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AN EXPLORATION OF WOMEN'S GROUPS AS A TOOL OF EMPOWERMENT FOR MUSLIM WOMEN IN SOUTH AFRICA

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A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of Humanities, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role women's groups play in the lives of 10 Muslim women in South Africa. A qualitative methodology was employed to gain information from two women's groups in Johannesburg. An open-ended questionnaire, focus groups, and individual interviews were used to elicit information. The data were initially analysed using a computer-based content analysis programme (Atlas-ti), to identify a priori and emergent themes and categories in the data. These themes and categories were then used as the basis for a qualitative interpretive analysis, focused in particular on issues of empowerment with respect to psychological, community, economic, intellectual and political empowerment, and more specifically on gender equality. The study would thus suggest that while these groups do have many positive outcomes, the issues dealt with in women's groups cannot be isolated from the broader social context in which Muslim women live. While the processes of empowerment appear to have begun in areas of psychological, community, intellectual, economic and political empowerment in this sample of women, empowerment with respect to gender equality still seems far off.

Community empowerment, economic empowerment, empowerment, gender equality, intellectual empowerment, Muslim women, political empowerment, psychological empowerment, women's groups

DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

_____

_____day of _____200__

To My Wonderful Parents, my first source of knowledge:

For all you are, for all you do, all you've taught me, all the sacrifices and all that's still to come...

Thank You for Everything

May you be rewarded abundantly!

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CHAPTER 1 - *INTRODUCTION*

"Always begin with the end in mind" (Steven Covey)

1.1. Aims of the study

This is a study about Muslim women conducted by a Muslim woman. The aim of the study is to investigate pertinent issues that Muslim women in South Africa have to deal with and how these issues fit in with issues faced by other Muslim women across the globe.

Thus, the main aims of this study are to explore the current situation of Muslim women in South Africa by getting insights from Muslim women who are directly involved with the broader Muslim community, through their involvement in community women's groups.

This study focuses on a limited number of Muslim women and through their experiences it is intended to highlight issues relating to empowerment and gender equality.

1.2. Rationale of the study

The South African context is a unique one, which is supposedly more open and susceptible to the process of empowerment, specifically women's empowerment. Gender equality and women's empowerment have been regarded as one of the main objectives of the post-apartheid government. In the year 2000 *South Africa's National Policy Framework for Women's Empowerment and Gender Equality*, which is also referred to as *The Gender Policy Framework* was developed by the Office on Women. This policy aimed to address past inequalities by implementing changes at two levels; that is, the "basic (practical) needs" level and the "strategic needs" level. On the basic needs level it intended to focus on improving basic living conditions of women, this included attempts at poverty alleviation. On the strategic needs level, attempts at gender equality in all sectors were discussed, this involved creating equal opportunities for women in business and education for instance (Gender Policy Framework, 2000).

The main aims of the gender policy were thus to ensure that women are treated equally and that sexist attitudes do not prevail. This included all areas of society, including religious, cultural and customary practices. It was emphasised that women's rights be regarded as human rights and that the differences between women be recognised, while the similarities between women should be used to strengthen empowerment initiatives. Furthermore, it was

suggested that affirmative action programmes targeting women be developed and implemented, that economic empowerment of women be promoted and that adequate structures, resources and training which focus on improving the lives of women should be put into place (Gender Policy Framework, 2000).

In 2004 the different provinces developed specific gender policy documents and while it has been acknowledged that many inequalities are still very evident, these policies have highlighted some level of change and aim to make continuous and sustaining efforts to redress these inequalities (Gauteng Provincial Government Gender Policy Framework, 2004; Draft Policy Discussion for Cape Town, 2004).

Despite the fact that many obvious inequalities still do exist and women's empowerment and gender equality are still areas of great concern in South Africa, these active attempts at National and Provincial level are important as it recognises the importance of women's well-being in the society. Through this study it is hoped to provide insights into the empowerment process in South Africa, as it affects the daily lives and work of a small group of Muslim women. More specifically, this study aims to explore whether women's groups are in fact a tool of empowerment, whether they contribute to women's empowerment on psychological, community, political, economic and intellectual levels and if they can act as a vehicle for highlighting the inequalities and disadvantages of women.

1.3. Context of the study

The focus area of this research is Johannesburg, South Africa. The South African Muslim community currently makes up about 2% of the 40 million people in the country (IEOSA, 2006). The history of Islam and Muslims in South Africa can be traced back to the seventeenth century (Cajee, 2003). According to the Islamic Education Organization of South Africa (IEOSA), Muslims arrived in this country by two waves. They were brought to the Cape by the Dutch as exiled slaves and political prisoners from countries such as Batavia, Indonesia, Ceylon, Malaya, the Indo-China region, Japan, Zanzibar and India. The arrival of Muslim workers in Natal later on has been referred to as the second wave of Muslims that entered South Africa. The Muslims brought out from India were brought to South Africa by the British as indentured labourers to work in the sugar fields. At the same time, many Muslims from India entered into the country as merchants and began setting up businesses (Mahida, 1993; Cajee, 2003; Dangor, 2003; IEOSA, 2006). Therefore, under the old

apartheid classification system, most Muslims fell within two racial categories, “Indians” and “Coloureds”, with majority of the “Coloured” or as they are referred to “Malay” Muslims living in Cape Town, and majority of the “Indian” Muslims in Kwazulu-Natal, Gauteng and Mpumalanga (Dangor, 2006).

Vahed (2006), mentions that residential segregation and other social inequalities had mixed consequences for Muslims in South Africa. Residential clustering for instance, allowed Muslims to build Mosques and *Madressahs*[*] in a value friendly environment (Vahed, 2006). In addition, the majority of Muslims had better access to education, health services and capital. In fact, many Muslims managed to generate exceptional wealth and command economic resources (Vahed, 2006; Balem, 2006). Balem (2006) is of the opinion that Asian Muslims at least, managed to navigate a less perilous path than “black” or even “coloured” people in Apartheid South Africa.

As Patel (2006) points out residential clustering made Muslims feel more comfortable to practice Islam freely within their environments, however, it also closed Muslims off from people of other races and cultures and what resulted was very “close knit” Muslim communities. After the demise of Apartheid, Muslims began to leave these closed communities and they now live amongst people of different religions, races and cultures. “Many Muslims believe that their Islamic lifestyles and values were more "protected" during the apartheid era”, because Muslims are now mixing freely with people who have very different lifestyles and value systems as compared to what they are accustomed to. Also, the spirit of “togetherness” and the close community that once existed is now beginning to disintegrate with people moving further away from each other (Patel, 2006).

Since the demise of apartheid, the Muslim community in South Africa has become far more diverse, Islam is spreading to people of other race groups and cultures, in both urban and rural areas (Latif, 2006). In addition, the demise of apartheid has led to many foreign Muslims from other African countries as well as from the Indo-Pak subcontinent entering South Africa (Dawjee cited in *Mathaba*, 2005).

[*] The definition for this and other Arabic terms can be found in the *Glossary of Terms* at the end of this chapter.

The role that Muslim women play in the South African context is perhaps almost as diverse as the context itself. Both Dangor (2001) and Jeenah (2001) have made mention of the fact that the views of Muslim women in South Africa vary, from the more conservative and traditional viewpoints to more modern and liberal ones. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon to hear about Muslim women in South Africa who have been actively involved in social and political struggles. In fact, Muslim women have played an important role in the community for many years.

Nazeer (2002) profiles the life of a Muslim woman who despite many obstacles and restrictions managed to become a Principal of a school (see Appendix A for full article). Amina Goondiwalla managed to receive a high level of education and take up a profession at a time when most Muslim people believed that a standard 5 education was sufficient for a girl. Another such woman is Suraya Hassim, a South African Muslim woman who has been involved in relief and charity work for many years, and who is currently the director of a charity organisation in Johannesburg which is known as Islamic Relief Fund. For Suraya, becoming a leader in society meant that she had to prove herself "in a man's world" and make a lot of sacrifices (Moothoo-Padayachie in Harper, 2004). Similarly Suraiya Nawab is the founding director of a Johannesburg charity and counselling organisation known as Islamic Careline. This organisation is run entirely by women; a point stressed by Suraiya Nawab who strongly believes that Islam is a force that can empower women within their communities, and that women are as capable as men. She strongly asserts that "women will lead Muslim communities in the future in a positive way" (Hadfield, 2005).

These are just some examples of Muslim women within South Africa that have managed to make important contributions in society. However, as Jeenah (2001,p.1) points out, "despite the important community roles women have played, it has only been in the past three decades that the gender roles and the gendered identities as defined by the Muslim community have been seriously questioned, particularly on the basis of Islamic scriptures". Some Muslim women, and men have been actively involved in a struggle against gender apartheid in South Africa, and active attempts have been made and are still continuing in order to change the structures that disempower and discriminate against Muslim women in South Africa.

1.4. The role of the researcher in this study

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is a particularly important one (Ratcliff, 2005). In contrast to the "non-existent" ideal of the quantitative researcher, the qualitative researcher acknowledges that the researcher herself can make important differences in the environment that is being studied. The ideal then, is for the qualitative researcher to document such possible differences and to constantly be aware that she is capable of making differences through direct interaction with the participants.

This role becomes particularly complicated for the researcher, as the lines between 'researcher' and 'respondent' can easily be blurred. As Ratcliff (2005) points out, if an emic approach is adopted then the researcher "becomes a full participant in the activity". The researcher thus minimizes distinctions between herself and the participants and she is very easily regarded as an 'insider'. In this particular study, the participants very easily regarded the researcher as 'an insider'. This was most probably due to the fact that the researcher shared the same cultural and religious background as the participants.

It must be remembered here that although the researcher shared a cultural and religious background with these women, she could not entirely be regarded as "one of them", because the fact that they were all members of a particular women's group, still rendered the researcher as an outsider, as she was unaware of the internal workings of that group.

For, Hoepfl (1997) the researcher in a qualitative study can be regarded as a "human instrument" or "the vehicle through which data will be collected and interpreted". Ratcliff (2005) echoes this and elaborates on it by stating that "those reading the report need to know the instrument", that is, relevant aspects of the researcher such as possible bias, assumptions and expectations should be made clear.

