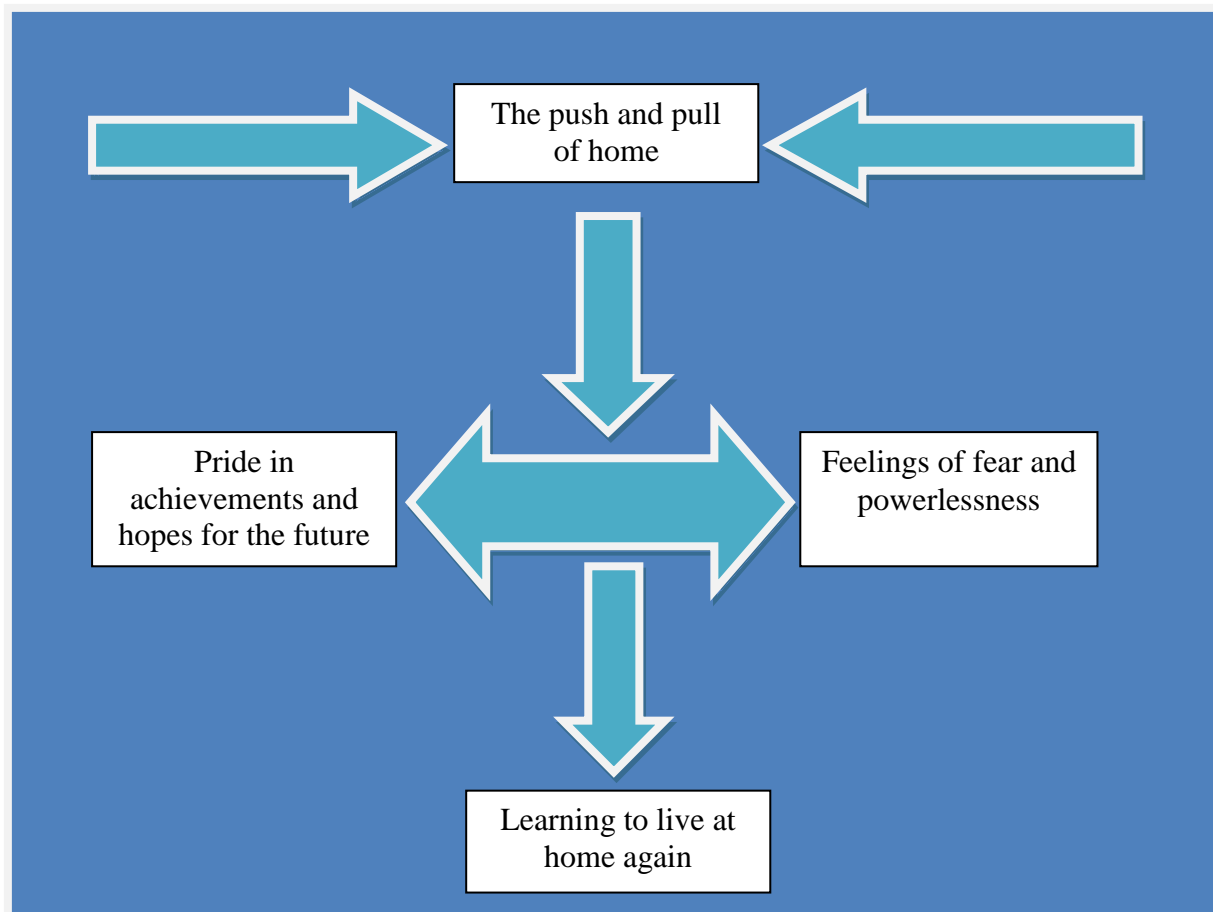


Figure 10: Primary and secondary themes that emerged through the data analysis

Primary theme 1: The push and pull of home

Towards the conclusion of their sojourns, the participants talked proudly about their academic attainments and personal achievements in Australia. Most of all, they expressed excitement about returning home to be reunited with extended family members. They were also enthused by the prospect of being able to demonstrate to family, friends and colleagues how they had changed during their international sojourns and how strong and independent they had become. The exposure to people from other cultures, opportunities to learn new things and the chance to share aspects of their culture and religion were new and exciting experiences during the sojourn, for some of the women, and they were eager to communicate all of these new experiences on returning home. At the same time, they were fearful, as they

identified obstacles that might prevent them from implementing their plans and dreams. Mostly, they were concerned about ‘slipping back’ into the people they had been prior to coming to Australia and reflected on losing ‘the free life’ they had experienced. Participants with spouses and children talked about their fears for them and how they would readjust to being home again.

All of this combined to form a potent mix that demonstrated how the participants were at once emotionally pulled towards returning home to reunite with extended families, return to familiar places and enjoy the feeling and comfort of what home means, while simultaneously determined to hold onto the newfound strengths and competencies they had achieved while living overseas, some of which were likely to be out of step with the values and behaviours of their country of origin. This is described as the *push and pull of home*. In interviews conducted one to four weeks before departure from Australia, the women talked freely about how they felt about returning home:

I am happy to go. It is just happiness and excitement. But maybe next week it will be different because I realise that now I am leaving, maybe forever (Rania – interview 2).

At the moment I feel depression. I don’t know. Even though my family [parents] are with me now, but I don’t know what I feel ... I will miss the freedom and natural life here (Maymuna – interview 2).

Honestly, sad. I love it. Yeah, I love it. It’s like my home country. I don’t know, maybe it’s because I love everything ... You know, if you love something and you become – like you lose this thing, you become sad, because I don’t know if I can come again to see Australia or not, because it is far away (Sara – interview 2).

Only one woman expressed total happiness and a sense of relief to be returning home:

No, just all happy. I have friends here but all my friends ... all of them go (Medina – interview 2).

The oscillation between positive and negative feelings that characterised the primary theme – the *push and pull of home* – is explained through the two secondary themes – *pride in achievements and hopes for the future* and *feelings of fear and powerlessness*.

Secondary theme: Pride in achievements and hopes for the future

Participants described a number of factors that contributed to the theme of *pride in achievements and hopes for the future*, namely, the joy of accomplishment, personal growth, plans and dreams, implementing new ideas and the ‘pull’ of family.

The joy of accomplishment

Pride associated with achievement took two forms: the first linked to academic accomplishment and the second to personal achievements. Most of the participants talked about the family celebrations they anticipated on their return home, reunions with extended family members and their parents’ pride in their success. Returning home with an academic qualification from an overseas university was significant, not only for the graduates, but also for the reputation and status of the whole family:

My mother told me that he [my father] is preparing for lots of things because she [mother] told me he’s very proud that his daughter got a Masters degree which is one of the first females in my family to get a Masters degree (Noor – interview 2).

I am happy, very, very, happy ... My family will make a celebration for me and my husband and our little boy because we go far away, then we come back and we get our results and maybe good results, and other people are happy about that (Medina – interview 2).

For Sara, attaining her postgraduate qualification was not as important as improving her proficiency in English, because ‘when you know English, you can speak to all people’ (Sara – interview 3). Sara regarded English language proficiency as a key to opening communication and building relationships across cultures. She posited that English is the

major world language. She regarded being able to communicate effectively in English as critical to her future.

Personal growth

Achievement was also recognised in terms of personal growth. The participants often measured this by reflecting on how they had managed challenging or unfamiliar situations in Australia. All of the participants talked about the profound impact of learning and expressed surprise in how much they had changed and in their capacity to do so. Much of this was reported in terms of newfound confidence and independence:

Everything for me has changed whether from education, even thinking about my future life ... Before [in Saudi Arabia] I don't have any job, and I didn't do anything. I just think about my home, and go outside, go to the bank – the little things, but now I think it is more than this (En – interview 2).

I learn here how I can depend on myself (Maymuna – interview 1).

The emergence of personal strength was often spoken about by the women as something they had not seen in themselves previously. It was as if this strength had lain dormant, unable to surface or discouraged from emerging in their home country. But in Australia, with greater responsibilities, more opportunities and different expectations, it had emerged:

I'll speak about my experience and how strong I am from this experience, to let everyone know how wonderful an experience I got here (Noor – interview 2).

I am very happy. I found myself here. I have many relationships with other cultures, if it's Muslim or non-Muslim. You learn my culture and I learn your culture ... I understand more and more about my religion and how to discuss it with people and how to explain my religion (En – interview 2).

For many of the women, the experience of being in Australia gave them permission to become adults and do adult things. Although the participants were all aged over 25 years,

most of them reported that in Saudi Arabia they had been unable to do things alone, assert their personalities and show their resourcefulness and capacity:

Here I live alone. At the start I lived alone, and it is a big thing that happened to me. But in my country, I have a brother, and my father, my mum – I am still a little child (Rania – interview 2).

[Noor talked about her biggest achievement] to achieve my character ... He [husband] admires me because I'm changing. He always told his friends, that my life really changed when I came here ... When she came here she was unable to speak to anybody, but now she always tells me, be quiet, at home (Noor – interview 2).

Although the women were extremely proud of their academic achievements, they were even more delighted with what had happened for them personally. Even though it could be argued that these two attainments were connected, it was personal growth, namely, increased independence and confidence, that the women spoke about most fervently.

Plans and dreams

Finding a suitable career that valued their international qualifications was an extremely important component of the women's plans and dreams. It was also a matter for concern. The limited professional fields open to women in Saudi Arabia was regarded as a significant challenge:

But I will search to work in marketing but I'm not sure if I can or not. The situation with women and the company in Saudi Arabia it's still in the interim stage (Rania – interview 1).

But the widespread employment of foreign workers did not worry or intimidate the women, as they identified that many of these workers were unlikely to be employed in the fields in which they sought employment, or to do the same types of work. The women anticipated that

it could take more than six months to find suitable employment. Most had thought through a range of possibilities that included working for public or private organisations:

There is more safety and if you work in the Government [public] you will be stable [secure] (Maymuna – interview 2).

I am not really thinking of working in my first degree. I have to search for the company in business [private] (Rania – interview 2).

Others considered the possibility of establishing their own small businesses:

My thoughts are if I couldn't find a job I'll run my own kindergarten ... I'd start with five or six kids and see the achievement that will advertise for me (Noor – interview 2).

I am also planning to do some business through Facebook ... I will open a little studio for the photographer in my home (Maymuna – interview 2).

One woman had a professional position to return to and her dream was to:

Become famous – have many courses, workshops. I prepare it with other doctors to have workshops and conferences ... I am challenged to change many things and persuade my boss ... [I want] to show them what social workers can do in hospital. Because I think there are many of them, they don't know exactly what is our job (Sara – interview 2).

Later Sara divulged that she was considering further study:

I am looking for a university in Saudi Arabia, a good university. I want to study for PhD. I want to study some problems for people who have diabetes ... I don't want to go away to study ... I want to be with my family (Sara - interview 3).

Further study was also regarded as an alternative to finding employment:

If God is willing for this one, I have a dream to continue my study here ... I don't want to stop myself. I don't want to be just a teacher – I don't want to stop my dream,

because I can do research, I can author a book, I can do anything that gives me development for myself (En – interview 2).

Actually I'm thinking about if I don't get any job, I think I'll come back again here to complete a double major (Maymuna – interview 2).

Taking time to care for young children was important for one woman, who believed she had not been able to devote enough time to them in Australia:

I need time because I need time for my children. Because here I am busy with my work and the children didn't have any time but now I can maybe stay with them and take care ... For one year I will stay with my baby and take care of the children and in another year I start to work and my children maybe in childcare also (Medina – interview 2).

For Rania, marriage was also a possibility for the future:

Marriage, maybe in the future ... He will find me. He will talk with his family and our family talks with him. They choose me, they come to ask and I will see. If he is good I will say yes. If he's not, I'll say no, and I will search for another one. Or another one will search for me (Rania – interview 2).

Noor saw employment as contributing to her family's well-being in that her income would provide funds for schooling for her children. However, her primary concern was for her husband:

Working, a good job, a good school for my kids and the most important thing, a good job for my husband (Noor – interview 2).

The women's plans and dreams centred on obtaining professional employment, as it represented financial security. They reasoned that having sufficient disposable income would deliver a 'good life' for themselves and their nuclear family. Further study and professional development was also important to building on the knowledge and skills they had obtained in

Australia. Relationships, including marriage and the care of children, were also important goals, demonstrating the importance of family in the women's lives.

Implementing new ideas

The participants talked about the numerous skills they had acquired in Australia. Some of these skills were about new ways of approaching tasks; others were about influencing change. Rania was keen to show that she could undertake multiple tasks simultaneously and could perform tasks more quickly than she used to:

Because I said in my country I was slow [laughs] ... Absolutely because slow sometimes is not good. Even to do these things quickly is not good but I try to make it better. Quickly but better ... I'm very good so it's not like before. Before we took about two hours, three hours just to do one thing but now I can do two things at the same time. It's good (Rania – interview 2).

Medina talked about how she would try to manage her time better:

I organise myself in Saudi, but because we a big family, sometimes my mother-in-law and sister-in-law and mother coming in my house – I cannot manage. It's too busy ... [when I return home] I will try to be like this, organised and wake early and do something for me and meeting my friend (Medina – interview 1).

Maymuna described how she had learned to organise herself, undertake new tasks and develop new skills while in Australia. Some of these skills were formerly undertaken by her mother, but now she had taken over these roles:

Maymuna: I can do everything. They [parents] depend on me here [when they are visiting Australia] entirely...

Interviewer: What things do they depend on you to do here?

Maymuna: Accommodation and booking their holiday. Everything here.

Interviewer: Before at home what happened?

Maymuna: I can't do.

Interviewer: Who did it for you then?

Maymuna: Mum. Yeah.

Since coming to Australia, Rania explained that she had been required to become more organised, to avoid costly mistakes:

I have to get up at this time and finish at this time to catch a bus at this time. If I make a mistake with five minutes or two minutes it will be changed. I have to take a taxi and I have to spend more money (Rania – interview 1).

Sara reflected on the skills of persuasion she had acquired; being able to encourage others to re-think their ideas and to adopt new approaches to solving problems. She envisaged that she would be able to use these new skills in her workplace:

Yeah, and now because – and I study ... to become patient, don't become angry. Maybe what I ... they will help me to persuade my boss ... Yeah to be quiet (Sara – interview 1).

Be patient first with them, and have time to listen, just when they relax, not nervous ... I will be humble with them (Sara – interview 2).

Others were keen to influence how children were taught in Saudi Arabia. They intended to encourage more independent thinking among children, suggest changes to curriculum content and teach English using different styles and methods:

I'll change the way of teaching. The first thing, I'll make it fun rather than strict to the children. That's my idea actually ... In just one public school [Australia] I saw some words written in the director's office and in just one school they teach us how to think, but in other school they teach us what to think. So this is what I want to achieve back home (Noor – interview 2).

And also I want to be in science education curriculum. Yep. Why – because I find a lot of difference between here and there [Australia and Saudi Arabia] ... I want to

provide a reference [text book] for the student when they go overseas and they want to find the reference that's written from Saudi author in English [cross-reference]. It's difficult to find this reference (En – interview 2).

The pull of family

The *pull* of family on the women to return home as soon as possible after completing their studies was strong and, indeed, the critical motivation for some to return. All of the women made clear that their families, especially their parents, had been supportive of their opportunity to come to Australia, but there were high expectations for their return. Siblings expressed their wish for the women to be home with them and there was a sense that, until they were back together, the extended family would remain somehow incomplete:

They want me back. They said it is enough what you did. Even though they feel comfortable about me here, they worry about me ... We want you to return and be as a family and with each other (En – interview 2).

I think everything here is good, or better than my country. Not exactly, but maybe if my family is here with me. Dad wanted me to go back (Sara – interview 1).

There was a degree of sadness for Noor in talking about returning home as she saw a better future for herself and her nuclear family in Australia, but could not envisage staying if her extended family were not with her:

Everything is here. I feel like I belong to here ... When I talk to my mum or family, I told them if you just came here and leave everything there, you will love it here. But they belong there and I should go there (Noor – interview 2).

Separation from family was associated with heightened feelings of affection, as well as feelings of guilt for bringing children to Australia and taking them away from extended family members:

I appreciate my family more. I love my mum more. I appreciate the time I spent with my sisters and my sisters-in-law. Sometimes I think about my children and how I

bring them here without any contact with other cousins. I feel really guilty about that (Noor – interview 1).

The emerging importance of technology, as an effective tool to address the issue of separation and keeping the women connected to family and friends, while they were in Australia, was taken up by Sara and En:

We keep in touch by *Viber*, two hours last night ... I have two special friends and they are the same, no change (Sara – interview 2).

It [technology] makes us as we are there with them ... It is very important, I can see him every second, every time for free, for nothing ... I think it is a big advantage to being away ... It is not a good feeling when you feel separated from your partner but at least we are okay and our relationship it's okay and we talk every day and we see each other every day [through technology] (En – interview 3).

The participants talked about relationships with their mothers far more than their fathers, reflecting closeness and ease of sharing confidences with them. Despite fathers sometimes having had the experience of overseas education, their daughters did not see that it would be possible to talk to them about readjustment issues:

I think at that time he wasn't really happy with the experience he got there [USA] and he didn't have lots of contact with his family. So I don't know that he feels as sad as I'm feeling now ... He's also worried about my experience because he knows that the life here is very different from over there. So, I think he is worried about me, about these feelings ... I feel a little bit shy [to talk to him] (Noor – interview 2).

The *pull* of family was a strong motivator for the women to return home. Two of the women wanted to remain in Australia. It was only the necessity of fulfilling scholarship requirements and, most importantly, the *pull* of their family members that drew them back. For these women, there was a sense of obligation to make the family whole again and a strong desire to be reunited. En wanted to postpone her return by undertaking further study. She wanted her children to continue their schooling in Australia. She acknowledged that one day, she would

return home, but her desire was to delay as long as possible so that she could fulfil her personal dream. Others were excited about the prospect of being reunited with their families and, although they had concerns about their future in Saudi Arabia, particularly in regards to gaining employment, they were optimistic about returning. Medina looked forward to her return. She had no desire to remain in Australia. For her, going home came as a relief from stress and pressure. She had made few contacts in Australia and had relied on other Saudi women for friendship and support. As they had returned home, she felt lonely and wanted, above all, to reunite with her family and friends. As she noted:

But I miss my family now, I think that now I need to have family, and different other friends (Medina – interview 2).

Secondary theme: Feelings of fear and powerlessness

Feelings of fear and powerlessness formed the second of the secondary themes from the data analysis. The participants talked about the challenges they anticipated on their return and what they would miss about being in Australia. There were four main elements to this theme: fears, feeling powerless, losing personal freedom and conflict.