As mentioned earlier, this is a study about Muslim women that has been conducted by a Muslim woman, so it makes sense that the reader will be interested to see exactly what role the researcher has played and in what way the data has been portrayed. Certain over sensitivity and scrutiny might even be adopted by readers. As An-Na'im (in Afkhami, 1995, p.53) points out "people tend to take the identity and standing of the author into account in evaluating a point of view". It might, then further complicate things if it is admitted that not only is the researcher a 'Muslim woman', but also someone that regards her identity as a

Muslim woman very highly. The question might arise as to whether it is in fact possible to remain unbiased and to keep personal assumptions, feelings and opinions separate from the research itself. However, what Ratcliff (2005) has very clearly highlighted is that the very nature of qualitative research brings to the fore the inevitability of the interconnectedness of the researcher role to the study, and as Ratcliff (2005) suggests, instead of ignoring these factors, one needs to be aware of it and document it appropriately. An attempt will therefore be made to document the possible influence of the researcher throughout the entire process of this particular research study, and as mentioned by An-Na'im (in Afkhami, 1995) the extent to which the reader considers the identity and standing of the author and the importance that the reader places on this should be a matter of personal judgement and free choice. However, he makes a very important point as he mentions that when attributing credibility to a point of view, coherence, rationality and the commitment of the author to the values and argument articulated should be considered.

1.5. Conclusion

In sum, the main focuses of this research are on empowerment and the gender equality of Muslim women in South Africa. Since empowerment in itself is a very broad area, this study aims to explore issues related to Muslim women's empowerment by focusing specifically on women's groups and the role that these groups play in women's empowerment at both the individual and the group level. For this purpose, two research questions have been formulated, these questions are:

1. **Is there evidence to suggest that involvement in women's groups contributes to empowerment of Muslim women on psychological, community, political, economic and intellectual levels?**
2. **Are Muslim women being empowered with respect to gender equality through their involvement in women's groups?**

The literature review which follows will thus include a discussion which relates to Muslim women, empowerment and women's group or group processes as these areas are important aspects of this study.

1.6. Glossary of Terms

Community Empowerment- From a community psychology perspective, empowerment has been defined as "the process by which communities are reminded of their own power and are facilitated in their attempts to claim it" (Gibson & Swartz, in Hook at al., 2000, p.473).

Content Analysis- **"**Content analysis is essentially a coding operation. Communications-oral, written or other- are coded or classified according to some conceptual framework (Babbie, 1995, p.311).

Economic Empowerment- Economic empowerment has been defined as the control of income and other key economic resources such as land or animals for example (Blumberg, 2005).

Empowerment-"Empowerment has been defined as the process (and result of the process) whereby the powerless or less powerful members of a society gain greater access and control over material and knowledge resources, challenge the ideologies of discrimination and subordination, and transform the structures and institutions which uphold the unequal distribution of resources and decision-making power" (Baltiwala, 1994 in Dangor et.al, 2000, p.296).

Feminism- "The contemporary usage of the term suggests that in addition to being a doctrine and movement for women's equal rights, it is also viewed as "an ideology of social transformation aiming to create a world for women beyond simple equality" (Humm, 1989, p.74 in Shaikh, 1996, p.2).

Gender-refers to the social roles allocated respectively to women and men in particular societies and at particular times. Such roles are conditioned by a variety of political, economic, ideological and cultural factors. Gender is distinguished from sex which is biologically determined (South Africa's Gender Policy Framework, 2000, p. xvii).

Gender equality- Refers to a situation where women and men have equal conditions for realizing their full human rights and potential; are able to contribute equally to national political, economic, social and cultural development; and benefit equally from the results. Gender Equality entails that the underlying causes of discrimination are systematically identified and removed in order to give women and men equal opportunities (South Africa's Gender Policy Framework, 2000, p.xix).

Group-A group involves interaction and interconnectedness of two or more people. A person does not have to be physically present to belong to a particular group or social category, nor does someone have to meet any members of a group to belong to that group. For instance, people may be bonded on the basis that they belong to a particular religious, social or gender group (Brown in Wetherell, 1996).

Hadeeth- The Hadeeth are the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad*, the Arabic word "Hadeeth" is usually translated as "Traditions", and it means "a saying, or a report or story of something that happened". The Hadeeth are regarded as the second most important source of knowledge in Islam. It includes sayings of the Prophet Muhammad in almost every aspect of life, including social, family, moral, historical, business, and even legal matters (AMS, 2001b).

Hijab- "While the term hijab literally means barrier or curtain, in this context it has come to signify the notion of concealing garments that women wear outside their homes in keeping with an Islamic ethics of modesty. Conceptually it encompasses a range of different forms of covering that Muslim women adopt which are contingent on socio-historical factors and range from a headscarf to loose clothing to a veil" (Shaikh in Safi, 2003).

Intellectual Empowerment- Kumon (2000) uses the term Informatization to describe intellectual empowerment. He writes that intellectual empowerment is enabled by an increase and sharing of knowledge and information.

Islamic Feminism- "Islamic feminism is, firstly, an ideology which uses the Qur'ān and Sunnāh to provide the ideals for gender relationships as well as the weapons in the struggle to transform society in a way that gender equality is accepted as a principle around which society is structured. Secondly, it is the struggle of Muslim women and men for the emancipation of women based on this ideology (Jeenah, 2001, p.66).

Madressah-"school, place of study; the word is frequently used to refer to the supplementary evening or weekend schools where many Muslim children in the West go to learn Qur'an" (Al-Khattab, 1998, p.122). In South Africa these classes are more commonly held in the afternoon on weekdays.

Mashwarah- **"**Mutual consultation held in accordance with Islamic teachings" (Ayub, 2007, p.141).

* When referring to the Prophet Muhammad, Muslims always convey peace and blessings after mentioning the Prophet (Peace be Upon Him) in any context or instance.

Patriarchy-"The term patriarchy literally means "the rule of the father" and was "originally used by anthropologists to describe the social structure in which one old man (the patriarch) has absolute power over everyone else in the family" (Tuttle, 1986 in Shaikh, 1996, p.2).

Political Empowerment- Besides an increased awareness about politics, political empowerment includes equal access to vote in elections, ability to stand as electoral candidates, active involvement in campaigning for elections and the height of political empowerment would be to actually hold a seat in parliament (UNIFEM, 2006).

Power- According to Heider (1958 in Ng, 1980, p.149) power refers to what; "a person can cause, either because of his individual physical or intellectual capacities, or because of his position in relation to other people."

Psychological Empowerment -"Psychological empowerment (PE) includes beliefs about one's competence, efforts to exert control, and an understanding of the socio-political environment" (Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000, p. 46).

Qualitative Research- Qualitative research methods are involved with understanding and interpreting the meanings and intentions that underlie everyday human action (Mouton, in Ferreira et. al, 1988).

Qur'an- The Qur'an is the fundamental source of knowledge in Islam. It has been described as "the foundation and complete code of Islamic life and culture" (Association of Muslim Schools, 2001a, p. 21). Muslims believe that the Qur'an is the Word of God and the final revelation which was revealed to the Prophet Muhammad by the angel Gabriel and which is regarded as a guide for mankind.

Shari'ah-"From the Qur'an and the Sunnah, the Islamic Moral and Legal System has been formulated", this is referred to as Shari'ah (Hamid, 1989, p.34).

Sunnah-"Sunnah means 'way of life' which implies that which the Holy Prophet practised" (Ansari, 2002, p.97). While the Hadeeth are the sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, the Sunnah, refers to the example or the practice of the Prophet. This includes his actions, habits and entire way of life (Hamid, 1989).

Thematic Content Analysis-"Thematic analysis is a process for encoding qualitative information. The coding requires an explicit "code". This may be a list of themes; a complex model with themes, indicators and qualifications that are causally related; or something in between these two forms" (Boyatzis, 1998, p.4).

Ummah- "The community as identified by its ideology, law, religion and group consciousness, ethics and mores, culture and art" (Ansari, 2002, p.309).

Women's Empowerment-"According to the executive director of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), empowering women means: extending choices: choices about if and when to get married, choices about education, employment opportunities, controlling the social and physical environment: choice about if and when to get pregnant, and ultimately about family size. Empowerment requires that husbands, partners, family members and communities help to promote a healthy environment, free from coercion, violence or abuse, in which women are free to use community services on a basis of equality" (Sadik, 1994 in Neidell, 1998, p.247).

Women's group- The same definition as a group applies here, except that a women's group would include only women.

CHAPTER 2 - *PERSPECTIVES ON MUSLIM WOMEN*

"The position of women in Islam has recently been an issue of debate. Some misconceptions arise, whether from traditional practices which are thought to be "Islamic", but are not, or else from prejudices" (Yahya, 2006).

2.1. Introduction

"Few issues in Islam and Muslim culture have attracted more interest- and yet proven so susceptible to stereotyping-as issues involving women (Esposito in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 1998, p.xi). El-Solh & Mabro (1994) discuss how the common western perception includes the stereotype of the heavily veiled secluded Muslim woman, whose life is restricted to being a wife and mother. They argue that although this might be partly true for women in some present day Muslim communities, it is very limiting when attempting to understand the lives of most contemporary Muslim women. Surely, when attempting to understand the lives of Muslim women, one realises that this issue is not simple and clear cut, as women coming from different countries and different socio-cultural backgrounds will have varying experiences. Esposito (in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 1998) asserts that; "the study of women in Islam and Muslim society is complex, reflecting the diverse and varied realities of Muslim women and Muslim societies throughout the ages" (p.xi).

This chapter is an attempt to address some of the most pertinent issues relating to Muslim women, not only in South Africa, but across the world, in both so-called "Western" or "secular" countries as well as Muslim countries. Various opinions and viewpoints from different paradigms will be reviewed in order to give the best possible picture of the types of discourses and arguments that surround the topic of Muslim women.

2.2. Factors influencing the lives of Muslim women

To speak about Muslim women as if they are one monolithic group is really to do injustice. It cannot be emphasized enough that the lives of Muslim women differ in many ways. However, it is impossible to discuss the unique situation and specific factors that women are faced with in every country of the world. This discussion will therefore focus on the experiences and challenges that women do have in common and perhaps through this general discussion, some of the differences between women will be illustrated.

Esposito (in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 2001, p.x) mentions that "it seems to be the case that when a community feels imperilled, women's bodies become the focus of concern and attention". He discusses incidents in history where women became the central concern when communities feared destruction and he goes on to say that once again in present day societies it seems that as people fear the destruction of faith, women have once again become the main focus of attention. For him, this results in the need to protect women by secluding them from the outside world and ensuring that they cover up their bodies. In agreement with this, Ahmed (2003) is of the opinion that the treatment of women in Muslim societies is directly related to the Muslim self-perception at the time. He says that "when Muslim society is confident and in a state of balance, it treats women with fairness and respect. When Muslim society is threatened and feels vulnerable, it treats women with indifference and even harshness" (Ahmed, 2003, p.115-116). He takes this discussion even further by arguing that in times of change and disruption the women of opposed groups become the targets of men. It is not uncommon for women to be assaulted and attacked even raped all for the cause of dishonouring the enemy (Ahmed, 2003). Bearing this in mind then, it is not surprising that political, social, cultural and even economic factors in different contexts have a direct impact on the lives of women.