Fears

Although employment and career advancement was an important part of the women's plans and dreams, the reality that obtaining suitable employment would be difficult was also a fear. For Noor, it was not only employment for herself, but also for her husband. She sensed his concerns for the future and this impacted on her. They connected happiness, fulfilment and contentment to employment. It is unknown whether this was purely related to financial security or also to issues around family status and loss of face:

My husband's worried about getting a job and always thinking about getting a job and that makes me sad (Noor – interview 2).

But also I'm worried I'm not happy to be again in Saudi Arabia with no job available. If I will not get a job ... Because if I got a job I feel my life is good and stable now (Maymuna – interview 2).

There were also fears for children, particularly those of school age, who had experienced education in Australia. Two of the women had daughters who had attended school and younger sons who had attended preschool. One woman had two sons – a baby and an older boy who had attended preschool in Australia. The women saw advantages in the education system in Australia and noted that their children had become settled here. They tentatively prepared their children for returning to Saudi Arabia, although they did not disclose the details of their return:

I tried to prepare her [daughter] emotionally before going home, but she's started to recognise what does that mean, so she feels like she's sad and doesn't want to go home, because she loves the school and her teachers. She's started to get used to the school and its environment and she told me a week before that she doesn't want to go home. She just wants to go home to see her cousins and then go back to school (Noor – interview 2).

I am very happy for her [daughter] to learn a new culture. She has a friend from Australia, two or three, maybe the whole class from Australia ... She knows that one day she will go home, but she doesn't know when (En – interview 2).

The women expected that their children would experience issues around resettling into schools in Saudi Arabia:

She started to speak English very well, she started to read English and she's started to write English now but in education in Saudi I know that she will get really, really confused because in Arabic we write from right to left (Noor – interview 2).

The participants alluded to fears around maintaining their newfound strengths in their home environment and the challenges of remaining strong when life events moved in ways that forced them back to the people they were before coming to Australia. Noor, who was

particularly proud of her personal growth, was fearful about withstanding pressure from the outside environment. She stated her personal goal as being:

Just still strong and never broken ... To see support of people around rather than no-one who lets you down and down (Noor – interview 2).

In sum, the women talked about a range of issues that made them fearful. There were fears for their immediate family members (husbands and children) and how they would readjust to being home. There were particular fears for children who had attended school in Australia. Their personal fears were around losing their personal strengths that had been hard to achieve.

Feeling powerless

Despite being able to talk with pride about their achievements and the goals they set for themselves after returning home, the women also talked about obstacles and barriers that might hold them back, and how powerless they felt to overcome these challenges. They spoke about the fear of ‘slipping back’ into the people they had been before and how ‘the situation’ or the ‘environment’ might push them back:

I think I will go back to my life like before, nothing changed. Because the situation has forced me to be like before (Rania – interview 2).

Noor seemed resigned to leaving behind in Australia some of her newfound achievements. She spoke as if she would shed her Australian persona on departure:

How strong I have become now; how free I’ve become now, which is really making me sad because the freedom which I get here will stay here and not go with me (Noor – interview 2).

The obstacles or barriers the women anticipated did not come from their immediate families, but rather from their culture and traditions. As Sara explained, it was beyond her power and capacity to challenge:

I think it is going to be hard at home. I can't change the culture or the tradition ... Here it's very easy, you can do what you want, nobody can bother you. But there [Saudi Arabia] no, if they think it is not allowed or maybe called taboo (Sara – interview 1).

You're not allowed by the government to say anything bad about anything that's bad (Sara – interview 2).

After returning home, Sara noted:

It is harder than expected for everyone. If you have a good life, and you are comfortable with this life, and you come back to a difficult life ... You cannot do anything. You cannot make decisions (Sara – interview 3).

Noor had support from her immediate family but, like Sara, it was the outside environment that she feared most:

I know he [husband] will be supportive [of me], but the worry is the surrounding environment (Noor – interview 2).

Although the participants conceded that life was difficult for everyone in Saudi Arabia, women were perceived to have greater challenges or barriers than men. This was related to women's issues of independence and being able to move around freely. Having to acquire permission from male family members was related to issues of personal pride and dignity:

I think it's hard for everybody, but especially for women, it's more than men; it's difficult ... Because there you can't go anywhere or do anything without your father or your brother or your husband. You don't have any dignity (Sara – interview 1).

Feelings of powerlessness were very strong and related not to how immediate family members were likely to react to the women's newfound strengths, but rather to the culture

and tradition. Challenging the outside environment was perceived to present such difficulties that 'slipping back' was regarded as an easier, albeit disappointing option.

Losing personal freedom

The 'free life' in Australia was constantly referred to by all the participants. Freedom, largely in terms of independence, was what they said they would miss most back home. The women reported 18 different activities (journal entry) they undertook independently in Australia. Noor describes some of these:

I can do more things by myself. I can go shopping by myself. I can do lots of things without my husband. I can go meeting friends or go to the park with my kids without my husband. So yeah, this is the sort of feeling I have about freedom (Noor – interview 1).

There were two main outcomes from undertaking these activities alone – heightened feelings of confidence and independence. When the women spoke about 'an easy life' in Australia, they were referring to being free to move around unaccompanied, undertake activities without having to seek permission from male relatives and being able to walk or take public transport. It is noted that the women's husbands were agreeable and comfortable with their wives becoming independent and going out unaccompanied in Australia. Many of the women talked about the difficulties they experienced in Saudi Arabia in organising drivers and cars to take them to local shopping centres or to appointments:

Even if we want to go to a close place, just prepare a car and a driver to go. Sometimes because of this, we change our minds and stay home ... Actually my father brings two drivers in my home with cars. But even with this, we don't go ... There is no public transport. Should me ask my brother to pick me with him. This is what's hard ... I will hire maybe a driver. (Sara – interview 2).

Medina enjoyed being able to take public transport or to go walking alone:

I think here the life is easier. Because we can go by bus. We can go by taxi. We can go walking. We can go to the university. But in my home we cannot go by walking (Medina – interview 1).

But she also had this to say:

I think you can take freedom in Saudi. I asked my husband I would like to go shopping, he respond to me and go shopping, not ever by myself but with my husband. Maybe this I miss I can go with my friends like here, I talk my friends and go out shopping, just I maybe miss this point (Medina – interview 2).

Sara noted transport as a key issue:

I will hire maybe a driver. I have learned to hire a man maybe from Indonesia. I asked my housekeeper to find a good man and she told me her uncle is a chauffeur. I just need to go back and do some papers to bring him here ... I will buy [a car] (Sara – interview 2).

Freedom and fear of losing newfound freedom was the most talked about concern for all the participants. Having experienced personal freedom in Australia and recognising how changed they felt about themselves as a result of moving around independently; undertaking activities alone; and making decisions for themselves, the participants were worried about how they would readjust. As Noor explains:

Now I feel more confidence about myself here, being more independent and back home I know that I will go back again (Noor – interview 1).

Unmarried women described how they would be again required to seek permission from their parents. After living independently in Australia, they were concerned about how they would cope in meeting the expectations of family and the limitations placed on their independence:

I think I've become, as you said, an independent woman. I can go anywhere, anytime. But there, when you live at home, you should ask permission from your parents, even when you are older (Sara – interview 1).

Another concern which is I will lose the free life here ... Here in Australia I feel freedom, I can go and do everything by myself and I don't need to ask from my brother or mum as in Saudi (Maymuna – interview 2).

Personal freedom had changed the women's attitudes:

I love my country so much, but if you can't feel free in your country, that's not life. A good life when you become comfortable with the place. It feels – just suffering all the time and you just – like your hands are not free (Sara – interview 1).

We don't have fun. Just with the shops, go shopping ... This is what we have. There is no choice; just shopping ... There are no clubs. There is no place we can go to enjoy anything ... a coffee, yeah ... We can go there just to have a dessert (Sara – interview 2).

Being able to do what they wanted, when they wanted, unaccompanied, was the most valued part of the women's international sojourn. However, freedom was a very personal experience, as noted by En:

Maybe you have women they don't have, they have a freedom but she doesn't find this one a very positive thing. It depends about the person who is and what you want and what's the problem and the difficulties that they have. Maybe you will see my opinion as different from my sister; maybe you will see my opinion different from my husband or my closer friends; but this is from my perspective and what I think (En – interview 1).

Conflict

Only one participant anticipated conflict with her family on returning home. As an unmarried woman, expected to live with her parents, she envisaged that changes in her personality and behaviour would become obvious on a day-to-day basis. Living under the same roof as her parents, after living alone in Australia, was regarded as challenging to this women's emerging sense of maturity. Respect and affection for her family made this situation very

difficult. She was torn between wanting to demonstrate the changed person she had become and respecting her family's values:

I think that's difficult for them because with each other we will struggle with my father, especially, he'll want me to become like before, and me, I want change. Sometimes he accepts some ideas, but other ideas, no way for him (Sara – interview 1).

Primary theme 2: Learning to live at home again

The second primary theme *learning to live at home again* traced the participants' experiences after their return home. This theme comprises two parts. The first chronicles the events of the first few months after return and describes the women's homecoming experiences, their emotional response to being home, how their expectations were met and the experiences of their children. The second is a more reflective account, titled *making sense of the sojourn experience*, in which the women discuss how they attempted to put the international experience into practice, rebuild relationships with family, friends and colleagues, the importance of religion, their lasting memories of Australia, advice to prospective sojourners and finally how they see the future. One participant chose not to participate in this study after her return home.

The first few months after return: The homecoming experience

Rania described the first week after returning home in this way:

I sat in my brother'[s] flat for 10 days, so my family just say welcome ... this is the important part ... Maybe because I'm still happy that I'm between them after all (Rania – email communication).

Unforeseen circumstances (misfortune and illness) prevented Noor from experiencing the joyous homecoming she had hoped for and anticipated:

It was really hard to put my plans into place. I wanted to enrol my daughter in a good school, but I could not do this because my money was gone. I could not buy the furniture I wanted for the house. I could not celebrate with my family (Noor – interview 3).

Maymuna described her first few weeks at home:

I'm always delighted and happy to meet my sister, my family ... But as far I spent a month, I was very depressive and I couldn't adapt to the sort of environment (Maymuna – interview 3).

En's return to her family was initially very positive, but soon issues confronted her:

I was so busy because I just arrived for three days in Jeddah in my house and then I went to Riyadh. We have a wedding there. I was so busy and happy and I stayed there for 14 days and I met two of my friends there ... Then I back to my house ... I found difficulty to enrol my daughter [in school] ... she couldn't catch the term over there ... My son, he is okay (En – interview 3).

Being part of a large family again and accepting responsibilities for family members was difficult at times:

My brother bring his daughter for us to take care of her. She is annoying everyone at home. You know after two years in Australia I hate the loud voices (Rania – email communication).

Sara's experience of the first two weeks at home involved many visits from family members and friends. She enjoyed these visits, but sometimes sought a quiet place. She reflected that she was used to being alone in Australia and enjoyed being alone (Sara – telephone conversation).

Family members were not always supportive or interested in the sojourn experience:

My sister told me that I should accept being home again and to look to the future. I still feel very sad and unsettled here ... My relationship with my husband is strong.

My relationship with my family is also strong, but it is hard to go back to the person I was before and they expect. I am different now. I have learned new things. I have done many things (Noor – interview 3).

The women were delighted to reunite with family members on their homecoming, but the feelings of euphoria were short-lived, with many describing the period immediately after their return as sad, depressing and unsettling. The parties and celebrations that the women anticipated before departing from Australia were not often spoken about. Some homecoming parties were delayed because the women were too busy, or unsure of their future, while others did not take place because of changed circumstances within their families.

The emotional response to being home

During the first few months after their return, some of the women communicated their thoughts and experiences of being home via email. For Noor, coming home was a sad and lonely experience:

Things are not really good here and I'm not feeling okay. I feel like something huge is missing from me which made me feel down all the time. Lots of changes happened here which made me feeling lost ... It is nearly one month since we returned home and no sign of change. We still searching for jobs, new apartment and good school for the kids ... I feel lost and weak, I don't know if it will get better or it will get worse. I can't settle down here, I wanna return to Australia (Noor – email communication).

After some initial excitement at reuniting with her extended family, Maymuna spoke about a three-month period that she described as 'depressive':

I was so depression, and because I was very familiar for two years with the [Australian] environment ... Maybe I miss all the activities that I did in Australia. Maybe I loved it and I didn't love it here. Here, I miss, I miss the freedom that I practised there (Maymuna – interview 3).

En remained optimistic that she would be able to return to Australia and continue her studies, although this communication showed also a level of uncertainty about her future:

[Husband] he still work about my scholarship and until now, I don't know what will happen for me, but I still optimistic (En – email communication).

The oscillation between happiness and sadness continued for Rania and Sara:

My feeling is good, however, I miss AU...weather, sea, trees, my friends, to study, I think it is everything I miss (Rania – email communication).

Sara reported that she was happy to see her family again, but ‘missed everything’ about Australia (telephone conversation). After four months, she still wanted to come back to Australia, as she felt unsettled at home. She found her work situation disappointing, as there was little interest in the new ideas she brought home with her. She expressed a desire to return to Australia for further study, but her attempts to do so had been unsuccessful (Sara – telephone conversations). After six months, she seemed more resigned to being at home again:

I love Australia, but I cannot live there for five years [to undertake PhD] ... I need to be with my family (Sara – interview 3).

Expectations

Prior to their departure from Australia, the women anticipated challenges. However, after their return, their distress was palpable, as they encountered unanticipated challenges and unexpected events:

I did not expect that it would be so hard for me and my family. I did not expect my daughter to be sick. I did not expect that my husband to live away from us. I did not expect to lose the money I save in Australia (Noor – interview 3).

Sara noted that the cost of living had increased significantly while she was in Australia and this was placing pressure on Saudi people. She expressed frustration in everyday life in Saudi Arabia; high levels of unemployment; how hard it was to make things happen; how slowly progress occurred. Although she was cognisant that this was likely to be the situation before her return, facing challenges on a daily basis, gave rise to feelings of disappointment and dissatisfaction (Sara – telephone conversations). She said: ‘But how can we change when we don’t have any job’ (Sara – interview 3)?

The experience for children

Three of the participants were mothers, two with school-age children. They used similar strategies to prepare their children to return home and recognised that the transition for their children might present challenges. However, the magnitude of these challenges was not anticipated:

Everything for me is hard. I was looking for [daughter] schools and I was found problems with her because we came in the middle of the school year in Saudi Arabia, the education system here is not as Australia, so unfortunately she couldn’t study right now she has to wait until August to start year 5 for her. So I decided to give her a private Arabic extensive classes to get her ready for next year (En – email communication).

[Daughter] didn’t really accept that we will never return to Australia. She is no longer that active and beautiful girl who made me always smile. [Daughter] here is totally different from [daughter] in Australia. You will not believe that I did not see her smiling in more than one month and I didn’t hear her voice since last week. She is always sad, crying, and sleepy. She always dreams about her previous school and teachers. She lost her appetite and because of that she loose [lost] lots of weight. I took her to the doctor and he told me that she has some symptoms of children depression because of the cultural differences between here and there. She refuse to go to school because she doesn’t have any friends. She also told me that her teacher

and classmates are always laugh when she talk because she speaks funny Arabic as they told her: it's too rude (Noor – email communication).

There was a cumulative impact of the challenges facing this woman, who not only dealt with her daughter's distress and illness, but also the absence of her husband and seeming lack of support from her extended family:

I feel so guilty to make [daughter] experience this sadness in this young age and what make it harder is I'm facing it alone because my husband is working now in Riyadh and I just see him on the weekends. Also my family and friends blame me for what happen to [daughter] and that doesn't help at all (Noor – email communication).

Later, during the third interview, this woman reflected on the preparation she gave her daughter before leaving Australia. She commented that, in retrospect, she needed to prepare her for impending loss, as well as the joy of reunion:

I spend a lot of time to prepare my daughter for going home. I told her about her cousins, her grandma, and her family in Saudi Arabia. I prepare her for coming to Saudi Arabia, but I did not prepare her to leave Australia. She did not understand that we will not come back. She just understand that she will see her family again (Noor – interview 3).

In contrast, younger children, who did not enter school in Australia, coped better than their older siblings:

My son he is little and he does not go to school yet, so he is happy to be home and to see his cousins (Noor – interview 3).

My son he is okay he start study in KG3 in international school but he also study Arabic and religion subject, but he also have problem because the students in his age should write and read by themselves but as you know he was in pre-school in [city], and he just have fun and they didn't teach the kids to read and write at this stage. So I worked very hard with him because I want him to be the same ability as other student in his class (En – email communication).

Making sense of the sojourn experience

Putting the international experience into practice

Putting what they had learned into practice was challenging for the women. Six months after their return, two of the women had still to find paid full-time employment. One of these women, who was young and single, remained within the family home and spent her time helping her mother and caring for extended family members. Another volunteered for three months, but was yet to find paid employment:

But now – I'm free now, so I have too much time to myself ... My father gives me money so it's okay. But maybe one day I need more than the money that he gives me ... But I want not to be free all the time, to have things to do, like to study or something like ... this is the first time to stay like this without studying at school or university and not to work, but I have to accept that now ... Most of the time I stay inside my home ... My connections with people is less than before ... Each day I help anyone who needs help in my home (Rania – interview 3).

I try to get a job, but it is hard. I have to look after my family. I was upset and I worry about my daughter ... I work as a volunteer in a school for three months, but I will not do this in 2012. They tell me what to teach and how to teach. I say to them I will do these things, but I close the door and I teach them the way I learned in Australia. I am happy and the children are happy too (Noor – interview 3).

New ideas were often rejected by prospective employers and overseas experiences were sometimes ridiculed in the workplace:

But every time I want to find a job, I feel that okay, that they will offer me a job. But I get disappointed because the lady says you don't have experience so you have to wait, and maybe they don't choose me. So less confident. The situation in Saudi, you have to wait. You know it's a big country and there you have to wait ... less confident (Rania – interview 3).

The teachers laugh when I talk about Australia and new ideas. They call me the ‘Australian’. This makes me sad, but I do not give up. I talk to them about my ideas and way to do things (Noor – interview 3).

In a telephone conversation Sara stated that her boss did not want to talk to her because he thought she knew too much. He did not want to hear about her new ideas. After three months, Maymuna found employment. This was critical in assisting her to feel happier and more settled. It also provided opportunities for her to engage with expatriates, a situation which reminded her of being in Australia:

When I start this job, the environment for this job is – remind me about Australia, because I meet every day a lot of international people ... I’m happy. It seems like that in Australia, because I meet with international people and students ... Even the Chinese and New Zealand, Italian and German. I like that, because, like, I feel good now, yes ... I can’t imagine I will leave this job (Maymuna – interview 3).

Although the position did not fully utilise the qualifications Maymuna acquired in Australia, she saw it a starting point that would provide valuable experience in an environment reminiscent of her international sojourn:

I’m going to keep going with it – with the chance to get experience, yes, because my manager is very helpful. Maybe I find it useful for my skills, maybe later when I fill another position ... I plan ... maybe to belong to another company as, like, ARAMCO (Maymuna – interview 3).

En hoped that her husband would be able to negotiate her return to Australia to continue her studies. After six months, she finally was granted permission to return to Australia with her children. Her excitement at this news was palpable:

I got it. Finally I got the approval [to come] back again. I will [be] coming soon (En – email communication).

In telephone conversations with Sara, I learnt that she had returned to her former employment after returning home. She noted some policy and procedural changes in the workplace, which she hoped would improve working conditions. At first she was optimistic about her professional future, but later reported that she was engaged in ongoing conflict with her boss, who refused to talk to her. She found that colleagues were unreceptive to hearing some of the new ideas she had acquired in Australia.

Rebuilding relationships with family, friends and colleagues

Family was an extremely important element of the women's homecoming, but, despite the joy of family reunion, emotionally the women still oscillated between the pull of family and their lives in Australia. This suggested that readjustment would be a long-term process. Rania described her feelings in this way:

Happy. But I still remember my friends in Australia. I remember Australia. I miss Australia, but I am happy because finally I am home with all my family, and with my friends and remember everything they do for me ... I lived in Australia alone, and here I can't do the things by myself ... So you are kind of different than before ... We wear black here in Saudi Arabia. It's okay because we wear *abaya* ... I wear like a hat ... I don't wear before (Rania – interview 3).

Noor's experience was disappointing. Her family and friends showed little interest in her overseas experience and she felt humiliated in the workplace:

My friends and my family do not want to hear about Australia and that makes me sad. It is a big thing I have done. They want me to be the same like before...I feel sad and disappointed. This has been a big change for me and I need my family to understand that. I want them to know about Australia ... Sometimes they [workplace colleagues] try my ideas. Sometimes they don't. Sometimes they try them and then they say they do not work (Noor – interview 3).

Noor's belief in what she had learned in Australia and her love of teaching helped her to overcome some of the challenges she faced with her colleagues:

I'm now volunteering in something like community service. I'm working now in a charity kindergarten which try to provide quality teaching for the poor and orphans children who can't provide money for good schools. And you know what, I LOVE IT. I feel so special when I am surrounding by these lovely kids. Although I am working for free, but I feel lucky teaching English for them. And what I like more is that they love me and that most of them call me mum instead of teacher, isn't that cute? (Noor – email communication).

Maymuna's employment involved working in a mixed-gender environment. Although this was not totally comfortable for her, it was possible because of her international experience:

It's very comfortable. But with this job, if I get it before I go to Australia, for sure they [family] don't agree ... But I feel a little bit not comfortable deal every day with the man (Maymuna – interview 3).

En was very happy to be granted permission to return to Australia. Her family were supportive and proud of her achievements:

They [family] are very proud of me and my dad is very proud of us. [My husband] he is my first supporter. He did everything for me. What happened to me now is because of him (En – interview 3).

For Sara, relationships with professional colleagues were strained, as she attempted to bring about change in the workplace. Her supervisor often refused to talk to her and, although she remained resolute, she was also unhappy and disappointed. She interpreted her colleagues' reaction as emanating from feelings of jealousy, and threat:

My boss ... he gives me a new position [not promotion] because he needs me to do some of his work ... I also have colleagues who doesn't like me. They ask me when will you go to study for PhD (Sara – interview 3)?

Support of religion

Despite many challenges, the women held firmly to their faith and took enormous comfort in their belief that God (Allah) had a plan for their lives. They believed that, if they remained patient and did ‘the right things’, then God would deliver the best possible outcomes for them. The women described the importance of their religion in these ways:

Everything is good from God. Everything bad from maybe I made a mistake ... He will organise things but I have to be aware to choose the right one. He will help me; absolutely he will help me (Rania – interview 2).

I believe God will help me to be where I should be. I must trust him. The best will happen in my life if I trust him ... I know that all God plan for us is the best. So I’m hoping this will be the beginning of good things that Allah is planning for us (Noor – recent email communication).

I have to accept what God want for me even if it good thing or not good thing. I have to accept that and believe that and say thanks for that and believe that is good for me (En – interview 3).

The women’s faith brought comfort and direction to their lives:

When I read the Holy Qur’an it just reminds me to be satisfied and become patient about what happens around me ... the Qur’an also says that you should be patient because not everything happens forever, it will change (Sara – interview 1).

It’s all under submission. Submitting our life to Allah (En – interview 3).

Lasting memories

After six months at home, the women still held lasting, positive memories of Australia:

The flowers ... I will never forget the ocean. I will never find the ocean like this ... I miss Australia such as the walk between my apartment to the bus station ... I really miss the weather. Yeah, it’s different. It’s very different ... shopping, markets or something like that ... to go out ... or something like this. In Australia, it’s different.

But here it's a bit boring ... not have cinema which is the thing I most miss, really, really ... (Rania – interview 3).

Maymuna explained her feelings in this way:

Interviewer: What is your lasting memory of Australia?

Maymuna: Everything.

Interviewer: Everything?

Maymuna: Yes, everything (Maymuna – interview 3).

Sara remembered Australia as, 'the easy life'. When asked to explain what the easy life meant for her, she replied:

Here I have no rights. I cannot complain ... I have no freedom [personal freedom] (Sara – interview 3).

Advice for others

The women provided very disparate responses to the types of measures they believed would assist others to prepare for returning home. Because Saudi Arabia is such a vast country geographically, they did not envisage that alumni connections would be an effective support mechanism. They commented that they would contact others who lived in proximity to their home cities. Some believed that preparation for returning was a personal matter, but technology could be useful for delivering information and facilitating connections with host organisations after departure. They did not endorse workshops or group meetings as useful activities to aid preparation for returning home:

You must prepare yourself for coming home. The best thing is technology. Email and Facebook is good. Emails from the University are important to me. I like to read what is happening there. I like to see the news. It makes me feel I am still there, I can imagine those things (Noor – interview 3).

If I need to know about Newcastle, I can go to the web site and sometimes I go. I do sometimes I need to brush up my English and remember things (Rania – interview 3).

Because some of the women had experienced difficulty in finding employment after returning home, they cited recommendations (references) from host organisations as useful and practical employment experiences overseas, as beneficial. In a telephone conversation with Sara, she suggested that other international students might be able to help by sharing their knowledge and experiences, but she was unsure how this might be arranged.

View of the future

Employment remained a key factor for most of the women in terms of delivering financial stability and personal satisfaction. Rania placed family relationships and employment above finding a suitable marriage partner and Noor regarded employment as an anchor to secure her husband and children's future:

Job is more important than to get a husband ... because I want to live as I want, not as he wants. So I get a job first. This is my life and he can come ... I don't want ... I need a husband because I can't live without a husband because I can't live without money ... Maybe as I get older and older so I need someone to share my life, but not easy to find. The main thing is my family (Rania – interview 3).

I want to get a good job and my husband too. I want my children to be happy. I hope I can come back to Australia to study or live, and if not these things, I want to visit (Noor – interview 3).

Having obtained employment since her return to Saudi Arabia, Maymuna was more optimistic about her future. She had plans to move forward professionally and to establish her own business:

Maybe I belong in that stream [type of employment] or to belong to another company as, like, ARAMCO ... as I am busy in this job, I didn't make my business yet, but I'm still planning it (Maymuna – interview 3).

En was optimistic about her plan to complete her PhD and then return to Saudi Arabia to be reunited with her family. She was living her dream and, although she anticipated challenges with her studies and managing her children's education, she believed this was the right path for her:

Exciting, happy and worried, nervous, think about confirmation and think to my study. It's mixed emotion ... I have to improve my language ... I forget my language when I was there (En – interview 3).

Sara was also optimistic about her future, although she felt some frustrations about life in Saudi Arabia:

I will travel around the world to any country [God willing] for a holiday ... If a good man finds me, I will accept, but if he does not find me, that is okay too ... I have my family (Sara – interview 3).

Conclusion

This chapter reported the findings of this study, through the themes that emerged during data analysis. It focused on the participants' emotional responses to returning home and chronicled important aspects of the readjustment process. In the following chapter, this study's findings are discussed and compared to the literature presented in Chapters 2 and 3.

Chapter 8

Discussion of findings

Previous chapters explored the impact of expatriate experiences on repatriate outcomes for a small group of postgraduate Saudi Arabian women. A substantial component of these chapters was dedicated to exploring the women's individual stories and experiences of living and studying in Australia and to capturing their emotional responses to returning home. After returning to Saudi Arabia, the women's personal journeys of readjustment were recounted by examining the steps they took in learning to live at home again and documenting their reflections on the sojourner experience. This chapter aims to build on the findings from Chapters 6 and 7 and to relate the experiences of the study's participants to the relevant literature presented in Chapters 2 and 3. Particular attention is given to expectations theory and Sussman's (2000) Cultural Identity Model, both of which contribute to the cognitive stream of repatriation theories. Individual and situational variables that were shown to influence repatriation outcomes are also discussed within the context of the findings of this study.

Many common themes were identified throughout this study, even with the emphasis placed on individual stories and experiences. There were also exceptions to common themes and these are acknowledged throughout this discussion. It has been noted that one of the women did not respond to invitations to discuss her journey post-departure. Indeed, despite the availability of modern communication technologies and the participants' expertise in using technology, maintaining contact with some of the participants following their departure from Australia was extremely difficult. Time differences, the way the women used technology at home and their busy lives and responsibilities combined to inhibit easy

communication. The importance Arabs place on prioritising matters at hand over prearranged appointments (Meleis, 1982) might also explain some of the difficulties encountered when attempting to schedule appointments for conversations on *Skype*.

Major findings

Personal growth and identity change

Several authors asserted that the quality of sojourner-host relationships was one determinant in how positively or negatively repatriates described their sojourn experiences (Church, 1982; Hull, 1978; Klineberg & Hull, 1979; Perucci & Hu, 1995; Westwood & Barker, 1990). The participants of this study formed few meaningful relationships with members of the host community and this is a familiar but disappointing aspect of Australian sojourns for many international students (Briguglio, 1998; Gendera et al., 2012; Koehne, 2005; Marginson et al., 2010; Todd & Nesdale, 1997; Volet & Ang, 1998). However, for the participants of this study, being able to cite only one or two meaningful relationships with members of the host community did not taint the way they viewed their sojourn, as they did not rely on sojourner-host relationships to become engaged with host-country behaviours, activities and ideas.

Sussman (2011) referred to Hong Kong citizens, who adopted ideas and behaviours of the host country, while simultaneously clinging to aspects of home. This description fits aptly with the way the participants of this study chose to live in Australia. Being able to blend new ways of thinking and behaving into everyday life created strong attachments to the host country, explained by one woman as ‘belonging’. This finding suggests that, for the participants of this study, attachment to the host society was strong, not through relationship building with members of the host culture, or social integration per se, but rather through the opportunities the host society proffered for new ideas and behaviours to emerge. This gave

rise to notions of personal growth and identity change, which were positive outcomes of the sojourn experience.

Church (1982) asserted that personal growth demonstrated in increased self-confidence and self-reliance were primary outcomes of international sojourns, rather than changes in cultural values relating to family, interpersonal relations and religious beliefs. (Church also included political beliefs and sexual norms as cultural values, neither of which was investigated during this study.) This assertion was validated through the findings of this study, as awareness of personal change was one of the most important outcomes to emerge, while values relating to family, interpersonal relationships with friends and engagement with religion were shown to remain largely unchanged, or strengthened. The findings from Uehara's (1986) study that highlighted changes in repatriates' values in terms of opinions about male and female relationships, the place of the individual within society and their perceptions of global issues were also validated through the findings of this study. All the participants reported that their perceptions about global issues changed while overseas, whether through learning about other cultures, sharing aspects of their religion, or engaging with attitudes and behaviours that were different to those they had grown up with in Saudi Arabia. Dandy and Pe-Pua (2010) underscored that development of a global perspective was a phenomenon linked to education. One participant found employment in a mixed-gender workplace on her return to Saudi Arabia and, although she conceded that working with men was not always comfortable, it was possible as a result of her international sojourn.

The comfort, frustrations and challenges of being home

In Christofi and Thompson's (2007) study of returned sojourners, participants described a simultaneously strong commitment to their home country, while expressing frustration with aspects of life there. This was also the experience of the women in this study, who talked openly about their love for their country and the simultaneous frustration of living there,

citing restrictions on their personal freedom and the difficulties of getting things done quickly as their primary concerns. They also spoke negatively about the environment, the climate, food and entertainment options. However, unlike the participants in Christofi and Thompson's (2007) study, the participants in this study did not hold idealised views of life in Saudi Arabia, while overseas, but rather were cognisant of the many realities about everyday life, possibly due to the ease of regular communication (email, phone, *Skype*, and *Viber*) with friends and family.

Christofi and Thompson's (2007) finding in which participants described feelings of comfort and discomfort in home and host countries is an interesting one, for the women in this study were drawn, above all else, to the comfort and support of their families in Saudi Arabia. Though aspects of life in Australia were very appealing, the pull of their family in Saudi Arabia was ultimately greater. Even for the women who wanted to stay in Australia and articulated feelings of belonging here, their wish was for their families to join them and not to live separately from them. Large networks of extended family members with daily gatherings to demonstrate support and comfort are important aspects of family life in Saudi Arabia (Meleis, 1982). They show the valued role of kinship in fulfilling functions that, in Western societies, are divided between business and professional contacts, clubs, neighbours, friends and family members (Altorki, 1977; Holthausen, 2011). For the participants of this study, the desire to reunite and be with their families was greater than any opportunities that they might have perceived for 'an easy life' in Australia.

The experiences of children

Participants with children began to prepare them for returning home several months prior to their departure. They anticipated that their children who attended school in Australia were likely to experience the greatest repatriation shock, largely because they were older, had more established friendships and had lived and been educated in Australia for a significant part of

their lives. The women prepared their children by talking to them frequently about their extended families in Saudi Arabia and emphasising the positive aspects of going home. They did not talk to the children about the losses they were also likely to feel around separation from friends and teachers, different school environments and their 'free life' in Australia. This was later noted by one woman as a mistake. While the women expected their school-aged children to face some challenges and difficulties after returning home, the reality of some of the children's experiences was far more severe than anticipated. As the women expected, younger children who had not commenced school in Australia experienced fewer readjustment challenges than their older siblings, but they were still vulnerable, as they were judged as not having achieved the same standards of literacy and numeracy as their Saudi peers of similar age. This required some parents to engage private tutors in an attempt to avert potential issues of ridicule and humiliation.

One child experienced severe readjustment challenges. She faced derision and embarrassment from teachers and classmates because she was seen to have lost the capacity to speak Arabic appropriately and, in their eyes, did not possess the skills and competencies that others of a similar age were able to demonstrate. As a consequence, she became so withdrawn, sad and disengaged from her family that her mother sought medical assistance and, as a result, she was diagnosed with depression.

The literature paralleled closely some of the experiences of the children in this study. In their study of Japanese repatriates, Enloe and Lewin (1987) reported that children were made to feel as if they had lost some of their cultural purity through the international experience and were berated for their deficient language skills. Sussman (2011) talked about concerns of Hong Kong parents around the potential for bullying and the possibility of depression developing in their children, because they lacked knowledge of popular culture, games and sports. A wide range of schooling options available to assist parents to choose the

best possible schools for their children in Hong Kong was helpful to the readjustment process for the families in Sussman's (2011) study. Some schools offering a flexible curriculum that comprised both Mandarin and English and allowed children time to reconnect with the Chinese language and familiarise themselves with local culture. Such flexibility was less available to families returning to Saudi Arabia, who found the cost for private schools high, the system inflexible and seemingly ill-prepared for returning students. This was evidenced by the experiences of one child who was not permitted to enter school until the beginning of the next school year (approximately eight months after returning home). To address this issue, her parents were obliged to hire a private tutor.

Gaw (2000), in a study of US American college students, pointed to some of the feelings and behaviours exhibited by much younger children in this study. He identified alienation, depression, isolation, loneliness, general anxiety, speech anxiety and friendship difficulties, as emotional responses to repatriation.

As the women in this study took particular responsibility for the welfare and education of their children and played a key role in decision-making about their children's education, they expressed feelings of acute sadness and guilt in observing the difficulties their children experienced on their return to Saudi Arabia. One woman, whose child experienced considerable difficulties on returning to school, felt guilty about her child's suffering and blamed herself for putting her own interests in coming to Australia ahead of her family. This situation caused her sadness not only because she witnessed her child's distress, but also for the responsibility she carried as a Saudi wife and mother for conserving the family unit and raising her children according to sociocultural norms (Baki, 2004; Le Renard, 2008; Moghadam, 2004; Pharaon, 2004). The findings of this study concur with Szkudlarek (2008) that children might experience greater challenges in re-entry than their parents, and that this is a topic for further research.

Expectations theory

One of the key points of differentiation between the findings of this study and some of the repatriation literature concerns sojourner awareness of personal growth and identity change prior to departure from host countries and how this might affect their expectations. The participants of this study were highly aware of how they had changed during their sojourns and, in fact, cited personal growth and identity change as some of their proudest achievements. They talked at length about developing confidence and independence, but also identified how these changes might impede the readjustment process. Martin (1984) and Storti (1990) asserted that awareness of personal changes becomes salient on re-entry, but for the participants of this study, awareness was raised well before their departures from Australia. Sussman (2011) reported a similar finding for Japanese repatriates, who were highly aware of personal growth and identity change before they returned to Japan. This suggested that it was the repatriates' awareness of the cultural homogeneity of Japanese society and its low tolerance for cultural flexibility that gave these repatriates greater insight to personal change. Given the similarities between Japanese and Saudi society in terms of cultural homogeneity and low tolerance for cultural flexibility (Jamjoon, 2010; Montagu, 2010), it is possible that this explanation about personal awareness might also apply to the participants of this study. Church (1982) contended that increased self-awareness would be greatest for sojourners from very different cultures, because they were likely to experience severe enough adjustment challenges to induce self-questioning and culture analysis that would ultimately lead to raised self-awareness. This assertion might also be applicable to the participants of this study.

Self-awareness was tied to expectations for this study's participants and resulted in all of them anticipating some level of difficulty in repatriation and an awareness of at least some adjustments they would be required to make on returning home. They expected to have

difficulty in obtaining employment and anticipated that their newfound confidence and independence would be challenged by their home culture and traditions. One woman anticipated conflict with family members, whom she identified as holding more conservative views, while the threat of loss to personal freedom was another issue in the forefront of the participants' thinking. Although the reality of their post-departure experiences did not always match their expectations, their eyes were open to the possibility of some of these challenges. Hammer et al. (1998) and Sussman (2002) found no direct relationship between met expectations and more positive readjustment experiences, while Black (1992) and Rogers and Ward (1993) argued that, when difficulties were anticipated and expectations met, fewer readjustment issues emerged. The findings of this study show that awareness of aspects of daily life within their home country and consciousness of changes within themselves gave rise to more realistic expectations about returning home, but did not alleviate or diminish repatriation challenges.