Perhaps this is more so the case in present day society than it ever has been as political forms of Islam are beginning to take centre stage in many parts of the world. As a result, discussions about Muslim women have been gaining momentum in very different contexts. Opinions vary and there is no doubt that many stereotypes and misconceptions exist in this regard. As Zunes (2001) points out, "ugly stereotypes" of Muslims continue to persist, especially in the West. The stereotype of Muslims as terrorists and oppressors for instance, seems to be gaining momentum day by day. He goes on to say that "even though the vast majority of the world's Muslims oppose terrorism, religious intolerance, and the oppression of women, these remain the most prevalent images of the Muslim faith throughout the Western world" (Zunes, 2001, p.2).

The direct effect of these politics on the lives of women cannot be escaped, and is evident even in a country like South Africa. For instance, a South African Muslim woman who has chosen to completely cover herself up when leaving the house describes some of the encounters that she has had. She writes that; "what I experienced on an international airline carrier a month ago, provoked feelings of shock, confusion and deep concern". She goes on

to describe the encounter that she had where she was stopped on the way to her seat in the airplane by an "Afrikaner" man, who demanded to know what she was doing there and why she dresses in the way that she does. She relates how she was referred to as a "ninja" because of the way she dresses, and how this man pulled at her sleeves asking her; "Are you scared now, ninja! Who'll help you now?" Although the air crew were very apologetic and even upgraded her family and her seats to business class, and even though this man's wife came to apologise later, this incident still left this particular Muslim woman with feelings of "shock, confusion and concern". She mentions another incident when she was in a lift in a busy shopping mall and an elderly English man ran to catch the lift, but refused to enter when he saw her in it, "he stopped in his tracks, stared, clicked his tongue, shook his head and walked away. He refused to enter a lift with a veiled woman", she writes. These type of experiences have made this woman feel that she is constantly been forced to make important choices about her identity (Omar-Mahomed, 2006, p. 9). Such occurrences highlight the complicated nature of political forms of Islam and how the current situation creates a distinct difficulty for Muslims.

Mahmood Mamdani explores issues of political Islam, particularly after 9/11 in his book *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim.* According to Mamdani (2005), a new trend has emerged where people talk and think about religion and culture within a political framework, instead of a cultural or religious one and he makes particular reference to the categorization of Muslims after the September 11, 2001 attacks into "good Muslims" and "bad Muslims". "Bad Muslims" being responsible for terrorism and related activities, whereas "good Muslims" are anxious to remain clear from such acts and are prone to adopt a more secular and liberal way of thinking. (Mamdani, 2005). Mamdani (2005) emphasizes that "judgements of "good" and "bad" refer to Muslim political identities, not to cultural or religious ones" (Mamdani, 2005, p.15). Furthermore, he asserts that a central message of such discourse is that; "unless proved to be "good", every Muslim was presumed to be "bad". All Muslims were now under obligation to prove their credentials by joining in a war against "bad" Muslims" (Mamdani, 2005, p.15). He goes on to discuss the complicated nature of such a discourse and concludes that "there are no readily available "good" Muslims split off from "bad" Muslims, which would allow for the embrace of the former and the casting off of the latter" (Mamdani, 2005, p.15).

There are various reasons that a simple split between so-called "good" Muslims and so-called "bad" Muslims cannot occur. Firstly, Islam emphasizes brotherhood and unity as a fundamental principle of religion (Ansari, 2002; Khan, 2003). Secondly, as Zunes (2001) points out, the political movements that exist within an Islamic context "are often rooted in legitimate grievances voiced by underrepresented and oppressed segments of the population, particularly the poor" (p.2). Also, some Islamic political groups view the West as a force that is corrosive and which undermines the identity and moral fabric of Muslim societies. These groups call for the implementation of *shari'ah* as the ideal that they need to fight towards (Esposito, 2002). All of these issues have a direct impact on the opinions and understanding and subsequently the actions of Muslim women.

The result of such discourses is that Muslims worldwide are forced to assume a political identity or at least they are forced to think about themselves in a political way and women have not been left out of this. Instead the lives of women have become central to the current political discourse.

This is quite visibly enacted in Muslim societies. Since the 1970s and Islamic resurgence or revivalism the West has been regarded as the "enemy" and Islam's biggest threat. Women and the family were identified as the ones that were most susceptible to harm. The family structure was threatened by Western influences that called for women to leave their homes and move out into the workplace, where they were free to intermingle with men. Furthermore, women were influenced by Westernized forms of dress and Western ideas that were regarded as a threat to their modesty. The emphasis of Islamic revivalism then was to regain the Islamic identity that was been threatened. Women came to be regarded as the primary bearers of culture and maintainers of tradition (Esposito in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 1998).

This type of thinking has a dual effect on the lives of women. For some women it means the end to their freedom, others however, agree with this type of thinking and take this responsibility of being "the culture bearers" very seriously. Based on a study of women in Egypt, Yagi (2003) makes it clear that women themselves appear to be making the choice to return to Islamic principles and values. She mentions that the commonly used slogan "Islam is the solution" is appealing to women that choose to 'return to Islam'. Wearing the Islamic dress or *hijab* is one way in which women are showing their commitment to return to Islamic

principles. It was found that those women that discard Western forms of dressing for Islamic dress are mostly younger women from their late teens to their twenties. They are usually well educated, having graduated from high school or university and belong to the middle class. Through interviewing some of these women it was found that most of them have chosen to wear Islamic dress voluntarily because of religious reasons. Although some women cited other reasons for donning Islamic dress such as "it is fashionable", the general conclusion was that "the majority of women wearing the Islamic dress feel that they, in principle accept and support Islamic values, which include a belief in separation of women from men, and separate roles for men and women based on gender (Yagi, 2003, p.56-57).

Another important conclusion that was derived from this study was that women are faced with many contradictions that become challenging for them to overcome. For instance, Egypt is a country that seeks modernization and therefore recommends that women be educated and that they should enter the labour market. However, the society itself has not completely accepted this and "there are no real places for women in the labour markets" and society does not hold women who work in high esteem (Yagi, 2003, p.58). Furthermore, women's labour is called upon in times when there is a shortage of labourers, but when there is fear of job shortages then women are reminded that the only place for women is the home (Yagi, 2003).

Similarly, with the Islamic Revolution in 1979 came a new political paradigm that strongly opposed the West and everything that came with it. Western imperialist domination was believed to be the object that undermined religion and culture and the focus was turned on women, where women that had been influenced by Western principles and values were regarded as a source of cultural destruction (Najmabadi in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 1998). Women and girls with any sort of Western appearance became the first targets of the cultural campaign to return to Islam and educated, professional Iranian women with any cultural exposure to the West were put in the spotlight as "the most visible symbols of western cultural imperialism" (Kar in Bayes & Tohidi, 2001, p. 178).Whereas women in Iran were previously allowed to be seen in public spaces, with the Islamic revolution, veiling became mandatory and women were only allowed to be in public spaces if they were veiled.

Currently, women in Iran can be divided into three distinct categories; the conservative religious women, the reformist religious women and the secular and non-conformist women. All of these women are continuously making attempts to deal with the challenges that they

encounter, albeit in different ways and through different means. The conservative religious women remain loyal to the traditional interpretation of religion but have at the same time realized that the present laws of the country do not support the promising slogans and although they make objections to certain laws regarding women, the gender critique of many of these women do not oppose the principles of the Islamic Republic. The stance taken by the reformist religious women is that men and women are equal but they have different roles and therefore should have equal but not the same rights. They also assert that men and women should be regarded as equals in front of the law and that both men and women should be regarded as equivalent beings with regard to their perception and understanding. These women actively protest against certain laws and call for the reformation of laws regarding women. They publish their views in monthly magazines and journals which include articles which might be considered as controversial for many people. They also believe that the solution to women's rights lies in the re-interpretation of Islamic texts. The third group, the secular non-conformist women are of the opinion that men and women should be given equal rights. These women were initially against mandatory veiling and opposed the removal of women judges amongst other things. They employ a variety of ways to resist, including the writing of literature and poetry and circulation of pamphlets to raise consciousness and to advocate the improvement of women's status (Kar, in Bayes & Tohidi, 2001). It can be seen from this that the religious-political system has influenced the lives of all women in Iran. Even though women have different viewpoints, they still play a central role within the prevailing system. There are evidently challenges that have to be faced by all women, irrespective of the particular paradigm that they adopt.

It can be deduced that women in the Muslim world are faced with various challenges that seemingly emanate from the political system which in Muslim countries is very closely linked to religion, but what about the challenges faced by Muslim women in Western, Muslim minority countries? Many authors emphasize caution with regards to making inferences about all Muslim women based on experiences of Muslim women in Western countries. Moghissi (1999) is adamant that experiences of Muslim women in the West cannot be applied to women in the Muslim world because the entire situation is different and women in the Muslim world are faced with distinct practices and traditions that are unfamiliar even to Muslim women in the West. Similarly Kandiyoti (in Afkhami, 1995) states that drawing parallels between Muslim women in Western societies and Muslim women in the Middle East and North Africa can be very misleading. One thing that Muslim women do have in

common though is that they all have become the central focus of attention through specific political events. While it was events such as the Islamic Revolution in Iran or the coming of the Taliban to power in Afghanistan that made women in the Muslim world the central focus, it can be said that the events of September 11, 2001 had the same effect on Muslim women in the Western world.

In 2002, a community based research project was initiated by the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, who partnered with other women's groups and organizations to conduct a study which aimed to investigate the effects of September 11th and its aftermath on Canadian Muslim Women. A total of 181 women participated in the study. A questionnaire was given to them to fill out and this was followed up by a number of focus groups (15 in total) that were held across the country. The results of this study demonstrated that the everyday lives of Canadian Muslim women were negatively affected by the events of 9/11. The main issues that emerged in the focus group discussions included; feelings that media reporting was biased, women experienced feelings of fear and anger, previous religious freedoms of women were restricted, and women experienced ambivalent feelings about wearing of the headscarf due to fear of been assaulted (Hussain,2003).

This study demonstrates what has been mentioned earlier, that women become the central focus in society in times of crises. Furthermore it illustrates that this is true for all Muslim women, and indeed for all women, whether in Western societies, the Middle East or Africa. It is also quite clear that the way in which religion is practised is closely linked to politics. Not only is religion linked to politics, but there are also other factors that influence the way in which religion is practised.

In a comparative study between Muslim women and Hindu women in the professions in India, it was found that class and economic differences amongst women in India were more significant than religious differences. Suhail Ahmad (1996) conducted a study of women in the medical and education fields. His sample comprised of 140 women, 70 Muslims and 70 Hindus. Exactly half of the women were chosen from the teaching profession while the other half was chosen from the medical profession. Ahmad (1996) discovered that the factors that prevent women from gaining education were not religious but factors such as family background, economic status and social position. Another

significant finding in this study was that the mean age for marriage depended on the social and education status of women. It was found that women in the lower classes in a socially stratified society, like India, married at a much earlier age than middle and upper class, educated women. Also, family size did not differ much amongst Muslim and Hindu women in the sample. Ahmad (1996) concluded that the status of women in Indian society and the general educational backwardness of women was linked more to social and economic inequalities than to religious beliefs (Ahmad, 1996).

Social and economic factors also have a direct influence on the way in which women practice religion, or the extent to which religious rules are emphasized. For instance, when exploring the lives of Nigerian Muslim women Gloria Thomas-Emeagwali (in El-Solh & Mabro, 1995) discovered that the concept of seclusion of Muslim women was largely class-based. While seclusion of women is regarded as an important part of the religion for Muslims in Nigeria, "peasants" or working class males in Nigeria could not afford for their wives to stay at home, as the income earned by women's work was necessary for survival. On interviewing women it was found that due to the economic situation and the increased cost of living, women were forced to come out of seclusion and join the workforce (Thomas-Emeagwali in El-Solh & Mabro, 1995, p. 78). Kandiyoti (in Afkhami, 1995), discovered that a similar situation exists in countries like Egypt and Tunisia.

According to El-Solh & Mabro (1995), the laws of the *shari'ah* seem to be applied and emphasized more strictly for urban women than for rural women. For instance, the veiling of Muslim women is emphasized more in urban areas, whereas appeals are rarely made for rural women to adopt the veil. The issue of the veil is another factor which has a huge influence on the lives of Muslim women and it thus seems fit that it should be discussed here in some more detail.

For some women it is inconceivable that the veil can be referred to in any positive way, especially as a form of liberation or empowerment. Moghissi (1999) for instance writes that arguments and justifications made in support of the veil are inaccurate. She argues that for most Muslim women in many countries there is no free choice with regards to the donning of the veil; instead coercion into wearing it is the norm. She writes that for many women, being forced to wear the veil is a type of torture and in some countries women's choice is between wearing the veil and death, as they are killed if they do not submit to wearing it. She indicates

that only a few women choose to wear the veil because they want to turn back to a more authentic way of life, but most women who choose to wear the veil don't do it for religious or spiritual reasons, but for other reasons such as wanting to get accepted for a job, wanting to get married or as a form of resistance against capitalist governments. Furthermore, she indicates that the veil aids in perpetuating class differences between women. For instance, some upper and middle class women in Egypt wear exclusive veils that are imported from the West (Moghissi, 1999).

When women do have a choice, and when they choose to wear the veil for religious reasons that are far removed from social or political ones, then a much more positive and liberating experience is described by them. In her book *From my Sisters Lips,* Na'ima Robert describes positive effects of donning the veil for the purpose of fulfilling an important religious obligation. Robert (2005) writes that not only does wearing the veil encourage modesty in dress and conduct but it also gives women a strong Muslim identity, one that gives them a sense of pride. For her, wearing of *hijab* is liberating, not only because men relate to you differently, but because as a woman you no longer have to worry about buying the latest clothes, keeping the hour glass figure or focusing on every aspect of your appearance, and you begin to understand that there is much more to you than just your appearance. Similarly, Safia Iqbal (1988) writes that *hijab* is truly a weapon for women to fight exploitation in every field. She says that there is no reason that the *hijab* should hamper a woman's activity. Instead, it allows her to conduct activities in peace (Iqbal, 1988).

It is clear then, that when the donning of the veil is not related to a particular political system or political agenda, and when it is adopted for purely religious and spiritual reasons, then women themselves view this as something positive and liberating.

El-Solh & Mabro (1995) also mention that Muslim women's rights as prescribed by the *shari'ah* are neglected more often in rural areas than in urban areas. The issue of Muslim women's rights is indeed a contested and often debated issue, an issue that cannot be omitted from any discussion of Muslim women. The focus of this discussion will turn towards the rights of Muslim women.

2.3. Muslim Women's Rights- To know or not to know?

Safia Iqbal (1988) asserts that the status and rights of women in Islam is highly misunderstood. She states; "that Islam has enhanced women's status and showered her with ample human rights which are her natural due is acknowledged freely" (Iqbal, 1988, p. 7). She does mention, however, that in order for this issue to be properly understood, a direct study of women's rights in Islam has to be made. She mentions further that it is not enough to merely pronounce these rights; instead, what is necessary is the proper implementation, preservation and protection of these rights (Iqbal, 1988). Amina Wadud-Muhsin concludes that if the Qur'anic concept of woman "had been fully implemented in the practical sense, then Islam would have been a global motivating force for women's empowerment" (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992, p.v). Similarly, Fatima Mernissi (1991) mentions that anyone who claims that women cannot be granted full enjoyment of human rights is making false claims with no grounds to defend their claims.

The Prophet Muhammad has been described as the "champion of women's rights", and it is mentioned that in the time of the Prophet women were raised to heights that are unparalleled (Iqbal, 1988). An evaluation of Islamic history will show that at the time of the Prophet, women played an important role in all sectors of society and their importance in society was evident (Schimmel, 1997). It was not uncommon for women to voice their opinions and engage in debate and they were encouraged to acquire knowledge, and this knowledge was not restricted to religious knowledge only (Dangor, 2001). In addition women participated actively in trade and commerce; took on professional roles, were present at religious gatherings, prayed in the mosque, and some women even participated in battles (Shaikh, 1991).

In fact Islamic history is filled with women who have played important roles, for instance, the first wife of the Prophet Muhammad, Khadija, who holds the privilege of being the first Muslim was known to be an esteemed business woman. History relates that the Prophet Muhammad consulted with her on many important matters (Ahmed, 2003; Schimmel, 1997; Qadri, 2001). According to Dangor (2001, p.109), "Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, whose knowledge of poetry, history and theology was acclaimed, used to deliver lectures on ethical and moral issues to the Prophet's Companions". Also, one of the Prophet Muhammad's later wives, Aisha was extremely knowledgeable in many fields; she was the teacher of many great

scholars of Islam. It is reported that many of the male companions of the Prophet acquired their religious knowledge from her (Khan, 1995).

To sum, Büyükçelebi (2003) writes that; "it is clear that women have received the true honour and respect they deserve, not just in theory but in actual practice, only once in history- during the period of Prophet Muhammad" (p.311).

A natural thought that might come to mind when reading this, is "what went wrong?" If there is consensus that Islam grants women equal rights and uplifts her status then why is there so much debate and discussion around this issue in present day society? Furthermore, if women played such an important role in all sectors of society in the time of the Prophet Muhammad, then why are cases of Muslim women's seclusion and oppression so often brought to the fore? An attempt will now be made to answer this very question.

What went wrong?

Saadallah (in Kabeer, 2000) mentions that when exploring gender dynamics in Islam, two levels need to be considered. The first level is at the level of the text, which includes the Qur'an and Hadeeth, and the second level is at the level of interpretation, which according to her comprises historical and cultural influences that are external to Islam. Similarly, Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1992) mentions that every reading of a particular text reflects the intentions of the text itself as well as the perspectives, circumstances and background of the individual who is reading or interpreting the text. She places emphasis on the difference between what the text itself postulates and what a particular interpretation of the text includes. This, she asserts, applies to readings or interpretations of the Qur'an as well. She writes that; "no method of Qur'anic exegesis is fully objective. Each exegete makes some subjective choices. Some details of their interpretations reflect their subjective choices and not necessarily the intent of the text. Yet, often, no distinction is made between text and interpretation" (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992, p.1). She goes on to say that traditionally women have not played a role in the interpretation of religious texts and this area was regarded as an exclusively male one. For her, this 'voicelessness' of females in religious text interpretation has erroneously been mistaken for 'voicelessness' within the text itself. She proposed to make a reading of the Qur'an which was representative of the female experience.

Wadud-Muhsin (1992) thus conducted an interpretation of the Qur'an using a hermeneutical model. From this she has deduced that; "the rights and responsibilities of women in the twentieth century, as well as social, political and economic opportunities for their full participation which have been discussed and implemented at the policies level, are reinforced by the Qur'anic reading" (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992, p.103). Like Wadud-Muhsin, there are many others who believe that Islamic principles are distorted because too much emphasis is placed on the interpretations of the text, instead of the actual religious texts itself.

In agreement with this, Shaaban (in Afkhami, 1995) has chosen to discuss this issue by profiling a woman interpreter who emerged in the 1920s by the name of Nazira Zin- al-Din. According to her, Nazira Zin al-Din tried to understand the situation of Muslim women of her time and in order to do this she made a thorough study of the Qur'anic texts and Hadeeth concerning women, their rights and their duties. She concluded that "Islam is not the reason behind the inferior status of women. The main reason is the gender-biased interpretation of the Qur'anic text by men of religion" (Shaaban in Afkhami, 1995, p. 64). Furthermore, Zin al-Din argued that the *shari'ah* should not be based on what Muslim scholars say, but it should be based on what is in the Qur'an and Hadeeth and she criticised men for drawing up laws without the participation of women.

In the same vein, Amira El-Azhary-Sonbol (in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 2001), conducted an archival study in which she evaluated court evidence from Egyptian Ottoman and modern courts. She supplemented archival records with literature, biographies and legal opinions to substantiate her study. Findings derived from this study suggested that under the modern nation state legal system, women have less freedom than in earlier times. El-Azhary-Sonbol (in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 2001) concludes that *shari'ah* court records from before the time of the Ottoman period and until modern times reveal that women had no trouble receiving judgements of divorce. Also, this particular study showed that in contrast to modern times women were very active in the public domain. "Every second or third entry in shari'ah court records involved women-women buying, selling, marrying, divorcing, reporting violence, demanding compensation or custody of their children, among other activities" (El-Azhary-Sonbol, in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 2001, p. 114-115). It was thus concluded that historically Muslim women left their homes, they went to court often, they were active in the marketplace and conducted business and they even owned shops and property. Furthermore, it was deduced that although the *shari'ah* is often blamed for gender

inequality, it is in fact the way in which the *shari'ah* is applied that should be focussed on as it is applied and interpreted very differently in today's time than it was in other historical periods. Finally she takes issue with the fact that Islam, as a religion based on God-given law is blamed for holding women back in society and with regards to legal issues and she argues that such an approach undermines history (El-Azhary-Sonbol, in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 2001).

Huda Al-Khattab writes that it; "all boils down to the yawning chasm that exists between the teachings and ideals of Islam and the practices of many Muslims" (Al-Khattab, 1997, p.14). She mentions that customs and cultural practices that are contrary to the teachings of Islam have been infiltrated into the religion. For instance, there is a common misconception that the practice of female genital mutilation is an Islamic practice, when in actual fact this is not a specifically Muslim issue and the extreme forms of female genital mutilation has no basis in Islamic teachings. In addition, she believes that the dominant western culture is also impacting on the way that Muslims do things. Hence, things that are given importance in Islam are been threatened by un-Islamic practices. Finally, she argues that; "the distressing fact is that in too many cases, religion is used to justify and condone, or at least excuse, what all too often amounts to nothing less than the oppression of women" (Al-Khattab, 1997, p.14).