The readjustment process

Adler (1981) and Storti (2001) argued that the readjustment process was characterised by stages that largely reflected phases of euphoria, followed by a period of negative feelings that found equilibrium around six months after re-entry. For the participants of this study, the euphoric (honeymoon) period was very short-lived (corresponding to the literature) and somewhat overtaken by deep, negative feelings, described by one informant as 'depression'. (Although the concept of depression is not conceptually or experientially equivalent across cultures, this participant chose to describe feelings of extreme sadness and despondency in this way.) After six months, the participants of this study still yearned for Australia, talked about visiting and could be described as unsettled. The oscillation between high and low feelings continued at this time, although there was also a growing sense of acceptance by some about living in Saudi Arabia.

Minoura (1988) and Yoshida et al. (2002), in studies of Japanese repatriates, identified that readjustment was likely to take between one and three years. It was characterised by surface level readjustment within the first year, followed by deeper readjustment over the following two years. These findings seem to be more in line with this study's findings, given that after six months the participants were still describing their situations as 'unsettled'. Although the time limit on this study precluded the collection of data to validate this assertion, there were strong indications that, for the participants, the readjustment process was still unfolding and was likely to go on for many months.

Minoura (1988) and Yoshida et al. (2002) also argued that the first year after re-entry consisted of readjustment to physical and biological environments, followed by a further two years during which repatriates realised and dealt with deeper cultural differences, such as values and ways of thinking, and made social readjustments in terms of self-concept. These assertions fit with the findings of this study that showed, after six months, the participants had taken steps to readjust to the climate, physical environment, food and daily activities of their home country, but still struggled with the more emotional aspects of returning home. Even though the participants of this study expected challenges on repatriation and each participant had her own story of readjustment, there was consensus that the process was complex, because it required multiple adjustments at personal and professional levels, as identified by Martin (1984).

Readjustment challenges

The difficulty of moving between 'loose and tight' societies (Triandis, 1989) encapsulated some of the challenges of this study's participants as they sought to integrate new ideas and behaviours developed in Australia into their more conservative home country, where mutual dependence is valued above self-reliance (Adelman & Lustig, 1981) and conformity,

discretion and limitations on self-expression are enforced by the state (Okruhlik, 2003). To overcome these challenges, some of the study's participants chose to follow the path described by Corey (1979) of adopting a 'conservative mask' (p. 48) whereby they followed overtly the directions of others (such as employers) while covertly implementing the ideas and practices they had learned overseas. Only one woman chose to challenge the directives of her supervisor in the workplace. She found this was difficult to do, but her determination to push forward with new ideas was greater than any rebuffs she encountered from those with whom she worked, at least in the short-term.

All of the participants emphasised that they intended to return to Australia in the future, whether to undertake further studies or to visit friends and familiar places. Corey (1979) reported that Saudi graduates who had returned home also chose to make frequent overseas trips as a strategy to overcome readjustment challenges.

Key factors that supported readjustment

The findings of this study highlighted three key factors that supported the readjustment process: the role of technology, the support of religion and finding employment. Technology was important for the role it played in developing more realistic expectations; religion gave comfort and support to the participants when they faced challenges during readjustment; and employment provided an anchor and assisted in helping the participants feel greater attachment to their home country.

The role of technology

The role of technology that facilitated regular, often daily communication between the participants and their family and friends was one possible explanation for the women's insights into ongoing daily life in Saudi Arabia during their sojourns. Cox (2004) raised the potential of technology for mitigating communication distance between sojourners and home-

country based family and friends, and this study concurs with this assertion. The use of technology as a tool to increase communication while sojourning might also be regarded as a logical extension of the high levels of internet usage among women in Saudi Arabia (Teitelbaum, 2002), for the purposes of gathering and exchanging information.

The findings of this study suggested that technology and regular home visits, as recommended by Black (1992) and Gregersen and Stroh (1997), were important mechanisms for sustaining communication and maintaining networks between the participants, their families and friends during the international sojourn. This study found that technology and relative ease of international travel kept the participants alert to changes within their home country and gave rise to more realistic expectations on re-entry. Although realistic expectations did not alleviate all the challenges associated with returning home, the women's eyes were opened to many of the potential challenges they were likely to encounter. The potential for technology to encourage realistic expectations in returning sojourners and, by inference, its capacity to influence the repatriation process positively is an emerging topic for further research.

The support of religion

Martin and Harrell (2004) posited that relationship difficulties between returning sojourners and their families involving religion were likely to be caused by repatriates having experienced more freedom overseas, as well as being exposed to different values and less conservative behaviours in host countries. Brabant et al. (1990) concluded that near-Eastern and Muslim repatriates experienced greater problems with families on their return.

The findings of this study indicate a very different role for religion in the participants' repatriation experiences. Religion provided great comfort to repatriates and did not incite conflict among family members. The participants demonstrated pride in, and strong

attachment to, their religion, as identified by Schvaneveldt et al. (2005), and looked to their religion for guidance and hope. Their belief that all good comes from God and that God would deliver them the best life course sustained them when they faced challenges and assisted them to remain patient when their goals were thwarted or seemed unattainable.

Although the participants were exposed to different experiences overseas, including greater personal freedom, these did not affect their faith and religious practices. One participant expressed excitement at returning home so that she could be ‘closer to her God’ through the religious activities woven into everyday life in Saudi Arabia. Religion was regarded positively by the women and was not seen as a source of conflict between themselves and their families. Religion was regarded as a bond between individuals, family members and the society as a whole. The participants of this study reverted to the *abaya* (some choosing to wear the *niqab*) without question on their return home and cited dress as a manifestation of their religious faith. The findings of Moaddel’s (2006) values survey that Saudi Arabians considered religion to be the most important element in their identity, placing religious importance above cultural and tribal identities, was corroborated by this study, through the participants turning to God (Allah) and prayer above all else, when they sought guidance, comfort and reassurance.

Finding employment

Prior to leaving Australia, most of the women expressed concerns about obtaining employment on returning home. Given the high unemployment rates for women in Saudi Arabia (Foley, 2010), this was not surprising. All of the women in this study wanted to use the qualifications and skills they had acquired in Australia to bring influence and change. The experiences of the participants, however, showed mixed results, with most experiencing difficulty in obtaining work, at least in the short-term. This might in part be attributable to lack of planning and legislation at the state level (Hijab, in Pharaon, 2004), or a mismatch

between skills and job shortages at the individual level. There was little evidence from this study that, after six months, educated women offered an alternative solution to expatriate workers in skilled positions (Foley, 2010). The women in this study either returned to paid professional positions they held prior to coming to Australia, remaining unemployed, volunteered as a means to gain experience, or obtained employment in large organisations alongside expatriate workers.

The inability to obtain suitable paid employment after six months was identified as a cause of great concern and disappointment for some women. It contributed to at least one woman's disheartened feelings and developing sense of isolation. It is noted that two of the women who struggled for employment were Shi'ite Muslims and, although there is no conclusive evidence that this was the reason for their difficulties in finding work, the literature identified that discrimination along religious lines was a factor in higher unemployment rates among the Shi'ite population of Saudi Arabia (Al-Rasheed, 1998). Not being able to obtain employment over time had a serious impact on the women and, although they held on to their religious beliefs that God had a plan for their lives and they should be patient, as time went on, they reported that their confidence was slowly being eroded with each unsuccessful attempt to find work.

For the two women who were able to obtain work, acquiring a suitable and satisfying job had an immediate effect on their repatriation, in that they reported feeling more settled and happier. Employment also brought financial benefits and reinforced feelings of independence, aspirations that were of particular importance to single-status women and noted by Le Renard (2008) and Schvaneveldt et al. (2005). This was borne out by the experiences of one woman, who obtained employment in a large organisation three months after returning home. She cited that working among professional colleagues from different countries greatly assisted her to feel at home. She described the multicultural composition of

her workplace as one of its most attractive features. She explained how she had acquired a sense of comfort through receiving regular reminders of life in her sojourning country by being among culturally diverse colleagues, some of whom were Australian. Her description of comfort in the workplace reflects Storti's (2001) explanation of what home means when he talked about familiar places, people, patterns of behaviour and routines, and how familiarity brings forth feelings of security, understanding, safety, trust and belonging. For this woman, the work environment provided a simultaneous link between her sojourn experiences and her future in Saudi Arabia, and this assisted her readjustment. The mixed-gender professional environment and the relationship she established with her male supervisor were agreeable. She cited her experiences in Australia as preparation for this situation, although she also expressed slight discomfort working in a mixed-gender environment in response to a lifetime of sex segregation and limited contact with male persons outside her immediate family (Le Renard, 2008). Klaff (2002) posited that home-country organisations should attempt, where possible, to place repatriates in workplace situations that provided them with opportunities for contact with people from their sojourning country as a strategy to assist the readjustment process. The findings of this study concur, with evidence that a workplace offering some type of bridge between the home and host country positively affected readjustment outcomes.

A very different experience unfolded for two women: one volunteered in an education setting after returning home, while the other returned to the professional employment she held prior to coming to Australia. The volunteer was disappointed that the skills she had acquired in Australia were neither recognised nor valued in the workplace. Her relationships with professional colleagues were tenuous and she was sometimes humiliated for suggesting new ideas. Labelled 'the Australian', she described feelings of loneliness and isolation. The other woman encountered rejection and intimidation from her colleagues, who regarded the knowledge she had acquired overseas as threatening to their own careers. Her supervisor

rarely spoke with her, but frequently delegated tasks to her. Both these experiences reflected what Butcher (2002) and Howard (1980) reported about home-country organisations that do not acknowledge the potential and capacity of repatriates and largely impart messages that the returnee is unwanted in the workplace, because they might pose a threat to the career aspirations of their colleagues.

It is noted that all the participants from this study were supported by their spouses and family members in pursuit of employment at the professional level. Husbands in particular supported their wives' searches for appropriate employment, with one husband transferring his own employment to be in a better position to offer his wife daily support, while another actively supported and encouraged his wife to continue her education. Husbands and male family members, who hold the decision-making power within Saudi society to permit women to participate in educational and professional pursuits (Foley, 2010; Le Renard, 2008; Palley, 1991; Somers & Caram, 1998), demonstrated strong support for the participants of this study to continue the professional journeys they had begun in Australia and build their careers thereafter.

All of these highly individual experiences around readjustment in the professional sphere highlight the positive contribution of work to the readjustment process. Work was linked to the retention of personal confidence. For some, it offered a reconnection to their sojourn experience and provided opportunities for financial and personal independence as well as a chance to put into practice some of the skills, values and knowledge they had acquired overseas. Even in situations where professional colleagues seemed unsupportive, the women reported that they felt fulfilled and useful through work.

The impact of individual and situational variables

The findings of this study highlighted the importance of a number of individual and situational variables in the readjustment process, including gender, age and marital status, prior intercultural experiences, cultural distance and housing.

Gender, age and marital status

Brabant et al. (1990) reported that, among other criteria, younger, female, single-status sojourners, who returned home without debriefing, were most likely to have greater repatriation difficulties. The findings of this study did not concur with this proposition in several ways. First, there was no evidence that unmarried women experienced greater repatriation difficulties than their married counterparts and, indeed, married women in this study reported that their anxiety levels were heightened by concerns for their spouses and children on their return to Saudi Arabia. Secondly, there was no evidence that those who were younger were more negatively affected by repatriation. As debriefing was not offered to the participants of this study, it is not possible to comment on its capacity to alleviate post-departure distress. However, the participants did not identify debriefing as a potential strategy that might assist others in preparation for returning home.

Gender in the workplace

Christofi and Thompson (2007) described the disappointment of female repatriates in their home-country workplaces as they encountered entrenched attitudes, restrictions and inequality. For many, it was the unexpectedness of these situations that caused their frustration. The findings of this study support, in part, the outcomes of Christofi and Thompson (2007) in that the participants of this study also encountered entrenched attitudes and restrictions (usually around cultural norms). However, the main difference in the findings was about expectations, as the participants of this study showed signs of being more

cognisant of how prospective workplaces were likely to be before returning home. This might have been due to their regular communication with friends, colleagues and family members during their overseas sojourns, or the result of more realistic expectations about the likelihood of sociocultural change within Saudi Arabia during their absence.

Age

The findings of a study by Orr (in Gama & Pedersen, 1977) that there was a relationship between readjustment difficulties and younger age on returning home, also identified that returnees who felt alienated from their home culture, perceived they had little influence over change, originated in more rigid cultures, or from countries where there was distrust of the host country experienced greater difficulties on repatriation. Some of these factors, such as perceived lack of capacity to influence change and feelings of alienation from their home country were relevant to this study. However, there was no evidence to suggest that these feelings were linked with the participants' age. Both older and younger women in this study identified some of these feelings as impacting on their experiences of repatriation.

Martin (1984) asserted that the age at which many international students went overseas for study purposes was a peak development period for forming opinions and understandings about the world. This resulted in more independent and adult behaviour on return, which was likely to bring about more positive relationships with parents. In this study, independence and personal growth were positive outcomes for the participants, but there was insufficient evidence to link these outcomes to age and to show correlation between these developments and positive relationships with parents. Strong relationships between family members, particularly with mothers, characterised all of the relationships between the participants and their families. One woman reported stronger connections to her mother since she had been in Australia and all relationships showed evidence of strength and resilience.

The findings of this study concur with those of Gregersen and Stroh (1997) who asserted that older repatriates did not necessarily experience an easier time readjusting to their home country than younger repatriates. Although the age range of the women in this study was relatively narrow (six years), the findings identified that all repatriates experienced difficulties in both the personal and professional spheres and that age did not improve their capacity to manage these challenges.

Marital status

Black and Gregersen's (1991) study concluded that older, married repatriates experienced an easier time in readjustment generally. These findings suggested that an individual's readjustment was related to their spouse's readjustment, possibly because they encountered similar challenges during the readjustment process. Cox (2004) asserted that single repatriates were likely to experience higher levels of depression and social difficulties, as well as closer identification to the host culture.

The findings of this study showed that, although married women received support from their spouses, they still experienced significant readjustment difficulties. In fact, concern for the well-being of their spouse and children was a significant issue that impeded the participants' progress towards their own repatriation. Similarly, there was no conclusive evidence that single-status participants reported higher levels of depression, or closer identification with the host culture than their married counterparts.

Prior intercultural experiences

Two of the participants of this study reported they had numerous previous intercultural experiences, largely for pleasure or religious duties (see Table 2, p. 120). The findings from this study do not show significant differences in readjustment outcomes for the participants who reported prior intercultural experiences and those who did not. This demonstrates

support for the findings of Cox (2004), who argued that there was no significant correlation between the number of sojourns and readjustment outcomes.

Cultural distance

Gregersen and Stroh (1997) and Kidder (1992) identified that homogeneity within the home culture caused repatriates to experience elevated feelings of difference and disadvantage on returning home. These feelings were more marked where home and host countries were culturally dissimilar. Triandis (1989) posited that transitioning between societies, where there was a well-defined behavioural code (tight societies), to those that have fewer restraining rules and norms (loose societies) or vice versa, was also likely to affect the repatriation process. Rohrlich and Martin (1991) asserted that, rather than cultural differences, it was the attributes of home and host environments, such as food and climate, that most affected readjustment outcomes. Pritchard (2011) reported conflicting values between modernism and traditionalism, individualism and collectivism, with many repatriates no longer conforming to the stereotypes of their particular cultures.

Taking into account the findings of these studies, the participants of this study acknowledged that their experiences of living in Australia were very different to life in Saudi Arabia. Although they did not use the same terminology to describe their situations as presented in the literature, the participants discussed in depth how the absence of restraining rules and norms in Australia, compared with the well-defined behavioural codes, rules and norms of Saudi Arabia, laid the foundations for personal growth and identity change. The homogeneity of Saudi society that contributes to the conservatism of the society was not the only factor to obstruct the readjustment process for this study's participants. Homogeneity in Saudi society, along with collectivist societal values relating to consensus, consultation, aversion to conflict, long-held values and traditions (Hofstede, 1984, 1986; Kapiszewski, 2006), conspired to maintain conformity and limit individual expression.

Housing

A challenging issue for single-status participants of this study was returning to live in the family home. Although the women had separate living areas from other family members, they found themselves living with their parents and less independent than they had been in Australia. Butcher (2002) cited this situation as one of the most disturbing issues for unmarried repatriates. Although it was a challenge for the participants of this study, it was also anticipated, as they were aware of cultural expectations that required single women to remain in the family home until they were married. This societal expectation lessened, to some extent, the impact of sharing living space again. The physical space available within Saudi homes also ameliorated readjustment issues in that single women had their own space (sometimes an area) that allowed them some distance from activities when they sought time alone. However, there was still some evidence of friction between the participants and their extended family members (often around noise and privacy) after living alone in Australia.

Married women returned to their own homes, lived temporarily with family members, or searched for new accommodation. Kendall (1981) reported that housing was a major disruption for repatriates and this was the experience for those participants who sought new accommodation on their return, especially accommodation that was affordable and suitable to their family's needs. However, where repatriates were able to live with family members, or had returned to their own residences, the impact of housing was reduced.

Cultural Identity Model

Sussman's (2000) Cultural Identity Model was used as the conceptual framework to explore the repatriation experiences of this study's participants. It proposes four distinct types of identity shift that might occur on repatriation:

1. *Additive* comprises those for whom the home cultural identity centrality (importance) is moderate and flexibility (willingness to bend or change cultural rules and patterns) is high. Identification is associated with high sociocultural adaptation to the host culture and subsequent likelihood of repatriation difficulties.
2. *Subtractive* comprises those for whom home cultural identity centrality is low and cultural flexibility is low to moderate. Like additive identifiers, subtractive identifiers experience high sociocultural adaptation to the host culture and are likely to experience difficulties on repatriation.
3. *Global* or *intercultural* identities are those who hold multiple cultural scripts simultaneously and draw on each as the self-concept requires. Adjustment is facilitated by low cultural centrality and high cultural flexibility, resulting in high adaptation.
4. *Affirmative* identities are those who maintain and strengthen their home culture identity throughout the transition cycle. They largely ignore the cultural discrepancies between home and host cultures, resulting in low adaptation to the host culture. Cultural self-concept is consequentially stable and unambiguous, resulting in low repatriation distress.

Without limiting or compressing the individual stories of the study's participants to fit the Cultural Identity Model, Table 4 shows how it was possible to tease apart the participants' detailed accounts of returning home and cross-reference these to the four identity shifts that were recapped above. Sussman (2002) suggested that the Cultural Identity Model would benefit from further testing using qualitative methods (see Chapter 4, p. 89). The findings of this study show that it was possible to adjust Sussman's (2000) framework to an in-depth, empirical, qualitative study.

Table 4: Indicators that show identity shifts in line with the Cultural Identity Model

Participant	Indicators	Identity
Noor	<p>Encountered difficulties in severing bonds with host country</p> <p>Experienced feelings of depression and displacement, isolation and bewilderment after returning home</p> <p>Found that her newly-formed opinions, perceptions, and ideas created feelings of alienation</p> <p>Experienced difficulty in obtaining suitable employment</p> <p>Experienced indifference from compatriots about the outcomes of her international sojourn which increased negative feelings</p> <p>Expressed worry and concern for her husband and most particularly her children, in managing re-entry transition</p> <p>Sought education that offered Western pedagogy for her children</p> <p>Encountered blame from her family when her daughter experienced readjustment issues</p> <p>Made frequent comparisons between home and host country (usually negative) about food, living standards, and the physical environment</p> <p>Experienced difficulty in finding new accommodation on returning home</p> <p>Chose to wear the <i>niqab</i> on returning home in place of the head scarf she wore in Australia</p> <p>Desired to return to host country for long periods (semi-permanently)</p> <p>Held on to ideas and behaviours that originated in host country</p> <p>Sought information in English from the internet and read Australian magazines on-line after she returned home</p> <p>Cooked Western food from recipes she accessed in magazines</p> <p>Retained strong belief in God's will and attachment to religion, as a comfort and support</p>	Subtractive identity
Rania	<p>Enjoyed international experiences and adjusted to life in host country</p> <p>Missed the personal freedom of host country and aspects of life such as movies, shopping by herself after returning home</p> <p>Missed the green environment of host country</p> <p>Acknowledged the warmth and security of extended family members on her return</p> <p>Embraced mutual dependence of her extended family</p> <p>Returned to live in her parents' home, in accordance with Saudi custom for single women</p> <p>Found living at home challenging at times, as she missed the peace, privacy and quiet of living alone</p> <p>Demonstrated a willingness to accede to parents' wishes re career</p> <p>Was unable to obtain work, after six months; a disturbing influence, but moderated through religious beliefs</p> <p>Critical of some aspects of the home environment in relation to the difficulty in obtaining employment</p> <p>Chose to wear the <i>niqab</i> on returning home in place of the head scarf she wore in Australia</p> <p>Strong attachment and belief in God's will</p> <p>Desired to return to host country for visits (not to live)</p> <p>Continued to practise English language, read English language books,</p>	<p>Additive /Affirmative identity</p> <p>Bi-cultural subtype</p>

	<p>watch television programmes in English</p> <p>Blended home and host country values</p> <p>Valued her home country for the sense of belonging it offered</p>	
Maymuna	<p>Described the early days of returning home as ‘depression’</p> <p>Regarded obtaining professional employment as a moderating influence, that enhanced feelings of belonging to her home country</p> <p>Sought out members of host country through work opportunities</p> <p>Acceded to parents’ wishes in regards to career advice</p> <p>Regarded family support and interdependence as important</p> <p>Valued highly the warmth and security that came from her extended family</p> <p>Lived with parents as expected of single women in home country</p> <p>Chose to wear black <i>abaya</i> on returning home in place of the head scarf that she wore in Australia</p> <p>Continued to practise English language, watch English language television programmes</p> <p>Missed the personal freedom of the host country, missed feelings of independence and personal choice</p> <p>Intends to use skills acquired in host country to further career prospects</p> <p>Expressed desire to visit host country as soon as possible</p>	<p>Additive/ Affirmative identity</p> <p>Bicultural subtype</p>
En	<p>Departed host country with the hope and intention of returning to continue her studies</p> <p>Made little attempt to readjust to home country environment, while negotiating her return to Australia</p> <p>Chose to wear a black <i>abaya</i> while in Saudi Arabia in place of the head scarf she wore in Australia</p> <p>Acceded to family’s advice and support in regards to career advice</p> <p>Intends to put skills and ideas acquired overseas into practice on eventual return to KSA</p> <p>Regarded family support as important, particularly support from her parents and spouse</p> <p>Showed favour for Western-style education for her children</p> <p>Cites technology as a vital communication link to her family while in the host country</p> <p>Cites her religion as submission and her future as God’s will</p>	Additive
Medina	<p>Consolidated common bonds with Saudi colleagues while in Australia</p> <p>Retained positive feelings about her home country throughout the sojourn</p> <p>Reported high levels of stress and worry during the sojourn</p> <p>Reported tiredness from household duties and caring for her husband and children during the sojourn</p> <p>Made few Australian friends</p> <p>Maintained strong links to her home country – watched Arab television programmes, communicated in Arabic language</p> <p>Expressed the view that her young son wanted to return home</p> <p>Reported few interactions with members of the host community</p> <p>Recounted how much she missed her family in Saudi Arabia</p> <p>Desired to return home as soon as possible and showed no mixed feelings about going home</p>	<p>This participant chose not to participate in providing information after her return to Saudi Arabia. The indicators that have been recorded are drawn from her pre-departure story. However, they suggest an Affirmative Identity.</p>

	Did not respond to requests for an interview after returning home	
Sara	<p>Expressed sadness in severing bonds with the host country</p> <p>Lived with parents as expected of a single woman in home country</p> <p>Drew strength from her siblings who had studies overseas</p> <p>Regarded her family as a source of comfort and support</p> <p>Used skills acquired in host country to further her career prospects</p> <p>Expressed desire to visit the host country in the future and to travel more</p> <p>Held on to her dream of pursuing further education</p> <p>Retained a strong belief in God's will and direction for her life</p> <p>Experienced negative reactions in the workplace to her return</p> <p>Experienced conflict in the workplace, where she encountered entrenched attitudes from her supervisor and peers who appeared threatened by her confidence</p> <p>Maintained a strong stance in the workplace and held on to the knowledge and ideas she had acquired overseas</p> <p>Made frequent comparisons between home and host country, which were usually negative towards her home country</p> <p>Cited personal freedom and the 'easy life' in Australia as the things she missed most about the host country</p> <p>Continued to practise English language and spoke regularly to the researcher via <i>Skype</i></p> <p>Regarded English as the key to engaging with other cultures</p>	<p>Additive/Subtractive identity</p> <p>Bicultural type</p>

Table 4 suggests that the participants of this study assumed many of the characteristics that fit with the profiles contained in the Cultural Identity Model. However, there were three factors that advise against making generalisations from these findings:

1. This study's small sample size
2. The limitations of the participants' host-country experiences that largely took place within one regional Australian city
3. The relatively short duration of the study that precluded longitudinal examination of the participants' repatriation experiences.

Cognisant of these limitations, the findings suggested that the majority had the characteristic of an additive identity. One of the participants demonstrated a subtractive identity, while another was shown to conform to an affirmative identity. What this means in terms of behaviours, attitudes and values is discussed below.

Additive identities

The participants who demonstrated an additive identity shift showed acceptance and appreciation of many of the values and attitudes they had encountered in their host country. They recounted how they were able to become involved in a different way of life that proffered many opportunities to learn and try new experiences in Australia and in fact had felt encouraged to do so. The impact of the participants' overseas experience was noted in their desire to return at a later time, either on a short-term or protracted basis.

Most noteworthy was their positive attitudes towards what they described as 'the free and easy life' in Australia, which involved personal freedom, individual rights, equality in relationships and acceptance of divergent opinions and views. In Australia, most of the participants incorporated into their attitudinal and behavioural repertoire aspects of the 'free life', which they feared would be lost on their return to Saudi Arabia, where values around consensus, harmony and protection of the family's reputation conspire with homogeneity and societal inflexibility to prohibit the emergence of diverse behaviours and attitudes (Kapiszewski, 2006). For most of the participants, 'slipping back' to the people they were before they came to Australia was acknowledged as both a fear and distinct possibility.

Despite these concerns, the participants returned home eager to express new ideas and opinions, especially in the workplace, which ultimately they hoped would bring about changes in ideas and practices. At the same time, they were aware that divergent views and opinions were likely to cause discomfort and even antagonism among professional colleagues in their home country. This required them to frequently adopt behaviours that overtly demonstrated consensus with their co-workers, while they privately employed some of the skills and behaviours they had acquired overseas. One woman was fortunate to find employment in a multi-cultural workplace where she was able to share new ideas more

openly, while another chose to openly confront and challenge the thinking of her professional colleagues.

The participants rated highly the opportunities that arose through their international sojourns to improve their English language proficiency, which in turn contributed to their professional and personal development. They used the internet to access information in English after they had returned home, spoke English when an occasion arose and sought out opportunities to watch English-language television programmes as strategies to maintain their language proficiency and remain connected to Western values and ideas. One participant read the texts she had used while studying in Australia to continually refresh her memory, while another communicated in English with colleagues in her workplace. Continuing to practise and improve the English language was important to all the participants, with one asserting that acquiring skills in English was her proudest achievement, as English facilitated engagement with other cultures.

For those who were parents, schooling that promoted Western-style pedagogy was considered advantageous. The participants appreciated the opportunities their children had in Australia to engage in interactive learning, develop skills in critical analysis and gain a more global perspective about issues. Although the participants were dedicated to ensuring their children received appropriate religious education, they eagerly supported many aspects of a Western-style curriculum. Choosing an appropriate school for their children after their return to Saudi Arabia was a primary consideration, as the participants were aware that children who had been educated in Australia were likely to experience distress in readjusting to different learning styles at home.

A close examination of what occurred for the participants of this study indicated that many adopted a bi-cultural subtype of the additive identity (Sussman, 2011), whereby they possessed two distinct behavioural and cognitive repertoires – Arab and Western – with the

ability to switch cultural behaviours according to the situation. This might be attributable to the participants' awareness of attitudes within their home-country, whereby the path of least resistance was to assess every situation and then adopt the appropriate behaviour or attitude.

Subtractive identities

One participant showed indicators of a subtractive identity, revealing movement away from her home culture's attitudes, values and behaviours, and movement towards the Western way of life, while another participant was described as an additive/subtractive identifier. For these participants, returning home was accompanied by distress expressed in terms of depression, anxiety and feelings of displacement. Cognitively, they perceived themselves as dissimilar to their compatriots in essential beliefs, values, self-definition and interpretation of others' behaviour (Sussman, 2011). They frequently reported feelings of isolation and bewilderment.

These participants expressed deep sadness in severing bonds and ties to the host country. In interviews they asserted that they would have liked to stay permanently in Australia and it was only the desire to reunite with their families that drew them back to their home country. One participant was particularly proud of how she had changed during her time in Australia, largely through increased self-confidence and her capacity to express opinions and ideas, which she feared would be lost on her return home. Her experiences after returning home vindicated the concerns she expressed pre-departure, as she recounted experiences of indifference, feelings of loneliness and alienation from family and professional colleagues. After six months, this participant remained committed to returning to Australia, but also acknowledged that her desire to live in Australia on a semi-permanent basis was unlikely to be realised.

This participant's repatriation experience was made more distressing by her daughter's readjustment, which was characterised by anxiety, weight loss and withdrawal from social

activities, sadness and despondency. Observing her daughter's discomfort increased her own feelings of distress and reinforced her desire to return to Australia. Further, the issues confronting her daughter magnified the tensions with family members, who showed indifference to her international experiences and blamed her for putting her own interests above those of her children. Although relationships with the family were resilient, there were events that showed tensions at times between family members. All of these factors conspired to amplify the feelings of alienation she experienced in being home again.

The participants who showed subtractive identity shifts made continuous comparisons between Australia and their home country, describing aspects of life in their home country less favourably. Food, climate, the environment, the cost of living, recreational activities and ability to move around freely were mentioned frequently as issues that made their lives less enjoyable in Saudi Arabia. One participant commented on high levels of unemployment and increasing levels of crime among those who were unable to find work in their home country, while the difficulty in getting things done and the slow pace of life were also common complaints.

After six months, these participants showed signs that they were beginning to readjust to being home again and to accept that they were most likely to spend substantial parts of their life in their home country. However, they remained unsettled and expressed dissatisfaction with many aspects of life in Saudi Arabia. Family and religion provided comfort and support. It was largely bonds between the participants, their families and religion that kept them from returning to Australia.

Affirmative identities

Two of the participants showed a blending of additive and affirmative identities, while another, who chose not to participate in this study after returning home, demonstrated strong

indications that she would have been likely to adhere to an affirmative identity on returning home. As affirmative cultural identifiers, the participants demonstrated pride in the values that affirmed their existing cultural identity (Sussman, 2011).

The affirmative identity became salient through a number of factors that included retaining close ties with the home culture and choosing to develop relationships with Saudi compatriots while in Australia. Although most of the participants in this study concluded that most of their friends had been either other international students or Saudis in Australia, they conceded that their desire had been to make more Australian friends. The participant who showed strong indications of an affirmative identity stated that she preferred Saudis over Australian friends. For this participant, the sojourn was stressful, as she encountered pressure to complete her studies, care for two children and manage the household. She expressed concern for her husband, who also studied in Australia and all these factors led her to describe the host-country experience as a struggle. A return home was regarded as a relief and release from the difficulties she had encountered in the host-country. This participant clearly articulated that she belonged in Saudi Arabia and her need to be surrounded by her extended family for emotional and practical support was a strong motivator to return home. Not only did this participant want to return home, she underscored how her children loved their home country and they too strongly desired to return to their extended family members. This participant adjusted to the Australian way of life in that she attended university and completed tasks associated with her postgraduate studies, but beyond these requirements, she chose to spend recreational time watching television programmes in Arabic, reading Arabic news and socialising with other Saudi women.

There were aspects of the affirmative identity in most of the participants of this study, however, and although some of these were not articulated by the participants, they were subtly revealed through their behaviours and in the course of informal conversations. All of

the participants showed delight in being reunited with family members and relished the security and comfort of their extended families. Even when tensions were reported, the bonds of family were strong. Despite living independently in Australia and enjoying the freedom that moving around freely brought, they did not hesitate to move into their family homes, as expected by local custom, to accede to their parents' wishes and follow their parents' advice in regards to their careers. They also adopted clothing in accordance with their religion and social custom. The mutual dependence of the Saudi family was the greatest bond for the participants of this study.

Intercultural or global identities

The participants of this study did not show indicators that they had assumed global or intercultural identities. Those who assume global identities are, according to Sussman (2011), people who have undertaken multiple sojourns, frequently moving in and out of their home countries. They have a keen sense of themselves as cultural beings and begin each new overseas sojourn with an awareness of how their values, beliefs, customs and preferences are shaped by their previous experiences.

In sum, the Cultural Identity Model proved to be a useful tool to tease apart the multifaceted aspects of the participants' readjustment and acted as a valuable lens to gain understanding of the often subtle differences between the participants' homecoming experiences. The findings show that the majority of participants of this study indicated an additive identity shift, either alone or in combination with other identity types. Although there is no conclusive evidence from the findings of this study that other Saudi Arabian repatriates might also favour the additive identity type, a foundation is laid for further exploration of this cultural population using this conceptual framework.

Conclusion

In this chapter, the key findings of this study were discussed, the relevant literature revisited and a detailed examination of the Cultural Identity Model was undertaken in relation to the study's findings. In the next chapter, conclusions are presented, along with recommendations for further research and practice.

Chapter 9

Conclusions and recommendations

The purpose of this chapter is to present the major conclusions from this study, offer recommendations for further research and practice and recap this study's contribution to existing knowledge on the repatriation of international students. The findings of this study showed that the process of readjustment was complex and multi-faceted and that all of the participants encountered some level of distress on their return, manifested emotionally and behaviourally. This chapter begins by revisiting, merging and examining the study's findings against the backdrop of the cultural theories proposed by Hofstede (1984, 1986), Sussman (2000, 2002) and Triandis (1989).

Major conclusions

There are four major conclusions to this study:

1. The international education sojourn is a life-changing experience.
2. It is important to highlight individual student stories, not only for what they deliver on the micro level, but also what they potentially contribute to the ongoing strength of the international education industry as a whole.
3. When we engage with international education, we impact significantly and meaningfully on the lives of others.
4. Participants fulfilled the goals of the King Abdullah scholarship programme.

The international education sojourn as a life-changing experience

What makes this a life-changing experience for sojourners is the learning and experience that comes from successfully traversing the cultural divide. The key findings of this study

demonstrated that most of the participants exhibited an additive identity, or a combination of profiles that included the additive type (Sussman, 2002). This was shown by their rejection of elements of their home culture and embrace of some aspects of the host culture during their international sojourn. Consequently, they experienced feelings of alienation, frustration and disappointment on their return home and struggled to negotiate a 'hybrid' path that encompassed elements of both cultures. Some were able to switch between the two cultures exhibiting a biculturalism though none were able to hybridise or merge Arab and Western behaviours and thinking to form a new, unique, stable and transferable sense of self switching between cultures (Sussman, 2011) due to the vast differences or cultural distance between Arab and Western cultures. Those who were able to switch effectively between cultures developed confidence, self-reliance and independence, all of which were attributes that Hofstede (1986) had ascribed to individualist societies that encouraged creativity, freedom, mastery and achievement. At the same time, they were able to adhere to the attributes of their collectivist home culture, which included conformity, attachment to in-groups, strong bonds between family members, harmony, consultation and consensus. Despite these positive gains, however, traversing this vast cultural divide also engendered feelings of disadvantage and difference (Gregersen & Stroh, 1997; Kidder, 1992; Triandis, 1989). Bridging this cultural divide upon re-entry was experienced by some as a loss of the flexibility, diversity of opinion, gender and social equality characteristic of Australian society to once again fit into the rigid, traditional, ordered, predictable society, which limited individual expression (Kapiszewski, 2006). However, strong family bonds more than compensated for this loss of freedom for most of the participants of this study (Hofstede, 1986). Nevertheless, participants had to exercise caution in offering new ideas and opinions on their return home and learn to adjust to the realities of life in Saudi Arabia, which sometimes frustrated them. They adapted to the strict sociocultural norms of their home country to preserve their reputation and that of

their family for, above all, participants were drawn to the comfort and support of their families and their religion.

Close examination of the many facets of the participants' re-entry transition and the way they negotiated and bridged the vast cultural divide led to the realisation of the magnitude of the international education experience for these sojourners and recognition that many had entered a foreign country as one individual and returned as another. Every phase of the international sojourn included challenges, which elicited highly individual responses and delivered very personal meanings. The first conclusion of this study was therefore to recognise *the profound impact of the international education sojourn as a life-changing experience*:

As rivers run into seas, seas into oceans, and oceans overlap lands, cross cultural experience involves awakening, and transformation of identity overlapping landscapes, cultures and languages. However, this metaphor is not a continuous flow-chart but there are backwaters and eddies, tensions and conflicts. Changes and ruptures take place. We reinvent ourselves again and again in response to the flux of flows ... and eventually become part of the multicultural delta (He, 2002, p. 320).