In order to further understand the concept of women's rights in Islam it is perhaps necessary to focus on men's abuse of their rights in specific areas, as the rights and duties of men and women are inseparable and complementary under Islamic law.

2.4. Men's abuse of their rights

Islam is often criticised for being unequal to women and not considering women's rights because of issues such as polygamy, abuse of women/ women battery, unequal divorce and inheritance rights and the punishment for adultery. While a detailed discussion of each of these areas is beyond the scope of this review, a common theme emerges in this regard. It is clear that in the case of all of these things, Islam has systematic laws and rules in place to ensure the humane treatment of both men and women at all times, however, these laws are often abused and the rules are not followed. In fact, it has to be admitted that some Muslims are not even aware of the strict rules that accompany each of the above mentioned issues.

For example, in the case of polygamy, it is compulsory that the woman should be willing to enter into a polygamous marriage (Khan, 1995). Also, the concept of justice between wives is integral to polygamy in Islam. A man has to be equal in the amount of time he spends with the respective wives, as well as the amount of money spent on them. If he buys a gift for one wife, he has to buy a gift for the other, this does not have to be exactly the same, but it needs to be equal in proportion (Al-Khattab, 1997).

Similarly, although many people insist that Islam allows women to be beaten by their husbands, this too has specific rules which should only be applied under particular circumstances. Verse 34 in Chapter 4 of the Qur'an is a verse that has been and continues to be the subject of tremendous debate as many people believe that it is this verse that sanctions the beating of women. The translation of this verse in English reads as follows: *"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what Allah would have them guard. As to those women on whose part you fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (next) refuse to share their beds, (and last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, do not seek against them means (of annoyance): for Allah is Most High, Great (above you all)".*

This verse relates to a state of disharmony or disorder between the husband and wife. Three steps are given as suggestions to ease the disorder. Firstly, there is a verbal solution, which can be reached between husband and wife, or which can be reached with the help of arbitrators. If open discussion does not work, then separation is suggested. The third step with regards to regaining marital harmony should only be implemented in extreme cases as a final measure. It is emphasized that these steps are given in order to regain harmony within the marriage and not to promote further disharmony. If the steps are followed in an organized way as prescribed in the Qur'an then it is very possible that the third step will not be reached. In the event that it is reached, however, it should not be implemented in a way that promotes violence or struggle between the couple because this goes against the nature of Islam. In fact, "beating" is not the most suitable word to interpret the Arabic word here, because beating is harmful and ongoing. The correct ruling is that this beating should be light, should not affect the body or cause hurt to the skin or bones, and hitting in the face is absolutely forbidden (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992; Al-Khattab, 1997; Shafi, 1998a).

Thus, as Wadud-Muhsin (1992, p.76) mentions "the problem of domestic violence amongst Muslims today is not rooted in this Qur'anic passage" as few men in today's time actually follow the steps outlined in the Qur'an before proceeding to the third step and while the goal of this verse is to regain harmony, the goal of men who beat their wives in present times is not harmony but to cause harm (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992).

A similar abuse and misunderstanding of the rules is evident in the case of punishment for adultery. Firstly, it is often believed that the punishment is different for men and women, which is incorrect. The exact same punishment has been prescribed for men and women. However, the punishment prescribed for adultery in Islam is different for married people and unmarried people, because the consequences of adultery are different in both of these cases. In the case of married people the consequences are more severe, therefore it is prescribed that a married person, both male and female, who commit adultery should be stoned to death (Shafi, 1998b). Whereas the punishment for unmarried people, both male and female, is one hundred lashes and one year exile. There are very specific rules and guidelines for flogging, such as; moderation of the strike of the whip as well as the hardness of the whip itself, whipping should be spread out across the body and people should not be whipped on the face and private parts, all people are to remain clothed while whipped, pregnant women should only receive their punishment after the post partum bleeding has ended, and only a learned person who understands all the rules should conduct the punishment.

Also, people cannot simply be punished based on an accusation of adultery. Shafi (1998) makes it clear that in Islamic law there are certain conditions necessary to prove adultery; he writes that the conditions to prove adultery are as tough as the laws themselves. Firstly, a prerequisite for punishment is that there should be four male eye witnesses, however, if there are no eye-witnesses of the act itself but a man and a woman are caught in a compromising position then a judge is allowed to make a ruling. If there is even a slightest doubt in the testimony then the maximum punishment for adultery is remitted. Furthermore, if someone makes a false accusation of adultery; that person receives a punishment of eighty lashes for spreading false rumours and falsely incriminating another person (Shafi, 1998b).

Despite these laws, it is common practice for women to be blamed and punished for adultery; furthermore, it is not unheard of for women to be punished because of mere accusations.

Once again in the case of divorce the rules and laws are often abused and although there is a set procedure for divorce in Islam (see Al-Khattab, 1997 and Büyükçelebi, 2003), this procedure is very often not followed. In fact, many people lack the necessary knowledge with regards to these matters.

Unfortunately every single aspect of Islamic law and all the rules and regulations that go with it cannot be discussed here. As can be seen this is a very comprehensive field. An attempt has been made here to shed some light on some of the issues that raise the most controversy and which are regarded as the most severe in terms of women's rights. It has been shown that the specific rules and regulations set out under Islamic law are often not followed, and in many cases men abuse the rights that have been given to them and thus neglect their duty towards women.

2.5. Muslim women demanding their rights

Recently there has been an increase in women's scholarship and Muslim women are becoming much more aware of what their rights are according to the Qur'an and *Sunnah* of the Prophet. Not only are they beginning to understand issues related to gender in Islam, but they are also able to identify when their rights are being violated according to Islamic laws and principles.

This can be clearly demonstrated when looking at the work of women that has been used throughout this chapter. Women are increasing their Islamic knowledge and becoming much more aware of the role of women as well as their rights according to the Islamic texts. Some women have even been involved in the interpretation of Qur'anic texts. In recent years there has been an increase in Muslim women scholars, who represent different paradigms of thought, from the feminist paradigm to a more traditional one. In many different ways, women are beginning to demand their rights as set out in the Islamic texts. Elizabeth Fernea writes that "women have become today not only the subjects of intense religious debate, but also participants in that discourse. In the past, men interpreted the Koranic verses and the hadiths that described women's rights. Women themselves are now arguing for new evaluations of those older interpretations -and supporting their arguments with evidence from the sacred texts" (Fernea, 2000).

This increase in knowledge and understanding of women's rights is not only confined to scholars, ordinary women are also becoming more aware of what their rights are according to Islam and when these rights are being violated. This was demonstrated in a study of South African women from Johannesburg and Durban conducted by Dangor in 2001. It was found in this study that more than half of the women, who made up the sample, indicated that they support women's rights movements because they feel that "Muslim women are among the most oppressed; and Muslim women are denied their *shari'ah* (Islamic legal) rights" (Dangor, 2001,p.126). Some of the reasons that women gave for their Islamic rights been denied to them were that men are culturally conditioned to believe that women are inferior, Western values have impacted on men, allowing them to believe that they have a higher status than women, men are not aware of the rights of women, thus they have a gender-biased understanding of Islam which leads to unequal Islamic education, economic dependence of women and gender-biased child rearing practices. These women were more aware of their rights according to Islamic law and expressed frustration that they were not being given these rights (Dangor, 2001).

Although the situation looks much better in that women are displaying an increased awareness of what their rights are according to the *shari'ah*, and when these rights are being infringed upon, very often their protests have very little impact. Nonetheless, Muslim women scholars are continuing to make significant contributions to the understandings of the rights of Muslim women and shedding light on the proper treatment of women according to the religious texts.

2.6. Muslim women re-defining themselves

One of the consequences of bringing a particular group of people into the spotlight is that people in that group begin to feel the need to define themselves in relation to what is being said about them. This is indeed the case with Muslim women. Within this section, three different paradigms or frameworks will be discussed, these are; "the modernist", "traditionalist" and "fundamentalist" paradigms. In many cases Muslim women do not actually define themselves in these terms or place themselves within these categories, however, their actions and beliefs adhere to the specific paradigms. Also, it must be noted that these categories are not concrete as there is considerable overlap between them. These terms will be used here only for the purposes of discussion but it should be borne in mind that in reality things are not as clear cut or rigid as they might appear in theory.

The "Modernist" paradigm

Hjarpe (1983 cited in El-Solh & Mabro, 1995) highlights the differences between the three paradigms. According to this definition "the modernists see Islam "as a religion consistent with common sense and its 'regulations and commandments are to be the objects of interpretation (*ijtihad)* which brings out the values and principles of which they are expressions'" (Hjarpe 1983, cited in El-Solh & Mabro, 1995, p.6). These women believe that Islam is flexible and that the principles of Islam can be applied to modern day life by re-interpretation of the Qur'anic texts. This group represents a more liberal type of thinking in which secular, Western discourses are not regarded as a negative force for women's empowerment but instead can be embraced and included within a religious framework (Saadallah in Kabeer, 2000). In addition, these women protest against male dominated patriarchal systems. Women who are referred to as "Islamic feminists" would fall within this category; however, this does not mean that every woman that agrees with this approach necessarily views herself as a feminist. Furthermore women who adhere to this category are more likely to place emphasis on female leadership and female interpretation of Qur'anic texts.

The "Traditionalist" paradigm

"Traditionalists believe that the injunctions laid down in the Qur'an and in the different schools of Islamic jurisdiction should be followed unquestioningly, and are not subject to any new interpretation" (Hjarpe 1983, cited in El-Solh & Mabro, 1995, p.6). This group of women appear to be more conservative and they oppose the modernists, strongly asserting that women's private space is a tool and symbol of their liberation and freedom (Saadallah in Kabeer, 2000). These women insist that they are happy with the position that they are in and the rights that Islam gives to them, but they are unhappy when these rights are denied to them. They do not however, voice any strong protests against men and the male dominated society. Furthermore, they believe that Islamic laws do not need to be changed and they display a strong affiliation towards traditional Islamic principles and interpretations. Also, they believe that men and women naturally have separate fields within which they work and that sending women out of the home, to work in the hostile outside world is an injustice to them (Iqbal, 1988).

The "Fundamentalist" paradigm

"Fundamentalists 'understand Islam as a social order', and as the 'natural religion' laid down by God and therefore unchangeable…the fundamentalist resorts to rational arguments to demonstrate how the divine law of Islam has been tainted by alien customs (Hjarpe 1983, cited in El-Solh & Mabro, 1995, p.6). Fundamentalists thus advocate a 'return to true Islam' (Saadallah in Kabeer, 2000). Anti-western sentiments are very strong within this paradigm and the women who ascribe to this type of thought oppose feminism, strongly believing that the principles advocated by feminists are alien to Islam and hence have no place within an Islamic framework. Also, the women in this paradigm are usually active in their cause and some are even willing to give their lives.

In South Africa for instance, in response to the global discourse surrounding women in Islam, a group of women voiced their opinion by circulating handouts in which they very clearly indicated the stance that they were taking (see Appendix B). Anti-Western sentiments are very strongly indicated herein and these women very boldly state the position that they are taking. It states; "Your sympathy is not needed…This is the response of many a practicing, fundamentalist, extremist, liberated Muslim woman…we do not need your pity and we certainly need not your approval! We are Muslim. We are proud of our identity. We aim to follow the commands of my and your Creator who knows best as to how we should lead our lives. I CHOOSE to live my life like this, so let me be!" Indeed, this type of resistance and anti-Western stance is common within this paradigm, as is a strong assertion of Islamic beliefs and principles.

2.7. Islam and Feminism

Very often Islam and feminism is regarded in opposition to each other. Indeed, many Muslim women feel that feminism is not compatible with the principles of Islam. This was demonstrated in a study of South African women conducted by Dangor (2001). None of the 50 women that comprised the sample in this study indicated that they support feminist movements. Although they were willing to accept elements of feminist women's liberation movements that reinforce women's rights according to the *shari'ah*, they displayed an aversion to feminism as a whole, because it is considered as an instrument of Westernization and irrelevant to Muslim society (Dangor, 2001). Both Jeenah (2003) and Sheikh (2003) mention that for many Muslims, feminism is regarded as a bad thing, something that Muslims don't want to be associated with. One of the reasons for this is that feminism is often

regarded as a solely Western concept, one that comes with its own ideological and historical baggage which many Muslim women do not want to associate themselves with. Also, feminism is often closely linked to Colonialism and Imperialism and thus many Muslims try to avoid it (Jeenah, 2003).

According to Saddeka Arebi (cited in El-Solh & Mabro, 1995) there are three reasons that Muslim women find it difficult to adopt a western model of feminism. "Firstly, Muslim women do not necessarily perceive 'family ties and kinship ties [as] a hindrance to 'women's liberation '; secondly, there is a resentment of 'the West's identification of "the problem" of Muslim women as a 'religious problem'; and thirdly, wages have not necessarily functioned as a 'liberating force' in the sense advocated by western feminists" (Arebi, 1991 cited in El-Solh & Mabro, 1995, p.17). Shaheed (in Afkhami, 1995) is in agreement with this. She writes that although some feminist analysis view religion as a major source of women's oppression, women in Pakistan do not see religion as either oppressive or constraining. Furthermore, feminism dismisses the fact that religion provides women with a sense of participation and belonging and in addition, feminism ignores the psychological healing aspect of religion that provides women with solace and support. Women in Pakistan perceive these elements as lacking in feminist activism (Shaheed in Afkhami, 1995).

It is not only Muslim women who feel that feminism and Islam are two opposing forces. Some feminists are also unable to reconcile the two. For instance, Moghissi (1999) sees Islam as a religion which is based on gender hierarchy and believes that for this reason it cannot be adopted as the framework for struggle towards gender democracy and women's equality. She states that the notion of equality within a feminist framework differs from the notion of equality within an Islamic framework and thus since the two have completely different ideas of equality, they cannot reconcile. She writes that; "Islam is reconcilable with feminism only when Islamic or Muslim identity is reduced to a matter of mere spiritual and cultural affiliation" (Moghissi, 1999, p. 142). For her *shari'ah* law is naturally based on discrimination between the sexes. She asserts that someone can only claim to be a "Muslim feminist" if they leave behind the Islamic legal framework on matters of women's rights and status (Moghissi, 1999).

Despite continuing debate around this, there has been an upsurge in what is now commonly referred to as "Islamic Feminism". Na'eem Jeenah (2003) writes that Islamic feminism has

developed in parts of the Muslim world as well as in the West "where Muslim women (and men) articulate a discourse and struggle for the establishment of women's self-worth, for gender equality and for the subversion of patriarchy" (Jeenah, 2003, p.1) The impetus for a feminist discourse within Islam comes from a reading of Islamic texts that focus on liberation. The basis of Islamic feminism then is the re-interpretation of Islamic texts within a feministic perspective (Jeenah, 2001). Thus, the Muslim feminist looks to the Qur'an and Hadeeth as a force of liberation (Jeenah, 2003).

For Sa'diyya Shaikh (in Safi, 2003) Islamic feminism is revolutionary in that Muslim feminists regard their activism as integral to their Islamic responsibility to ensure justice. Many Muslim women experience conflict because although the ideals of Islam are based on radical human equality, what women experience in practice is often opposite to this. Thus, for many Muslim women, the concept of ideal equality already exists in the Qur'an and therefore interpretations of the Qur'an that focus on this ideal equality and liberation is essential. Thus, Islamic feminists view their activism as an organic part of their faith, an expansion of their faith and not a rejection of faith (Shaikh in Safi, 2003).

This concept of Islamic feminism appears to be focussing on a balance between "traditional feminism" and the belief that feminism completely contradicts the Islamic belief system. Islamic feminism embraces both the teachings of Islam as well as the elements of feminism which serve to enhance the lives of women. It makes more sense to adopt this type of balanced viewpoint with regards to this issue. Focusing on a balance between these two appears to be more beneficial in enhancing the lives of Muslim women than a total disregard for feminism. This way, elements of feminism can be adopted and utilised within an Islamic framework so that the specific teachings of Islam are not overridden. Thus, there is no need for feminism and Islam to completely contradict one another. Instead, common aims and goals should be focused on and a balance between the two should be sought.

When discussing issues relating to feminism it is very difficult to leave out a discussion of patriarchy. Shaikh (1996) mentions that patriarchy and feminism are regarded as ideological adversaries as the male dominated patriarchal system in which males are the holders of power goes against the basic tenets of feminist ideology. This discussion will now shift focus to the role of patriarchy and specifically the way in which patriarchy is viewed within the Islamic paradigm.

2.8. Islam and Patriarchy

"The term patriarchy literally means "the rule of the father" and was "originally used by anthropologists to describe the social structure in which one old man (the patriarch) has absolute power over everyone else in the family" (Tuttle, 1986 in Shaikh, 1996, p.2). Rakoczy (in Harper, 2004, p.30) writes that; "in patriarchy, the male is superior and women are understood to be inferior in every way; thus all women are inherently inferior to every man". Islam is often criticised on the basis that it is a religion which encourages patriarchy. The justification given for this by many people is found in Chapter 4: Verse 34 in the Qur'an which states; *"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means."* This verse has also been translated as; "*Men are the protectors and maintainers of women because Allah has made one of them to excel the other*".

Mufti Muhammad Shafi (1998a) in his commentary of the Qur'an writes that although the male is regarded as "the head" of the family, this does not mean that he has been given "absolute power". Instead, consultation with the wife is emphasized. The role that has been given to the male here should be regarded as a functional role, based on a division of labour within the family. The male role described here is likened to the way in which any democratic government functions, where the President of the country is the leader, the "head of state" but he cannot make decisions on his own and has to consult with the rest of the government before decisions are reached (Shafi, 1998a, Khan, 1994).

This concept of mutual consultation is strongly emphasised in Islam. Ekram and Beshir (2003) write that a proper understanding of this concept of the male as "protector and maintainer" of women, which is referred to as *Qawamah* in Arabic, is necessary. For them this concept does not imply that man is superior to woman and it does not grant man with an advantage according to the law, instead it is concerned with the protection and maintenance of women. They emphasize that although man has been given leadership within the family, this does not grant him the right to be a dictator and in fact mutual consultation within the family is emphasized at various points within the Qur'an. Furthermore, instead of meaning that the man is more powerful or more superior, this just refers to a division of labour and role differentiation. Although men are given the authority to make the final decision, he is also given the responsibility to consult with his wife and a duty to provide maintenance and protection. There are privileges, responsibilities and

consequences that go with this concept which need to be properly understood in order to assure that rights are not abused and misused (Ekram & Beshir, 2003).

When discussing the issue of patriarchy, it is immediately assumed that rendering the male "the head" of the family or society for that matter is problematic. It is argued here however, that this need not necessarily be problematic. If the male head is democratic, kind and considerate in nature and willing to accept the opinions and viewpoints of the female, then what can exist is an atmosphere of harmony and peace, an atmosphere in which mutual consultation and respect between the sexes exists. It is believed that this is the type of atmosphere intended within an ideal Islamic framework.
When the man takes on the role of a dictator and assumes absolute power, then he is in fact going against the very ethos of Islam. As Iqbal (1988) writes, absolute power is an attribute that belongs only to God so this is not something that man can assume.

For Wadud-Muhsin (1992) the Qur'anic principle of leadership is similar to the rule for fulfilling any task, which is that the task should be fulfilled by the best suitable person. "That person is the one best suited on the basis of whatever qualifications or characteristics are necessary to fulfil that task: biology, psychology, education, finance, experience, etc." (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992, p.88).

For many Muslim women though, the male is still regarded as the best suitable person to head the family and society at large. For instance, Ahmad (1996) discovered in his study of professional women that "the most significant person for the married woman in choosing her occupational role was her husband. Without their husbands' support and active encouragement, the women respondents felt that they would not have attempted to take up professional work outside the home"(Ahmad, 1996, p.70).

Although it might appear as if the system of patriarchy is being defended here, the reader is cautioned that to dismiss this discussion as a defence of patriarchy misses the point. What is been argued here is that Islam is not coherent with the system of patriarchy the way in which it has come to be practiced today. While it is evident that the male is regarded as the "head of the family", this does not mean that he should dominate the family in an autocratic manner. Instead, mutual consultation or *mashwarah* as it is referred to in Islamic terms is emphasized and instead of the woman being treated and regarded as a subordinate she is viewed as a

partner, a friend and a confidante. It is interesting to note here that a common saying amongst Muslim women in South Africa is "*the man is the head and the woman is the neck and the neck gets to turn the head in whatever direction it wishes".* Perhaps this describes the complementary role that is emphasized and that should ideally exist within an Islamic framework.

2.9. The "gender debate" in Muslim society

Gender in Muslim society has already been indirectly discussed within this chapter. For instance, the issue of traditional interpretation of religious texts from a male perspective has been discussed in detail, similarly, other issues relating to gender in Islam such as women's rights, feminism and patriarchy have also been discussed. However, a more direct discussion of gender is necessary in order to gain a better understanding of the gender dynamics which exist within Muslim society.

According to Na'eem Jeenah (2001), the issue of gender in Muslim society can be discussed within three broad positions. "On the one extreme there are those that argue that women are inherently inferior to men; secondly, there are those that argue that women and men are not equal but that they are 'complementary' to each other; and on the other extreme there are those that argue for complete gender equality" (Jeenah, 2001, p.8). Jeenah (2001) has adopted the labels "gender inequality, gender balance and gender equality" from the works of an Iranian writer by the name of Ziba Mir-Hooseini, these labels will be retained here and these three positions will be discussed.