This metaphor describes the changes that took place in the construction of the identities of three Chinese women during a sojourn in Canada. It resonates with the findings of this study in its references to *awakening* and *transformation of identity* and in its acknowledgement that the international sojourn experience was complex and comprised forward and backward steps, tensions and conflicts. In alluding to the power of the cross-cultural experience, this metaphor demonstrates that, by the end of a sojourn, many of those who have participated have undergone life-changing experiences that have a long-term impact. Like the Chinese sojourners, the international education experience was also life-changing for the participants of this study. Choosing to live in an unfamiliar country required a substantial personal and

professional investment (Koehne, 2005), which brought with it many challenges and ultimately some rewards.

Importance of individual stories to international education

The privileged position of being able to hear the participants' stories and document their individual journeys was a reminder that the sizeable Australian international education industry comprised and depended on stories such as these. If the industry is to maintain its reputation and sustain its growth, then individual student stories need to be heard, valued and acted upon. Growth in the Australian international education industry since 2000 has shown that the number of international students has increased by 7.5 per cent per annum, twice the rate of tertiary students as a whole (Marginson et al., 2010). This presents a largely healthy picture. But behind this image, there is also evidence that the sociocultural environment, issues of safety, crime and tolerance, quality of education, transferability of qualifications and availability of part-time work (Marginson et al., 2010) are important factors in the decision of prospective international students to continue to choose Australia as their study destination. The need to generate income from international students and the seemingly endless supply of prospective students has, to some extent, marginalised the importance of taking time to hear individual stories, undertake research and develop programmes tailored to student issues and concerns (Ward, 2001).

A second major conclusion from this study, therefore, was the importance of highlighting individual student stories, not only for what they delivered on the micro level, but also what they potentially contributed to the ongoing strength of the international education industry as a whole. Given the impact of the international education experience on the participants of this study, it is important that the industry recognises that its ongoing success is inextricably linked to the stories of individual students and consideration is given to when the responsibility for international students end.

International education's profound impact on sojourners' lives

To encapsulate what the international sojourn experience meant for the participants of this study, it was important to reflect broadly on what it was really about. On one hand, the findings of this study suggest that the international education sojourn offered a cross-cultural experience that provided participants an opportunity to broaden their horizons and grow in ways they would not have done had they remained at home. Koehne (2005) highlighted that the international experience engendered both a sense of freedom and feelings of dislocation and isolation as the sojourner adjusted to life in the host country and re-entry to the home country. For every gain, there is a loss as students experience the 'backwaters, and eddies, tensions and conflicts' (He, 2002, p. 320) in cross-cultural adjustment. The emotional oscillation the sojourners in this study described reflected the uncomfortable feeling of being strangers in both their home and host countries. Whether or not the participants would, over time, once again feel completely at home in Saudi Arabia remains to be seen but whatever the outcome, one can be certain that the international experience could never be totally erased. It is part of the people they have become. Hence a third major conclusion from this study flowed from the meaning of the international education experience, which showed that, when we engage with international education, we impact significantly and meaningfully on the lives of others.

Participants fulfilled the goals of the King Abdullah scholarship programme

Given that all the participants of this study were recipients of the King Abdullah scholarship programme (KASP), some conclusions on its account are in order here. The aims of this extensive programme were to equip recipients with skills in strategic areas and provide them with knowledge that could only come from living overseas. As well as building and extending knowledge, participants gained increasing understanding through engaging in activities of cultural exchange (Alomar, 2010). This, it was believed, would produce

graduates with the capacity to lead change in social and professional areas across Saudi Arabia and, in the long-term, reduce the country's reliance on foreign workers, a process known as Saudization (Pharaon, 2004). Clearly, the participants of this study fulfilled the programme's aims in successfully completing their postgraduate degrees and gaining important skills for the future of their country. Not only did they acquire knowledge and experience from living overseas, but they also shared information about their culture and religion with others, while learning about other cultures. These are the major benefits of cross-cultural exchange. However, their ability to contribute socially and professionally to the future of their country rested squarely on the opportunities the home country provided for the employment of their newfound knowledge and skills. The findings of this study indicate that six months after returning to Saudi Arabia, two women were still seeking appropriate employment. Another two were employed in professional positions in fields associated with their postgraduate qualifications, while another sought to extend the knowledge she had gained in Australia by upgrading her qualifications. All of these women benefited personally and professionally from their time in Australia. The fourth major conclusion from this study is therefore that the participants' overseas experiences delivered outcomes that fulfilled the goals of the scholarship programme and facilitated personal outcomes for the women that were not articulated in the programme's objectives.

Recommendations for further research

Build on the findings of this study

There were a number of limitations to this study. The sample size was small and all of the participants were drawn from the same location in the host country. The short duration of the study allowed data to be gathered over an 18-month period, which was insufficient time to

examine long-term repatriation outcomes. All of these factors point to the importance of further research.

Recommendation 1: Further research is required to test the findings of this study with a larger population sample in diverse locations, over a longer period of time.

Explore the Cultural Identity Model using a larger population sample

The findings of this study showed highly individual responses in terms of the identity types that comprise the Cultural Identity Model (Sussman, 2000). Although there were some indications that the participants of this study exhibited an additive identity type, it was not possible with this sample size to draw conclusive evidence. Further research is required on the Cultural Identity Model to validate the findings of this and prior studies. The qualitative methodology used in this study elicited a richness of data that would be well-complemented by quantitative or mixed method methodologies.

Recommendation 2: The Cultural Identity Model requires further testing, possibly using different methodologies to substantiate this study's findings.

Investigate the potential of technology

The role of technology in maintaining connections between the participants of this study and their friends and families in Saudi Arabia during the international sojourn was shown to have potential to improve repatriation outcomes for returning sojourners. Technology assisted the participants to keep abreast of changes in their home country during their absence and, in doing so, develop more realistic expectations. It also demonstrated potential for supporting repatriates in maintaining contact with individuals and host country organisations following their return. The potential for technology to assume a significant role in positive readjustment experiences was raised in this study, but remained under-explored.

Recommendation 3: Although there are some studies that focus on the area, further research is needed on the role of technology in successful international sojourns and repatriation outcomes.

Examine how religion affects repatriation outcomes

Previous studies found religion incited conflict between returning sojourners and family members (Brabant et al., 1990; Martin & Harrell, 2004). However, the findings of this study indicated that religion played a supportive role, provided comfort and hope for the study's participants and drew them closer to their families and community. Religion exerted a powerful influence over the lives of all the participants and affected their behaviours and attitudes on a daily basis in their home and host countries. The importance of religion in the lives of the participants in this study cannot be over-emphasised. As a variable that might impact on repatriation outcomes, it was shown in this study to be highly significant. These differing findings on the role of religion in the sojourn and repatriation process indicate a need for further research in this area (Szkudlarek, 2010).

Recommendation 4: The findings of this study suggest that the role of religion in the sojourn and repatriation process is worthy of further investigation. A larger study of Saudi Nationals would assist in the validation of this study's findings.

The experiences of children

An unexpected finding of this study was that in focusing on women, their children's experiences were shown to be a significant concern. The children's repatriation experiences indicated the need for better understanding of children's emotional and physical responses to returning home. Although the participants of this study prepared their children for their return home, the findings clearly showed that some of the children remained confused about what was happening, experienced deep feelings of loss and sadness and found readjusting to

educational settings in their home country very difficult due to their strict enrolment procedures. These factors suggest that further research in this area would be beneficial.

Recommendation 5: Further research on the repatriation experiences of children could generate data to develop tailored strategies to alleviate some of their readjustment issues identified in this study.

The ripple effect

The spouses of the participants of this study were shown to be supportive of their wives undertaking studies in Australia. Most parents and extended family members were also supportive of their children and siblings engaging with international education. However, it was not possible to explore in any depth how family members might have felt about the homecoming of the participants of this study.

Recommendation 6: Further research on homecoming from the perspective of family members.

Implications for practice

Approach cultural differences from an individual perspective

One of the most important aspects negotiated in undertaking this study was deciding how to approach working across cultures and dealing with cultural differences. The approaches finally adopted (chronicled in Chapter 4) acknowledged the risks associated with categorising international students as a homogenous group or making generalisations about different groups of students (for example, all Saudis), as doing so might place the opportunity to fully and competently understand the complexities of an individual's relationship to their culture at risk. Indeed, the findings of this study showed clearly that even across the small sample of six students, there was considerable diversity of experience; debunking widespread perceptions

that the international student experience is somehow common to all. The focus on individual stories was thus a deliberate strategy to understand the cross-cultural experience and its implications for practice. The demands of dealing simultaneously with multiple issues presented by students can be challenging, but evidence gathered through this study shows that taking time to ask questions, seek clarification and adopt a position of openness to another's story engender relationships between education practitioners (or researchers) and students that ultimately deliver greater understanding, collaborative working relationships and positive outcomes.

Recommendation 1: Take an informed approach to working across cultures and consider the place of the individual in all engagements.

Building relationships with international students

Throughout this study, relationships were built between the researcher and the participants. The importance of developing these relationships was noteworthy as they created trust, which ultimately contributed significantly to the quality of the study's findings. There were four essential criteria in building relationships throughout this study: trust between the researcher and the participants that, over time, made clear that the researcher's intentions were genuine (Hofstede et al., 2002); reciprocity, which addressed issues of power that can exist between researchers and participants (Liamputtong, 2009); acknowledgement of the researcher's position as an outsider (Donohue Clyne, 2001); and ensuring that preparation was made before each engagement took place so that the researcher was mindful of the feelings and responses of the participants. Building trusting relationships took time and effort and involved participating in events outside the research process at times and providing information and support to the participants which did not contribute directly to the study's outcomes. However, building relationships was critical in gaining the cooperation and trust of the participants, and ultimately enhanced outcomes. The strategies described above have

implication for education practice as well as research, for this study shows that without developing trusting relationships over time, the quality of the data and positive outcomes for the participants and the researcher might not have eventuated. The findings of this study suggest that education practitioners (academic and professional staff) might also perceive mutual benefits in developing trusting relationships with international students to enhance outcomes in their areas of expertise. This recommendation is not intended to add to the workload of practitioners, but rather to invite those involved with students to look for ways to better engage within the context of existing relationships. Showing interest and concern for the students' wellbeing, asking questions about the students' cultural practices, or making mention of occasions that have cultural significance (for example, National Days) take little time in the course of an interaction, but can contribute to the building of trusting relationships. This recommendation also highlights the importance of programmes that facilitate the development of relationships among international students, university staff, domestic students and members of the broader community.

Recommendation 2: Education practitioners might consider how they interact and engage with international students with consideration given to engagements that culminate in the establishment of trusting relationships. Universities might also give consideration to additional support for programmes that encourage and facilitate relationship-building between students, staff and the broader community.

Recognise the significance of the international experience

The findings of this study strongly suggest that the international education experience has a life-changing impact for many international students. The personal and financial investment that students make to study in Australia and the challenges involved in being an international student are noteworthy. The successful completion of an international education sojourn is an event worthy of celebration. The participants of this study spoke excitedly about anticipated

celebrations planned by their families for their return (some of which did not occur, or were delayed). This suggested that they sought some type of public acknowledgement involving family, colleagues and friends. Whether recognition is offered in the form of ceremony or less formal celebrations, the findings of this study suggest that events that signal the completion of the international sojourn and the commencement of re-entry transition might assist sojourners to reflect on their achievements, what it means to return home and how they might prepare for impending departure. An event that acknowledges the end of the international sojourn might also provide an opportunity for sojourners to say ‘good-bye’ and formally close relationships with members of the host community (Kim, 2001).

Recommendation 3: It is important to acknowledge and celebrate the significance of the completion of the international education experience.

Prepare for homecoming

The findings of this study showed that a ‘one size fits all’ approach to preparing sojourners for re-entry transition would be less effective than taking a tailored, individual approach. The experiences associated with readjustment were shown to be highly individual, even where sojourners were returning to the same home country and this suggests that preparation also requires focus at the individual level. This finding is supported by Ripmeester (2005) who underscored the importance of individual, customised, one-on-one sessions to assist sojourners to prepare for departure. The Cultural Identity Model (Sussman, 2000) also fits this finding because of the model’s emphasis on identity change and the notion that different individuals undergo different transformations, therefore requiring individual approaches to re-entry preparation (Szkudlarek, 2008). The participants of this study showed little support for ideas around workshops or training sessions to raise understanding about re-entry transition. As one woman explained, ‘you have to prepare yourself’ (Noor – interview 3). Indeed, one of the initial aims of this study was to gather ideas that might be used to develop

structured initiatives to assist those on the point of departure. The findings of this study showed no support among the participants for re-orientation initiatives. However, the participants were supportive of information that they could access via the internet, if and when required, once they had returned home. The type of information they envisaged might be useful concerned preparation for the emotional responses they might experience as part of the readjustment process, how to assist and support their children through the readjustment process and general news of the university that kept them updated and connected to aspects of life in their host institution and community. The participants also identified that references from host organisations containing detailed information about the qualifications and skills they acquired overseas might aid in obtaining employment.

Recommendation 4: Explore how technology might be used to provide support and assistance to aid readjustment for returning students and their families.

Recognise the impact of the international experience on children

The findings of this study showed that the children of international students, particularly those who had attended school in Australia for a long period of time, experienced considerable difficulties in readjusting on their return home. Inflexibility around enrolling children mid-year further complicated the children's anguish at having acquired different skills and competencies in Australia and difficulties around communicating confidently in the language of their home country. All of these issues, along with missing friends from Australia and losses associated with the physical environment, combined to raise considerable concerns about the well-being of children in the readjustment process. Although younger children, who attended childcare in the host country, did not seem to experience the same level of difficulty as their older siblings, there was evidence that special care and arrangements might be helpful in also assisting them to readjust to life in their home country.

Recommendation 5: Explore the experiences of repatriating children and use the information obtained to develop, in cooperation with parents and local schools, a transition strategy to assist parents to prepare their children successfully for re-entry transition.

Conclusion

As a qualitative exploration of the repatriation experiences of female, postgraduate Saudi Arabian students, this study offered insights into the significance of the international education sojourn for individuals, institutions and the international education export industry. It added to the knowledge on this under-researched area of the international student experience, namely returning home, and highlighted the importance of this final phase in the sojourn cycle. The ongoing dissemination of this study's findings through presentations at conferences and journal publications gives voice to the largely unheard experiences of graduates once they leave the host country. As a preliminary study, it provides a foundation for further research involving larger population samples and opportunities for testing the findings across culturally diverse groups. It also stimulates thinking in practical areas, such as support services and alumni programmes, about how to engage graduates and keep them connected to host-country institutions beyond memory and sentiment. One of this study's most significant contributions is to recognise the capacity of the international education experience to change lives. This means acknowledging the important role host institutions and communities assume in this process and challenging existing ideas about engaging effectively across cultures. It further entails ongoing reflection into educational and research practices to ensure that individual stories are valued for their contribution to building understanding across difference.

REFERENCES

- Abdul Ghafour, P. K. (2011, December 28). Spending on King Abdullah scholarships hit SR20 billion. *Arab News*. Retrieved June 13, 2012 from <http://www.arabnews.com/node/402344>
- Abrams, L. S. (2010). Sampling 'hard to reach' populations in qualitative research: The case of incarcerated youth. *Qualitative Social Work*, 9(4), 536-550.
- Adams, T., Banks, M., & Olsen, A. (2011). Benefits of international education: Enriching students, enriching communities. In D. Davis & B. Mackintosh (Eds.), *Making a difference: Australian international education* (pp. 9-46). Sydney: New South Wales Publishing.
- Adelman, M. B., & Lustig, M. W. (1981). Intercultural communication problems as perceived by Saudi Arabian and American managers. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 5(4), 349-363.
- Adler, N. J. (1981). Re-Entry: Managing cross-cultural transitions. *Group and Organization Studies*, 6(3), 341-356.
- Agostinone-Wilson, F. (2012). Interviews. In S. Klein (Ed.), *Action research: Plain and simple* (pp. 21-47). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Alazzi, K., & Chiodo, J. J. (2006). Uncovering problems and identifying coping strategies of Middle Eastern university students. *International Education*, 35(2), 65-81.
- Al-Hariri, R. (1987). Islam's point of view on women's education in Saudi Arabia. *Comparative Education*, 23(1), 51-57.
- Alhazmi, A. (2010). *Saudi international students in Australia and intercultural engagement: A study of transitioning from a gender segregated culture to a mixed gender environment*. Paper presented at the ISANA international education conference. Retrieved September 20, 2011 from <http://www.proceedings.com.au/isana/2010.html>
- Ali, W. (2003). Muslim women: Between cliché and reality. *Diogenes*, 50(3), 77-87.
- Al-Krenawi, A., & Graham, J. R. (2001). The cultural mediator: Bridging the gap between a non-Western community and professional social work practice. *British Journal of Social Work*, 31(5), 665-685.
- Al-Krenawi, A., & Graham, J. R. (2003). Principles of social work practice in the Muslim Arab world. *Arab Studies Quarterly*, 25(4), 75-91.
- Al-Krenawi, A., & Graham, J. R. (2006). A comparison of family functioning, life and marital satisfaction, and mental health in women in polygamous and monogamous marriages. *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, 52(1), 5-17.
- Al-Makhamreh, S. S., & Lewando-Hundt, G. (2008). Researching 'at home' as an insider/outsider: Gender and culture in an ethnographic study of social work practice. *Qualitative Social Work*, 7(1), 9-23.
- Alomar, M.A. (2010). The goals of the King Abdullah scholarship program. Paper presented at the Washington International Education Council, Inc. Conference, Washington, DC. Retrieved June 13, 2012 from <http://www.washcouncil.org>