Gender Inequality

Many traditional Muslims hold the view that men and women are not equal. They make the assertion that men are superior to women and they use the Qur'an as the basis for this belief. According to their argument the Qur'an has rendered men as "guardians, custodians and maintainers" of women thereby indicating that men are superior to women. From this viewpoint; "women are inferior to men in reason, intelligence and understanding, and are physically, biologically and psychologically weak, passive and unstable (Khan, 1972 in Dangor, 2001, p.113). Jeenah (2001) elaborates on this by mentioning that according to this conservative view women are not only regarded as defective in intelligence and religion, but they are also regarded as "gossip-mongers", "untrustworthy" and are "concerned mainly with their own adornment". He makes a very important point when he writes that; "these

perspectives on women's nature obviously influence their positions in terms of the roles that women should or may have within Muslim society" (Jeenah, 2001, p.9-10). Furthermore, as Wadud-Muhsin (1992) points out, common negative attitudes and prejudices against women have not only affected the position of women within Muslim societies but it has also influenced the interpretation of the position of women in the Qur'an.

In a study conducted by Dangor (2001) on Muslim women in South Africa, it was found that while most of the women in the study (72%) believed that Islam regards men and women as equal, approximately 76% of these women stated that women are not treated equally within Muslim society. Some of the major reasons cited by them for this gender inequality included; discriminatory cultural practices which condition men to believe that women are inferior, lack of awareness of women's rights, conservative and gender-biased understanding of religion and ignorance of Islamic principles regarding women.

It is clear from this that the position of gender inequality is evident within South African Muslim society and furthermore this has impacted to a large extent on the lives of Muslim women as it has directly influenced the roles and subject positions that Muslim women occupy within society.

Gender Balance

Those who adopt this position hold the view that men and women are complementary and not totally equal to one another. According to this view, absolute equality between men and women is dismissed as it is believed that men and women have different duties and responsibilities. Complete equality is viewed as a 'Western' concept. Many women themselves hold this position and these women are active in the community, in the economy and in society in general. This middle position is made up of a range of people who "argue for the rights of women to participate in Muslim public life, to work, to be educated, etc. However, for them, women and men have their respective places in society. Men are undoubtedly heads of households while women are the nurturers of children. These understandings are also based on the understanding of inherent differences between the genders" (Jeenah, 2001, p.12).

Within this paradigm it is common for Muslim scholars to talk about "gender equity" instead of "gender equality". For them the term "equity" better illustrates the complementary role of

men and women. Badawi (2003) provides an in-depth discussion of this issue and focuses on *gender equity* in Islam on different levels.

On a spiritual level, he insists that both men and women have the same spiritual nature. Both genders have the same moral and religious duties and responsibilities and both are equally accountable for their deeds. “Nowhere does the Qur'an state that one gender is superior to the other. Some mistakenly translate *"qiwamah"* or responsibility for the family as superiority” (Badawi, 2003, p.4). On the economic level, it is asserted that greater financial security is assured for women as men have been rendered as the “maintainers” and it is thus the man’s responsibility to provide for the women in his household. The Islamic *shari’ah* recognizes full property rights of women; moreover women are entitled to their own income as long as the means by which they receive it is in accordance with Islamic principles. In addition, a woman is not required to spend of her money in the household and thus any property or income that she owns belongs solely to her to do with what she pleases. According to this view education is regarded as more than a right but a responsibility of every male and female. Within marriage the husband is responsible for the maintenance, protection and overall headship of the family *within the context of mutual consultation and kindness.* As mothers, women are given the highest degrees of honour and respect. Women are regarded as been more experienced in the “inner functioning” of the family and social life, while men are regarded as been more experienced in “external”, business matters. The roles of spouses are complementary and do not mean “subservience” from either party towards the other. Furthermore, the concept of total seclusion of women is regarded as alien to the prophetic tradition of the Prophet Muhammad. Finally, both genders are entitled to equality before the law (Badawi, 2003).

The results from Dangor’s (2001) study showed that about a quarter of the respondents held this position. He has summed up this position by using a quote from one of the respondents in his study. “An unmarried university student in the 15-25 age group stated: “Men and women are not equal in the true sense of the word; they rather complement and supplement each other in their various fields of expertise. It is impossible for men and women to be equal, but possible that they bring about harmony in their togetherness” (Dangor, 2001, p.114).

Gender Equality

Despite the above two positions, there are many Muslim scholars who strongly argue the case for complete gender equality within an Islamic discourse. Although the case for gender equality was initially made by Muslims in Western secular states, gender equality discourses are increasing, and this is evident within the Muslim world as well (Jeenah, 2001).

Within this paradigm Amina Wadud-Muhsin (1992) has explored the gender roles of men and women and has concluded that from a Qur'anic perspective, the only basis to distinguish between human beings is piety. According to her, the Qur'an does not support a specific and stereotyped role for males and females. She writes that many popular ideas about women do not have sanction in the Qur'an. From her interpretation of the Qur'an she has deduced that there is no hierarchical system set out for males and females, and thus there is no inherent value placed on either man or woman. She also mentions that the Qur'an does not delineate gender roles in such a way that only a single possibility for each gender is proposed (Wadud-Muhsin, 1992).

Similarly, Shamima Shaikh, a South African woman, who was an activist for women's rights and proponent of gender equality before she passed away in 1998, regarded the struggle for gender equality as a religious obligation. According to her, the Qur'an does not grant men with a higher status and women with a lower one, and in fact the Qur'an's focus is on women's liberation, making it clear that men and women are equal. For her, our understandings of gender are based on the way in which a society works, which is often in a very conflicting and confusing manner (Shaikh, 1997).

Within South African Muslim society, there has been an ongoing struggle for women's equality which began in the 1980s. Sa'diyya Shaikh (1996) mentions that the first two Muslim organizations that began to focus on gender issues in South Africa is the *Call of Islam* and *Muslim Youth Movement.* In fact, the *Muslim Youth Movement* even established a "Gender Desk", a division of the organization which focuses specifically on equality of women in all sectors of society. Although this "struggle" for women's equality cannot be discussed in detail, the next section mentions some of the major events which have occurred in this struggle for women's liberation and equality within the South African Muslim context.

2.10. The "gender struggle" in South African Muslim Society

Jeenah (2001) conducted research on the emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa and in this study he highlights the struggle for women's rights and gender equality within a South African Muslim context. He discusses various incidents and highlights examples to make his conclusions concerning Islamic feminism and women's rights. In order to shed some light on the issue of gender and Islam in South Africa, two incidents that Jeenah (2001) mentions will be discussed here (although not in as much detail).

Women's access to Mosques

Jeenah (2001) writes that one of the strong manifestations of the gender campaign of the *Muslim Youth Movement* (MYM) was in the province that used to be called The Transvaal, where the main focus became 'women's access to mosques'. He writes that this issue was predominant only in so-called "Indian" areas of the country as traditional cultural beliefs tend to differ between Muslims. In Cape Town this issue could not be identified with because the community there had always allowed women access to mosques, this was also the case in certain "Malay" areas in Johannesburg.

"Just before the Muslim month of Ramadan in 1993, MYM women activists anonymously printed and distributed pamphlets calling on women to attend the *Tarāwīh*[*] prayer daily at the 23rd Street Mosque in Fietas, Johannesburg. Women's defiance of the mosque committee and the committee's almost violent responses to it drew much media attention – especially for the leader of the campaign, Shamima Shaikh" (Jeenah, 2001, p.20). The result of this campaign was that women attended prayers at the mosque every night up until the 27th night of the month, which is regarded as the most auspicious night of the month. For this reason, the mosques are usually extra full on this particular night. When the women arrived for prayer as they had been doing every night for twenty six nights, they were re-directed to a marquee that had been set up at the back of the mosque as they were told that the place was needed for the extra men that were attending the mosque that night. Although some women attempted to pray in their usual space, they were forced out. The next night these women issued a pamphlet which raised issues of their ill-treatment the previous night and which brought up broader issues that related to the general treatment of women (Jeenah, 2001).This event challenged the existing structures and beliefs with regards to women's access to mosques.

[*] This is a special prayer that is read every evening only during the month of Ramadaan.

The argument was that women should be allowed access to the main space in mosques because this was their natural right. In a talk presented at Wits University in 1995, Shamima Shaikh said that denying women access to mosques is in fact a betrayal of the Prophet Muhammad as the Prophet allowed women to go to the mosque and instructed the Companions not to stop any woman from attending the mosque. She mentioned that; "Women occupied the back rows of the Prophet's mosque; where they could be seen and heard by the rest of the congregation", and "we are certainly a long way from the Prophet's mosque, open to all, welcoming all those interested in Islam, including women" (Shaikh, 1995).

The 'equal access' struggle became realised in 1994 when American Professor Amina Wadud was invited to speak at the Claremont, Main Street Mosque in Cape Town. She presented a talk before the main Sermon to a mixed gathering on a Friday. Off course this event sparked a lot of controversy. Although this example was not followed by many other mosques, some changes have been noted. Currently the only mosque in Johannesburg that is regarded as "an alternative mosque" is the *Masjidul Islam* mosque in Brixton. The mosque has a gallery section for women, where women sometimes deliver pre-Sermon lectures on Fridays and give talks at other times (Shaikh, 1996; Jeenah, 2001).

The Radio Islam Saga

Radio Islam is a community radio station which was established under the auspices of the Jamiatul-Ulama, Transvaal (Council of Muslim Theologians) in January 1997. Objection was raised against Radio Islam because of its policy that did not allow women on air. Their initial stance was that women's voices are part of their *awrah* (private parts of their body that should be concealed). In 1998 the first formal complaint was lodged with the Independent Broadcast Authority (IBA) against Radio Islam, by a Lenasia based Muslim organisation known as YIELD (Youth for Islamic Enlightenment and Development). This organisation claimed that Radio Islam was violating the practices of Islam, the South African Constitution and the Code of the IBA, and that the station was thus in violation of its licensing conditions. In its defence Radio Islam claimed that they were serving the needs of the Muslim community and they based their argument on Qur'anic injunctions that objected to the intermingling of sexes and that called for women to be modest. Furthermore, they insisted that they were not discriminating against women and that they were in fact against the

discrimination and subjugation of women, but they argued that allowing women to speak on air would be offensive to the majority of Muslims. The IBA heard the complaint and withdrew the station's licence. After changing their stance, the station applied for a new licence stating that after consultation with various religious bodies, it was concluded that women were allowed to speak on air. The IBA, refused to grant a licence because they were not convinced that women's voices would truly be represented and they also felt that the re-defined target community was too narrow. Radio Islam went to court and was granted a licence to broadcast, however a number of conditions had to be met. Radio Islam was instructed to include women in the broadcasting of programmes and they had to ensure that women participated as active committee members. Also, women's programmes had to be diverse and include talk-shows, a help line and call-in programmes (Jeenah, 2001, Gender links, 2001).