- Al-Qasimi, N. (2010). Immodest modesty: Accommodating dissent and the 'abaya-as-fashion in the Arab Gulf States. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 6(1), 46-74.
- Al-Rasheed, M. (1998). The Shi'a of Saudi Arabia: A minority in search of cultural authenticity. *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 25(1), 121-138.
- Al Rawaf, H. S., & Simmons, C. (1991). The education of women in Saudi Arabia. *Comparative Education*, 27(3), 287-295.
- Alsuwaigh, S. A. (1989). Women in translation: The case of Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 20(1), 67-78.
- Altorki, S. (1977). Family organization and women's power in urban Saudi Arabian society. *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 33(3), 277-287.
- Al-Yousef, H. (2009). 'They know nothing about university – neither of them went': The effect of parents' level of education on their involvement in their daughters' higher education choices. *Compare*, 39(6), 783-798.
- Anderson, L. E. (1994). A new look at an old construct: Cross-cultural adaptation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 18(3), 293-328.
- Andrade, M. S. (2006). International students in English-speaking universities: Adjustment factors. *Journal of Research in International Education*, 5(2), 131-154.
- Arabian Business. (2012). Saudi tribalism lingers for kingdom's settled Bedouin. *Reuters*. Retrieved November 7, 2012 from <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/saudi-tribalism-lingers-for-kingdom-s-settled-bedouin-443047.html>
- Arab News. (2012). <http://www.arabnews.com/saudiarabia>
- Armour, M., Rivaux, S. L., & Bell, H. (2009). Using context to build rigor: Application to two hermeneutic phenomenological studies. *Qualitative Social Work*, 8(1), 101-122.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS]. (2011). *Census. Community profile for the city of Newcastle*. Retrieved October 24, 2012 from <http://profile.id.com.au/newcastle/birthplace>
- Australian Education International [AEI]. (2010). *International Student Survey. Overview Report*. Retrieved April 17, 2012 from https://www.aei.gov.au/research/Publications/Documents/2010_International_Student_Report.pdf
- Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. (2010). *Saudi Arabia country brief*. Retrieved October 9, 2012 from http://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/saudi_arabia/saudi_brief.html
- Australian Human Rights Commission. (2012). *Principles to promote and protect the human rights of international students*. Retrieved October 17, 2012 from http://www.humanrights.gov.au/racial_discrimination/international_students.html
- Baki, R. (2004). Gender-segregated education in Saudi Arabia: Its impact on social norms and the Saudi labour market. *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 12(28). Retrieved February 8, 2011 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v12n28/>

- Barise, A. (2005). Social work with Muslims: Insights from the teachings of Islam. *Critical Social Work*, 6(2). Retrieved September 14, 2011 from <http://www.uwindsor.ca/criticalsocialwork>
- Black, J. S. (1992). Coming home: The relationship of expatriate expectations with repatriation adjustment and job performance. *Human Relations*, 45(2), 177-192.
- Black, J. S., & Gregersen, H. B. (1991). When Yankee comes home: Factors related to expatriate and spouse repatriation adjustment. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 22(4), 671-694.
- Black, J. S., Gregersen, H. B., & Mendenhall, M. E. (1992). Toward a theoretical framework of repatriation adjustment. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 23(4), 737-760.
- Black, J. S., & Mendenhall, M. E. (1990). Cross-cultural training effectiveness: A review and theoretical framework for future research. *Academy of Management Review*, 15(1), 113-136.
- Bontempo, R., Lobel, S., & Triandis, H. C. (1990). Compliance and value internalization in Brazil and United States: Effects of allocentrism and anonymity. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 21(2), 200-213.
- Brabant, S., Palmer, E. C., & Grambling, R. (1990). Returning home: An empirical investigation of cross-cultural re-entry. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 14(4), 387-404.
- Brein, M., & David, K. H. (1971). Intercultural communication and adjustment of the sojourner. *Psychological Bulletin*, 76(3), 215-230.
- Briguglio, C. (1998). *Non-English speaking background students' perceptions of their linguistic and educational need*. Perth, WA: Equity Project Report, Curtin University of Technology.
- Brislin, R. W., Lonner, W. J., & Thorndike, R. M. (1973). *Cross-cultural research methods*. New York: John Wiley & Sons.
- Brodsky, A. E., & Faryal, T. (2006). No matter how hard you try, your feet still get wet: Insider and outsider perspectives on bridging diversity. *American Journal of Community Psychology*, 37(3/4), 311-320.
- Brooks, G. (2008). *Nine parts of desire: The hidden world of Islamic women*. Sydney: Bantam.
- Bryman, A., & Burgess, R. G. (1994). Developments in qualitative data analysis: An introduction. In A. Bryman & R.G. Burgess (Eds.), *Analyzing qualitative data* (pp. 1-18). London: Routledge.
- Butcher, A. (2002). A grief observed: Grief experiences of East Asian international students returning to their countries of origin. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 6(4), 354-368.
- Calvert, J. R., & Al-Shetaiwi, A. S. (2002). Exploring the mismatch between skills and jobs for women in Saudi Arabia in technical and vocational areas: The views of Saudi Arabian private sector managers. *International Journal of Training and Development*, 6(2), 112-124.
- Chejne, A. G. (1965). Arabic: Its significance and place in Arab-Muslim society. *The Middle East Journal*, 19(4), 447-470.

- Christofi, V., & Thompson, C. L. (2007). You cannot go home again: A phenomenological investigation of returning to the sojourn country after studying abroad. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 85(1), 53-63.
- Church, A. (1982). Sojourner adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 91(3), 540-571.
- Church, AT., Katigbak, M., Ortiz, F., del Prado, A., de Jesus Vargas-Flores, J., Ibanez-Reyes, J., Reyes, JA., Pe-Pua, R., & Cabrera, H. (2005). Investigating trait theories in cross-cultural psychology. *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, 36(4), 476-496.
- CIA World Fact Book. (2011, July 12). *Saudi Arabia population*. Retrieved March 23, 2012 from http://www.indexmundi.com/saudi_arabia/population.html
- CIA World Fact Book. (2012, July 4). *Saudi Arabia economy overview*. Retrieved October 3, 2012 from http://www.indexmundi.com/saudi_arabia/economy_overview.html
- Cordesman, A. H. (1984). *The Gulf and the search for strategic stability*. Boulder, Colorado: Westview Press.
- Corey, J. R. (1979). Culture shock in reverse. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 48.
- Cox, B. J. (2004). The role of communication, technology, and cultural identity in repatriation adjustment. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 28(3-4), 201-219.
- Crawford, F. (1997). No continuing city: A postmodern story of social work. *Australian Social Work*, 50(1), 23-30.
- Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Quality inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. W. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dandy, J., & Pe-Pua, R. (2010). Attitudes to multiculturalism, immigration and cultural diversity: Comparison of dominant and non-dominant groups in three Australian states. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(1), 34-46.
- Dunn, K., Forrest, J., Pe-Pua, R., Hynes M., & Maeder-Han, K. (2009). Cities of race hatred? The spheres of racism and anti-racism in contemporary Australian cities. *Cosmopolitan Civil Societies: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, 1(1), 1-14.
- Donohoue Clyne, I. (2001). *Finding common ground: Cross cultural research in the Muslim community*. Paper presented at the AARE International Research Conference, Fremantle. Retrieved July 6, 2011 from <http://www.aare.edu.au/01pap/don01569.htm>
- Doumato, E. A. (1999). Women and work in Saudi Arabia: How flexible are Islamic margins? *The Middle East Journal*, 53(4), 568-583.
- Doumato, E. A. (2010, July 8). Tribes and tribalism: Saudi Arabian peninsula. In *The Gale Encyclopaedia of the Mideast and North Africa*. Retrieved March 23, 2012 from www.answers.com/topic/tribes-andtribalism-arabian-peninsula-4
- Dwairy, M. (1999). Toward psycho-cultural approach in Middle Eastern societies. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 19(8), 909-915.

- Enloe, W., & Lewin, P. (1987). Issues of integration abroad and readjustment to Japan of Japanese returnees. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 11(3), 223-248.
- Fernea, E. (1986). Women and family in development plans in the Arab East. *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 21, 81-88.
- Fernea, E. (2000). The challenges for Middle Eastern women in 21st century. *The Middle East Journal*, 54(2), 185-193.
- Foley, S. (2010). All I want is equality with girls: Gender and social change in the twenty-first century Gulf. *Middle East Review of International Affairs*, 14(1), 21-37.
- Furnham, A., & Bochner, S. (1982). Social difficulty in a foreign culture: An empirical analysis of culture shock. In S. Bochner (Ed.), *Cultures in contact: Studies in cross cultural interaction* (pp.161-198). New York, NY: Pergamon Press.
- Furnham, A., & Bochner, S. (1986). *Culture shock: Psychological reactions to unfamiliar environments*. New York: Methuen.
- Gama, E. M. P., & Pedersen, P. (1977). Readjustment problems of Brazilian returnees from graduate studies in the United States. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 1(4), 46-59.
- Gauntlett, K. (2005). The challenges of understanding the academic expectations of Gulf sponsored students. *Post-Script*, 6(1), 36-50.
- Gaw, K. J. (2000). Reverse culture shock in students returning from overseas. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 24(1), 83-104.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures: Selected essays*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gendera, S., Pe-Pua, R., & Katz, I. (2012). Social cohesion and social capital: The experience of Australian Muslim families in two communities. In F Mansouri & V. Marotta (Eds.), *Muslims in the West and the Challenges of Belonging* (pp. 89-113). Melbourne: Melbourne University Press.
- Gilgun, J. F. (2006). The four cornerstones of qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 16(3), 436-443.
- Glesne, C., & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, N.Y: Longman.
- Gold, D. (2003). *Hatred's kingdom: How Saudi Arabia supports the new global terrorism*. Washington, D.C: Regnery Pub.
- Graham, M. J. (1999). The African-centred worldview: Developing a paradigm for social work. *British Journal of Social Work*, 29(2), 251-267.
- Gray, M., & Coates, J. (2008). From 'Indigenization' to cultural relevance. In M. Gray, J. Coates & M. Yellow Bird (Eds.), *Indigenous social work around the world* (pp. 13-29). England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Gray, M., Coates, J., & Yellow Bird, M. (2008). Towards an understanding of Indigenous social work. In M. Gray, J. Coates & M. Yellow Bird (Eds.), *Indigenous social work around the world* (pp. 49-58). England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Gregersen, H. B., & Stroh, L.K. (1997). Coming home to the Arctic cold: Antecedents to Finnish expatriate and spouse repatriation adjustment. *Personnel Psychology*, 50(3), 635-654.

- Gresham, R., & Clayton, V. (2011). *Community Connections: A programme to enhance domestic and international students' educational experience. Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 33(4), 363-374.
- Gross, G. D. (2000). Gatekeeping for cultural competence: Ready or not? Some post and modernist doubts. *Journal of Baccalaureate Social Work*, 5(2), 47-66.
- Gullahorn, J. T., & Gullahorn, J. E. (1963). An extension of the U-curve hypothesis. *Journal of Social Issues*, 19(3), 33-47.
- Hammer, M. R., Hart, W., and Rogan, R. (1998). Can you go home again? An analysis of the repatriation of corporate managers and spouses. *Management International Review*, 38(1), 67-86.
- Hanley, D. C. (2010). Human rights: Speaker addresses misconceptions about Saudi women. In, *Status of Women in Saudi Arabia symposium*. Symposium conducted at the meeting of The Middle East Institute, Washington, DC. Retrieved April 11, 2011 from <http://www.wrmea.org/wrmea-archives/346-washington-report-archives-2006-2010-january-february>
- Hart, I., & Poole, G. D. (1995). Individualism and collectivism as considerations in cross-cultural health research. *Journal of Social Psychology*, 135(1), 97-99.
- He, Ming Fang. (2002). A narrative inquiry of cross cultural lives: Lives in China. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 34(3), 301-321.
- Heaton, T. B. (1996). Socioeconomic and familial status of women associated with age at first marriage in three Islamic countries. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 27(1), 41-52.
- Hofstede, Geert. H. (1984). *Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values*. Beverly Hills, CALIF: Sage.
- Hofstede, Geert. H. (1986). Cultural differences in teaching and learning. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10(3), 301-320.
- Hofstede, Geert. H. (2005). *Cultures and organizations: Software of the mind*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co.
- Hofstede, Gert. Jan., Pedersen, P. B., & Hofstede, Geert. H. (2002). *Exploring culture: Exercises stories and synthetic cultures*. Boston, NY: Intercultural Press Inc.
- Holtzhausen, L. (2011). When values collide: Finding common ground for social work education in the United Arab Emirates. *International Social Work*, 54(2), 191-208.
- Hoshino, A., & Niikura, R. (1983). The views of teachers on specialized education for overseas returnees. *Bulletin of the Center for Education of Children Overseas*, 2, 21-54.
- Howard, C. G. (1980). The expatriate manager and the role of the MNC. *Personnel Journal*, 59(10), 838-844.
- Hui, C. H., & Triandis, H. C. (1986). Individualism – collectivism: A study of cross-cultural researchers. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 17(2), 225-248.
- Hui, C. H., & Villareal, M. J. (1989). Individualism-collectivism and psychological needs: Their relationships in two cultures. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 20(3), 310-323.

- Hull, W. F. (1978). *Foreign students in the United States of America: Coping behaviour within the educational environment*. New York: Praeger.
- Jamjoon, M. I. (2010). Female Islamic studies teachers in Saudi Arabia: A phenomenological study. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 26(3), 547-558.
- Kapiszewski, A. (2006). Saudi Arabia: Steps toward democratization or reconfiguration of authoritarianism? *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, 41(5-6), 459-482.
- Kendall, D. W. (1981). Repatriation: An ending and a beginning. *Business Horizons*, 24(6), 21-25.
- Kidder, L. H. (1992). Requirements for being 'Japanese' stories of returnees. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 16(4), 383-393.
- Kim, Y. Y. (2001). *Becoming intercultural: An integrative theory of communication and cross-cultural adaptation*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Kingdom of Saudi Arabia Ministry of Economy and Planning. (2005). *The eighth development plan 2005-2009*. Retrieved December 2, 2011 from http://planipolis.iiep.unesco.org/upload/Saudi%20Arabia/Saudi_Arabia_Eighth_Development_Plan.pdf
- Klaff, L. G. (2002). The right way to bring expats home. *Workforce*, 81(7), 40-45.
- Klineberg, O., & Hull, W. F. (1979). *At a foreign university: An international study of adaptation and coping*. New York: Praeger.
- Knafl, K. A., & Howard, M. J. (1984). Interpreting and reporting qualitative research. *Research in Nursing and Health*, 7, 17-24.
- Koehne, N. (2005). (Re)construction: Ways international students talk about their identity. *Australian Journal of Education*, 49(1), 104-119.
- Koerber, A., & McMichael, L. (2008). Qualitative sampling methods: A primer for technical communicators. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 22(4), 454-473.
- Koolmees, J. (2004). *Finding a life in Saudi Arabia: My desert kingdom*. North Sydney, NSW: Bantam Australia and New Zealand, Transworld Publishers.
- Lempert, L. B. (2007). Cross-race, cross-culture, cross-national, cross-class, but same gender: Musings on research in South Africa. *NWSA Journal*, 19(2), 79-103.
- Le Renard, A. (2008). 'Only for women': Women, the state, and reform in Saudi Arabia. *The Middle East Journal*, 62(4), 610-629.
- Li, S., & Seale, C. (2007). Learning to do qualitative data analysis: An observational study of doctoral work. *Qualitative Health Research*, 17(10), 1442-1452.
- Liamputtong, P. (2009). *Qualitative research methods*. Melbourne, Australia: Oxford University Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverley Hills, CA: Sage Publications.
- Linehan, M., & Scullion, H. (2002). The repatriation of female international managers: An empirical study. *International Journal of Manpower*, 23(7), 649 -658.

- Ling, H. K. (2008). The development of culturally appropriate social work practice in Sarawak, Malaysia. In M. Gray, J. Coates & M. Yellow Bird (Eds.), *Indigenous social work around the world* (pp. 97-106). England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Lysgaard, S. (1955). Adjustment in a foreign society: Norwegian Fulbright grantees visiting the United States. *International Social Science Bulletin*, 7, 45-51.
- Marais, L., & Marais, L. C. (2007). Walking between worlds: An exploration of the interface between indigenous and first-world industrialized culture. *International Social Work*, 50(6), 809-820.
- Marginson, S., Nyland, C., Sawir, E., & Forbes-Mewett, H. (2010). *International student security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Martin, J. N. (1984). The intercultural reentry: Conceptualization and directions for future research. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 8(2), 115-134.
- Martin, J. N. (1986). Communication in the intercultural reentry: Student sojourners' perceptions of change in reentry relationship. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10(1), 1-22.
- Martin, J. N., & Harrell, T. (2004). Intercultural re-entry of students and professionals: Theory and practice. In D. Landis & R. S. Bhagat (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training* (pp. 307-326). New York: Pergamon Press.
- Maskalyk, J. (2009). *Six months in Sudan*. Australia: Bantam Random House.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2002). Understanding and validity in qualitative research. In A. M. Huberman, & M. B. Miles (Eds.), *The qualitative researcher's companion* (pp. 36-57). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Meleis, A. I. (1982). Arab students in Western Universities: Social properties and dilemmas. *The Journal of Higher Education*, 53(4), 439-447.
- Midgely, W. (2009). *When we are at uni our minds are at home: Saudi students worrying about wives*. Paper presented at the ISANA 20th International Education conference, Canberra. Retrieved April 12, 2011 from <http://www.proceedings.com.au/isana/2009.html>
- Minoura, Y. (1988). The psychological reorganization of overseas experience after returning to Japan: A symbolic interactionist approach to returnees. *Shakai Shinrigaku Kenkyuu [Journal of Social Psychology]*, 3(2), 3-11.
- Moaddel, M. (2006). The Saudi public speaks: Religion, gender, and politics. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 38(1), 79-108.
- Moghadam, V. M. (1993). *Modernizing women: Gender and social change in the Middle East*. Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Moghadam, V. M. (2004). Patriarchy in transition: Women and the changing family in the Middle East. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 35(2), 137-163.
- Montagu, C. (2010). Civil society and the voluntary sector in Saudi Arabia. *The Middle East Journal*, 64(1), 68-83.

- Nimmagadda, J., & Martell, D. R. (2008). Home-made social work: The two-way transfer of social work practice knowledge between India and USA. In M. Gray, J. Coates & M. Yellow Bird (Eds.), *Indigenous social work around the world* (pp. 141-152). England: Ashgate Publishing Limited.
- Oberg, K. (1960). Culture shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropologist*, 7, 177-182.
- Ochsenwald, W. (1981). Saudi Arabia and the Islamic revival. *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 13(3), 271-286.
- Okruhlik, G. (2003). Making conversation permissible. In Q. Wiktorowicz (Ed.), *Islamic activism: A social movement theory approach* (pp. 250-269) Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- Owens, A. R., & Loomes, S. L. (2010). Managing and resourcing a program of social integration initiatives for international university students: what are the benefits? *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 32(3), 275-290.
- Padgett, D. K. (1998). Does the glove really fit? Qualitative research and clinical social work practice. *Social Work*, 43(4), 373-381.
- Padgett, D. K. (2009). Qualitative and mixed methods in social work knowledge development. *Social Work*, 54(2), 101-105.
- Palley, M. L. (1991). Women's rights as human rights: An international perspective. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 515, 163-178.
- Park, Y. (2005). Culture as deficit: A critical discourse analysis of the concept of culture in contemporary social work discourse. *Journal of Sociology and Social Welfare*, 32(3), 11-33.
- Patton, M. Q. (1990). Qualitative analysis and interpretation. In M. Q. Patton (Ed.), *Qualitative evaluation and research methods* (pp. 371-437). London: Sage.
- Perrucci, R., & Hu, H. (1995). Satisfaction with social and educational experiences among international graduate students. *Research in Higher Education*, 36(4), 491-508.
- Peshkin, A. (1982). The researcher and subjectivity: Reflections on an ethnography of school and community. In G.D. Spindler (Ed.), *Doing the ethnology of schooling: Educational anthropology in action* (pp. 47-67). Prospect Heights USA: Waveland Press.
- Pharaon, N. A. (2004). Saudi women and the Muslim state in the twenty-first century. *Sex Roles*, 51(5/6), 349-366.
- Pon, G. (2009). Cultural competency as new racism: An ontology of forgetting. *Journal of Progressive Human Services*, 20(1), 59-71.
- Pozatek, E. (1994). The problem of certainty: Clinical social work in the postmodern era. *Social Work*, 39(4), 396-403.
- Pritchard, R. (2011). Re-entry trauma: Asian re-integration after study in the West. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 15(1), 93-111.
- Qur'an: 4: 129.
- Ripmeester, N. (2005). Handle with care. *Graduate Recruiter*, 22, 25.

- Rizzo, H., Meyer, K., & Ali, Y. (2002). Women's political rights: Islam, status and networks in Kuwait. *Sociology*, 36(3), 639-662.
- Rogers, J., & Ward, C. (1993). Expectation-experience discrepancies and psychological adjustment during cross-cultural re-entry. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 17(2), 185-196.
- Rohrlich, B. F., & Martin, J. N. (1991). Host country and reentry adjustment of student sojourners. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 15(2), 163-182.
- Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia in Washington, DC. (2007). *Saudi Arabia: History of a civilisation*. Retrieved September 5, 2012 from <http://www.saudiembassy.net/about/country-information/history.aspx>
- Rubin, A. (2000). Standards for rigor in qualitative inquiry. *Research on Social Work Practice*, 10(2), 173-178.
- Rubin, H. J., & Rubin, J. S. (1995). *Qualitative interviewing: The art of hearing data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Rugh, W. (1973). Emergence of a new middle class in Saudi Arabia. *The Middle East Journal*, 27(1), 7-20.
- Saudi Gazette. (2012, February 5). King Abdullah, Leader of Consequence. *Saudi Gazette*. Retrieved January 16, 2013 from <http://www.regionalinterfaith.org.au/home/worldwide-news/642-king-abdullah-leader-of-consequence.html>
- Saudi Gazette. (2012). <http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/>
- Scharpf, E. (2007). All the king's feminists: Saudi Arabian women in elected office for the first time. *Women's Policy Journal*, 4, 49-58.
- Schuetz, A. (1945). The homecomer. *The American Journal of Sociology*, 50(5), 369-376.
- Schvaneveldt, P. L., Kerpelman, J. L., & Schvaneveldt, J. D. (2005). Generational and cultural changes in family life in the United Arab Emirates: A comparison of mothers and daughters. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 36(1), 77-91.
- Severiens, S., & Wolff, R. (2008). A comparison of ethnic minority and majority students: Social and academic integration and quality of learning. *Studies in Higher Education*, 33(3), 253-266.
- Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). *Interpretative phenomenological analysis*. London: Sage.
- Somers, P., & Caram, A. (1998). Veiled delusions: Gender, education and employment in Saudi Arabia. *Initiatives*, 58(4), 49-58.
- Sonleiter, N., & Khelifa, M. (2005). Western – educated faculty challenges in a Gulf classroom. *Learning and Teaching in Higher Education: Gulf Perspectives*, 2(1), 1-21.
- Sowers-Hoag, K., & Sandau-Beckler, P. (1996). Educating for cultural competence in the generalist curriculum. *Journal of Multicultural Social Work*, 4(3), 37-54.
- Storti, C. (1990). *The art of crossing cultures*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press Inc.
- Storti, C. (2001). *The art of coming home*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, Inc.

- Sundar, P., Sylvestre, J., & Bassi, A. (2013). Diversity and social work practice. In M. Gray, J. Midgley & S.A. Webb (Eds.), *Sage handbook of social work* (pp. 355-371). London: Sage.
- Sussman, N. M. (1986). Re-entry research and training: Methods and implications. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10(2), 235-254.
- Sussman, N. M. (2000). The dynamic nature of cultural identity throughout cultural transitions: Why home is not so sweet. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 4(4), 355-373.
- Sussman, N. M. (2001). Repatriation transitions: Psychological preparedness, cultural identity, and attributions among American managers. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 25(2), 109-123.
- Sussman, N. M. (2002). Testing the cultural identity model of the cultural transitions cycle: Sojourners return home. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 26(4), 391-408.
- Sussman, N. M. (2011). *Return migration and identity*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
- Sydney Morning Herald. (2005, August 1). Saudi's King Fahd dies. *The Sydney Morning Herald*. Retrieved January 16, 2013 from <http://www.smh.com.au/news/world/saudis-king-fahd-dies/2005/08/01/1122748572035.html>
- Szkudlarek, B. (2008). *Spinning the web of re-entry [Re]connecting re-entry training theory and practice* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). Erasmus University, Rotterdam.
- Szkudlarek, B. (2010). Re-entry: A literature review. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 34(1), 1-21.
- Teitelbaum, J. (2002). Dueling for *da'wa*: State vs. society on the Saudi internet. *The Middle East Journal*, 56(2), 222-239.
- Teitelbaum, J. (2010). The Shi'ties of Saudi Arabia. *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, 10, 72-86. Retrieved August 9, 2011 from <http://www.currenttrends.org>
- Tetsuo, M. (2007). *The sojourner community: Japanese migration and residency in Australia*. Boston, MA: Brill.
- Thompson, C. L., & Christofi, V. (2006). Can you go home again? A phenomenological investigation of Cypriot students returning home after studying abroad. *International Journal for the Advancement of Counselling*, 28(1), 21-39.
- Todd, P., & Nesdale, D. (1997). Promoting intercultural contact between Australian and international university students. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 19(1), 61-76.
- Triandis, H. C. (1972). *The analysis of subjective culture*. New York: Wiley-Interscience.
- Triandis, H. C. (1984). A theoretical framework for the more efficient construction of culture assimilators. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 8(3), 301-330.
- Triandis, H. C. (1989). The self and social behavior in differing cultural contexts. *The Psychological Review*, 96(3), 506-520.
- Triandis, H. C., Bontempo, R., Villareal, M. J., Asai, M., & Lucca, N. (1988). Individualism and collectivism: Cross-cultural perspective on self-ingroup relationships. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 54(2), 323-338.

- Triandis, H. C., Brislin, R., & Hui, C. H. (1988). Cross-cultural training across the individualism-collectivism divide. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 12(3), 269-289.
- Triandis, H. C., Marín, G., Lisansky, J., & Betancourt, H. (1984). *Simpatía* as a cultural script of Hispanics. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 47(6), 1363-1375.
- Triandis, H. C., McCusker, C., & Hui, C. H. (1990). Multimethod probes of individualism and collectivism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 59(5), 1006-1020.
- Uehara, A. (1986). The nature of American student re-entry adjustment and perceptions of the student experience. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 10(4), 415-438.
- Universities Australia. (2011). *International Student Barometer Project – National Report*. Retrieved May 16, 2012 from <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/isb>
- Volet, S. E., & Ang, G. (1998). Culturally mixed groups on international campuses: An opportunity for inter-cultural learning. *Higher Education Research and Development*, 17(1), 5-23.
- Ward, C. (2001). *The impact of international students on domestic students and host institutions*. Report prepared for the Export Education Policy Project of the New Zealand Ministry of Education. Retrieved September 18, 2012 from http://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/international/the_impact_of_international_students_on_domestic_students_and_host_institutions
- Ward, C., Masgoret, A., & Gezentsvey, M. (2009). Investigating attitudes toward international students: Program and policy implications for social integration and international education. *Social Issues and Policy Review*, 3(1), 79-102.
- Westwood, M. J., & Barker, M. (1990). Academic achievement and social adaptation among international students: A comparison groups study of the peer-pairing programme. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 14(2), 251-263.
- Westwood, R. I., & Leung, S. M. (1994). The female expatriate manager experience: Coping with gender and culture. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, 24(3), 64-76.
- Whittemore, R., Chase, S. K., & Mandle, C. L. (2001). Validity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 11(4), 522-537.
- Yamani, M. A. Z. (2008). Polygamy and law in contemporary Saudi Arabia. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 6(1), 134-137.
- Yon, D. (2000). *Elusive culture: Schooling, race, and identity in global times*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- Yoshida, T., Matsumoto, D., Akiyama, T., Moriyoshi, N., Furuiye, A., Ishii, C., & Franklin, B. (2002). The Japanese returnee experience: Factors that affect re-entry. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 26(4), 429-445.
- Yoshida, T., Matsumoto, D., Akiyama, T., Moriyoshi, N., Furuiye, A., & Ishii, C. (2003). Peers' perceptions of Japanese returnees. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 27(6), 641-658.

- Zhang, Z., & Brunton, M. (2007). Differences in living and learning: Chinese international students in New Zealand. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 11(2), 124-140.
- Zinn, M. B. (1979). Field research in minority communities: Ethical methodological and political observations by an insider. *Social Problems*, 27(2), 209–219.

Appendix 1

Interview schedule



Interview 1

Q. 1: Can you tell me about your studies at the University of Newcastle?

Probe: How did you come to choose Newcastle for your studies?

Has it been a good choice? Why / why not?

Q. 2: Can you tell me about your life in Newcastle?

Probe: What are some of the things you enjoy doing here?

What things do you do here that you do not do back in Saudi Arabia?

Have you made Australian friends? Please tell me about them.

What are the main differences between friendships in Australia and Saudi

Arabia?

Q. 3: Can you tell me about your career in Saudi Arabia prior to coming to Australia?

Probe: What is working in Saudi Arabia like for a woman?

What are some of the challenges you face as a professional person?

How are these challenges different for women in Australia?

Q. 4: Do you think you have changed since you came to Australia?

Probe: In what ways?

How do you feel about these changes?

How will this impact your life after you return home?

Do you think your family and friends will notice these changes when you return home?

How will they feel about them?

Interview 2

Q. 5: Can you tell me about your plans / preparations for returning home?

Probe: How are you feeling about returning home?

How are you feeling about leaving Australia?

Q. 6: Can you tell me what you envisage you will do in the first few weeks after your return?

Q. 7: What do you think has been your biggest achievement since coming to Australia, apart from successfully completing your academic programme?

Probe: How will you use this achievement when you return home?

How do you see yourself in the future?

What are your personal goals?

What are your professional goals?

Q. 8: What will you do differently in your professional life as a result of being in Australia?

Probe: How will you make this happen?

Interview 3

Q. 9: Please tell me about the first week after you returned home.

Probe: How useful were your plans for returning home?

What other plans / preparations would have been useful to you?

In what ways were your expectations about returning home met?

Did you have expectations that were not met? Please tell me about them.

Q. 10: Please tell me how your family and friends have reacted to your return?

Probe: How have your relationships changed?

How do you feel about this?

Q. 11: What challenges have you faced professionally?

Probe: How have you overcome these?

What has assisted you to do this?

Q. 12: You told me in a previous interview that your greatest achievement in Australia had been
XXX. Is this still true?

Probe: Please tell me more about this.

Q.13: What are your hopes for the future?

Probe: How do you see yourself one year from now?

What would you say to other women who are about to go overseas to study?

What is your lasting memory of Australia?

Appendix 2

Consent form



FACULTY EDUCATION AND ARTS

Professor Mel Gray
Professor of Social Work and Research Professor
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Faculty of Education and Arts
General Purpose Building
Tel: 4921 7322
Mel.Gray@newcastle.edu.au

Consent Form for the Research Project:

The homecoming experiences of female Saudi Arabian international students

Professor Mel Gray

Dr Jill Gibbons

Ms Ruth Gresham

I agree to participate in the above research project and give my consent freely.

I understand that the project will be conducted as described in the Information Statement, a copy of which I have retained.

I understand I can withdraw from the project at any time and do not have to give any reason for withdrawing.

I consent to participating in a series of three interviews and having them recorded.

I understand that my personal information will remain confidential to the researchers.

I have had the opportunity to have questions answered to my satisfaction.

Print Name:

Contact Details:

Signature:

Date:

Appendix 3

Information statement



Professor Mel Gray
School of Humanities and Social Sciences
Faculty of Education and Arts
General Purpose Building
Tel: 4921 7322
Fax: 4921 7818
Mel.Gray@newcastle.edu.au

Information Statement for the Research Project:

The homecoming experiences of female Saudi Arabian international students

Document Version 2; dated 24 / 01 / 2011

You are invited to participate in the research project identified above which is being conducted by Ruth Gresham, a Masters student in the School of Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Newcastle, under the supervision of Professor Mel Gray.

You have been identified through the University of Newcastle's Student Records System as a potential participant for this research. Contact concerning this research has been made with you either through the International Student Advisor (Scholarships) or the Community Liaison Officer for Middle Eastern students.

Why is the research being done?

The purpose of the research is to better understand the re-entry experiences of Saudi Arabian women, who have been studying at the University of Newcastle. Information that we gather through this study will be used to develop programmes and support for Saudi Arabian women prior to, and after returning home. To date there has been very limited research conducted around Saudi Arabian

students, despite the significant numbers who are currently studying in Australia and overseas. Further, literature shows that the issue of re-entry of international sojourners, whether they are students, volunteers or professional employees, is largely under-researched. This is a very important issue, as the re-entry process determines how international students adapt and adjust personally and professionally after living overseas. For this university to be able to contribute to the body of knowledge in this area, and to identify key steps in the process to ensure a positive experience for returning international students will be a valuable outcome for students and the institution.

Who can participate in the research?

We are seeking female Saudi Arabian students who are within 6-9 months of completing their studies at the University of Newcastle who are completing postgraduate programmes.

What choice do you have?

Participation in this research is entirely your choice. Only those people who give their informed consent will be included in the project. Whether or not you decide to participate, your decision will not disadvantage you. If you do decide to participate, you may withdraw from the project at any time without giving a reason and have the option of withdrawing any data which identifies you. **A decision not to participate, or to withdraw from the research, will not negatively affect your relationship with the Muslim Women's Group or the University of Newcastle.**

What would you be asked to do?

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to discuss your experiences during three separate interviews. Each interview will be conducted on a one-on one basis. The first two interviews will be conducted face to face with the researcher in Newcastle, and the third interview will be by telephone after you have completed your studies and returned home.

During the interviews, you will be asked about your experiences of studying and living in Australia and your expectations about and preparations for, returning home. During the third interview, you will be asked about your re-adjustment experiences and invited to provide suggestions for making this transition easier for other graduates who will follow.

How much time will it take?

Each interview will take approximately one hour. During the face to face interviews in Newcastle, I will provide refreshments to acknowledge the time you are providing for this project.

What are the risks and benefits of participating?

We cannot promise you any benefit from participating in this research, however, the opportunity to talk about and plan for your departure at the completion of your studies, may be of personal benefit. By learning more about the re-entry experiences of Saudi Arabian women, we will be able to ensure, to some extent that you (and those who will follow) will receive adequate and appropriate tailored preparation and support to return home to optimise your experience of studying in Australia. This

study will identify types and extent of interventions that are required to prepare and support students through repatriation.

Should you find the interview(s) upsetting or distressing, you may stop the interview(s) at any time. You will be provided with the telephone numbers of the University of Newcastle Counselling Service and the International Office (Student Support).

How will your privacy be protected?

Any information collected by the researchers which may identify you will be stored securely and only accessed by the researchers, except as required by Australian law. (This would require the researchers to report a crime under Australian law). Any information that personally identifies you will be removed from transcripts, and both electronic and hard copies of the data will be coded. A master list of participant codes will be kept separately from the data and consent forms.

During the active phase of the research consent forms and hard copies of data will be held on the premises of the University of Newcastle, secured in a locked filing cabinet in the student researcher's office. The master list of participant codes will be secured in the researcher's office, but in a separate locked cabinet. Electronic files will be password protected and identifiable only by the participant's code number. Data will be stored on a secure network. **The researcher will be responsible for transcription of the interview data.**

Once the research is completed, the forms and data will be secured at the University for a period of five years after publication of study results. After five years all electronic records will be deleted and hard copies of data and consent forms will be shredded.

Information which might identify participants will not be disclosed without your prior consent.

How will the information collected be used?

The data will be used in a thesis to be submitted for Ms Gresham's degree and may also be published in journals, and may be presented at conferences. Individual participants will not be identified in any reports arising from the research. As audio taping will be used for this study, you will be able to review the recording and / or transcripts to edit or erase your contribution. For your participation, you will be entitled to a summary of the study's results. **If you wish to obtain a copy of the summary of the research, you may do so by emailing the researcher directly. A copy of the results will be sent to you either as an email attachment or in hard copy.**

What do you need to do to participate?

Please read this Information Statement and be sure you understand its contents before you consent to participate. If there is anything you do not understand, or you have questions, contact the researcher. If you would like to participate, please reply to the email message that is attached to this Information Statement. I will then contact you to arrange a time convenient to you for the interview.

Thank you for considering this invitation.

Further information

If you would like further information please contact:

Ms Ruth Gresham

Tel: 4921 5767

Email: Ruth.Gresham@newcastle.edu.au

OR

Professor Mel Gray

Tel: 4921 7322

Email: Mel.Gray@newcastle.edu.au

Supervisors

Professor Mel Gray and Dr Jill Gibbons (Conjoint)

School of Humanities and Social Science

Complaints about this research

This project has been approved by the University's Human Research Ethics Committee, Approval No. H – 2010-13311.

Should you have concerns about your rights as a participant in this research, or you have a complaint about the manner in which the research is conducted, it may be given to the researcher, or, if an independent person is preferred, to the Human Research Ethics Officer, Research Office, The Chancellery, The University of Newcastle, University Drive, Callaghan NSW 2308, Australia, telephone (02)49216333, email Human-Ethics@newcastle.edu.au.

APPENDIX 4

Glossary

Abaya	Clothing worn by Muslim women
Amir	Official person
Empty Quarter	Area of vast desert
Hadith	Prophet's speeches
Halal	Permitted under Islam
Iftar	Breaking of the fast during Ramadhan
Ired	A woman's chastity and honour
Khadiri	Non-tribal people
Muttawa	Holy man, community sources of religious scholarship or teachers of religion, often used to refer to the religious police
Niqab	A cloth that veils the face to varying degrees from the bridge of the nose downward
Qabila, Qabili	Tribe; tribal people
Ramadhan	Islamic month of fasting
Saudization	Process of replacing foreigners with indigenous workers
Shari'a	Islamic law
Sunna	Words, habits and practices that denote the practices of Prophet Muhammad
Shi'a, Sunni	Forms of Islam
Shi'ite, Sunni	People who follow either the Shi'a or Sunni form of Islam
Ulama	Religious scholars
Wahhabi, Wahhabism	Form of Islam practised in Saudi Arabia
Wasta	Influence, often due to family connections