Radio Islam currently has a gender policy which aims for gender equity in all matters concerning broadcasting including programme material that is chosen and presented. Furthermore it aims for equal representation of women on its Board and in addition it includes an internal Gender Monitoring Committee (which would work closely with the IBA) to serve as an advisory body and a channel for complaints. However, despite this it has proven difficult to get away from the stereotypical types of programming, with women presenting health and community issues while men present programmes that focus on politics and other national interests. Nonetheless, there has been a change in attitudes towards women and Radio Islam's current position on women varies considerably from their initial stance (Gender links, 2001).

Another attempt to achieve women's equality worth noting here is the ongoing efforts with regards to Muslim Personal Law. It is argued that current interpretations of Muslim Personal Law tends to be biased towards women and thus organizations like *The Call of Islam* and *The Muslim Youth Movement* argue for a reformed interpretation of Muslim Personal Law which will focus more on the rights of women (Shaikh, 1996; Jeenah, 2001).

The issues discussed in this and the previous section sheds some light on how gender has been conceptualised within the South African Muslim community. It is evident that people's understandings of gender differ and this impacts directly on the roles of Muslim women within society. To date, Muslim women in South Africa are still in the process of finding

a place for themselves within society and South African Muslim women still have many challenges that have to be dealt with.

2.11. South African Muslim women in a changing environment

Akhmat (2005) writes that although some of the old attitudes towards women continue to exist, such as a woman who stays at home is more pious, Muslim men and women in South Africa are finally beginning to realise that women can maintain their homes and still be active in the community. It is the combination of these two that Akhmat (2005) believes is important. She believes that the current South African society is more open and that Muslim women are free to assert their identity. Whereas previously women were not allowed to wear the *hijab* when they worked, now Muslim women are free to do so, thus making it easier for women to work, study, and be active in society. In fact, a case that has been well documented is that of a social worker who was fired by the Department of Correctional Services because she refused to remove her headscarf when at work. Fairouz Adams was dismissed from her position as a social worker at a Prison in Worcester because it was claimed that she flouted the rules when she refused to remove her headscarf and tuck in her shirt because of her religious beliefs that women should dress modestly. The matter was taken to the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration (CCMA) and then referred to the Labour court, but it was settled before it got to court and after eighteen months away from work she was re-instated to her previous position and allowed to wear her headscarf. In addition, the Muslim Judicial Council and the Department of Correctional Services agreed to hold discussions with regards to what type of dress code would be suitable for Muslim women within such an environment (Karaan, 2006; Kassiem, 2006).

As Akhmat (2005) mentions, although South African society in general tends to be non-judgemental, the media does seem to be having an impact on people's thinking and certain stereotypes about Muslims are beginning to be adopted by some South Africans. For instance, she mentions that if a Muslim woman wants to wear the *hijab* at work, perform her prayers and fast, then she might be perceived as a "fundamentalist". Nonetheless, Akhmat (2005) believes that the Muslim community should work hard to counteract these negative perceptions by breaking away from the old structures and by recognising that Muslim women should be educated not only in religious matters, but in other areas as well. Without proper understanding of their Islamic rights, women can easily be manipulated by men so they need to be empowered with regards to what their rights are according to Islam. Furthermore, she

believes that there needs to be proper structures put in place to meet the demands of the increasing amounts of people converting to Islam, and she emphasizes that Islam should be taught to new Muslims in a culture free way. Finally, she asserts that men and women need to join and work together in harmony in order to achieve the necessary goals. She writes: "There is a lot of work to do in the Muslim community. If Muslim men and women can learn to cooperate and pool resources, expertise, experience, and so on, a great deal of good can be done (Akhmat, 2005).

Despite the fact that South African Muslims still have a long road ahead of them, there are some definite changes in the lives of Muslim women, particularly with regards to work and education. The findings of a study conducted by Dangor (2001) suggest that the education level of South African women in general is increasing; also, more women are employed and receiving wages for their work. According to Dangor (2001) the education level of the women in his sample was very high in relation to the general education level of Muslim women in South Africa. In his sample, 70% of the women had undergraduate college or higher education while the remaining 30% had up to high school level education. Furthermore, 60% of the sample of women had gainful employment, while the remaining 40% were housewives or students and did not have gainful employment. In addition to an increase in employment and education, South African Muslim women are also becoming involved in professions that might have previously been described as "unconventional" for women. For instance Boomgaard (2006) has documented how young Muslim women are studying towards becoming pilots. These women have indicated that nothing will hold them back as they love flying and are currently studying hard to become pilots.

In general South African Muslim women appear to be using their skills and knowledge to their advantage. Many attempts are being made by women to improve their condition and to enhance their skills and knowledge. These women might represent different paradigms of thought and therefore go about trying to make changes in different ways. Nonetheless, these efforts are worth making mention of. One of these efforts is the influx of monthly magazines for women which specifically address issues relating to women. This is one forum in which women are able to voice their opinions and share their experiences. Recently, Muslim women from different organisations and backgrounds have come together to address issues faced by South African Muslim women. "The Interim South African Muslim Women for Truth, Justice and Peace Network" was thus formed (see Appendix C). These women have realised

that uniting and polling their skills and expertise might be more powerful in assisting them to reach their goals. Furthermore, organisations run by women are planning more conferences, lectures and workshops in order to enlighten Muslim women and to equip women with important information (see Appendix D, E and F).

Furthermore, Muslim women are not isolated from the broader South African society and thus their efforts can also be situated within the broader socio-political and economic context in South Africa. Perhaps the best example of this is the establishment of the *Muslim Aids Programme* (MAP) which is an organization established to help deal with the escalating HIV/AIDS rates in South Africa. This organization functions in all the major provinces in South Africa (i.e. Gauteng, Mpumalanga, Western Cape and Kwa-Zulu Natal). Networking between the *Muslim Aids Programme* and other governmental initiatives has been well established. Some of the activities conducted by this organization are youth life skills programmes, HIV/AIDS awareness and training programmes, HIV/AIDS counselling sessions which is part of the government's VCT (volunteer counselling and testing) project, and care giving. , The *Muslim Aids Programme* has also established a care centre for Muslim women and children who have been infected with the virus. Women play a pivotal role within this organization as the top management members as well as many of the staff members and volunteers are Muslim women (MAP, 2007).

Similarly, the *Islamic Careline* which is a confidential counselling service established, managed and run by Muslim women has had to deal with many of the same issues that are faced by South Africans on a daily basis. As a result of the high crime statistics in South Africa, the *Islamic Careline* counsellors deal more regularly with trauma related cases, including experiences related to burglaries, hijackings, rape, fatal car accidents and heists. As a community based counselling service, this organization deals with many other problems as well. These include family and marital discord, drug abuse, child abuse and domestic violence. This organization relies on the incorporation of religious principles within their counselling in their attempts to deal with the various problems faced by Muslims in South Africa (Nawab, 2007).

It is thus clear that the role of Muslim women in South Africa is changing from the more traditional roles where women were mainly home makers, to a more active and dominant role in society. Not only have women being making a valuable contribution to society, but their

efforts can be located within the broader context of the country, thereby situating Muslim women within South African society instead of isolating them from the current issues that South Africans are experiencing.

2.12. Conclusion

It is clear from the discussion in this chapter that the lives of Muslim women are influenced by various factors. Social, economic, political and cultural influences are often intertwined with religion to determine the situation for Muslim women. A past coloured with the terrible experiences of Colonialism and Imperialism has left its mark in many countries in the Muslim world, causing many Muslims to display very negative feelings towards anything regarded as "Western". The result of this on many occasions is that women become the central focus and women are naturally expected to be the maintainers of culture. Not only does this result in different experiences of Muslim women in different contexts, but it also results in different attitudes, opinions and understandings of particular phenomena.

Something that has been highlighted is that there exists a need for Muslim women to be educated about what their rights are according to the Qur'an and the Traditions of the Prophet Muhammad. It is believed by many that only true implementation of these rights will empower Muslim women and give them the status that they were afforded over fourteen hundred years ago, in the time of the Prophet Muhammad. Although Muslim women ascribe to different ideological frameworks, it might prove to be more productive if women were to find a common ground and pool their resources and expertise, as South African Muslim women are hoping to do by forming one common network for women. Furthermore, the abuse and misuse of rights very often lead to the denial of the rights of women and cruel mistreatment of women. The "gender debate" is often one that sparks a lot of controversy as people tend to adopt different attitudes with regards to gender. Within the South African Muslim community three different positions with regards to women and gender were discussed. Finally, as Abugideiri (in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 2001), points out, the term "Muslim" and "Islam" do not always mean the same thing, and the practice lags far behind the theory. To conclude then, the issue of Muslim women is a complex and sensitive one, one that might always stir up emotions of different sorts, one that is susceptible to stereotypes and subjective interpretations, but most certainly one that cannot be generalized about.

CHAPTER 3 – *ON POWER AND EMPOWERMENT*

"*In as much as the less powerful party is interested in redressing the imbalance, the more powerful party wants to keep the imbalance" (Ng, 1980, p.185).*

3.1. What is power?

Cheater (1999) suggests that there are many questions that arise when discussing the issue of power. For her, power remains a concept that is rather difficult to deal with; one that she concludes has a tendency to be "elusive". Nonetheless, various definitions of power have been postulated, some of which will be mentioned here.

According to Heider (1958 in Ng, 1980) power refers to what; "a person *can cause,* either because of his individual physical or intellectual capacities, or because of his position in relation to other people (p.149).

In Lewin's conceptualization, power is regarded as the possibility of one person inducing force of a certain magnitude over another person. Within this framework, power is related to the amount of change person A exercises over person B and subsequently, the amount of dependence displayed by person B. Thus, for Lewin "A's power over B equals the quotient of the maximum force which A can induce on B, and the maximum resistance which B can offer" (Lewin, 1941 in Ng, 1980, p.156).

Thus, power exists or comes in to play when one person or party is more dominant than the other, for some reason or the other. Also, this dominant person or group is able to exert pressure on another, more dependent person or group of people, which results in evident change in the behaviour of that person or people. Although power is very often regarded as a corrupting force, a certain amount of power is necessary for psychological well being. Furthermore, power is a multifaceted concept which might take on different meanings at different times.

Riger (1993) discusses the distinction between different forms of power. She cites Hollander and Offermann, (1990, p.179) in her discussion, as she attempts to make the difference between *"power over", "power to" and "power from".* According to this perspective, "*power over"* refers to; "explicit or implicit dominance". Within the context of empowerment, this would mean that people have actual decision-making control over such

things as resources or policies. "*Power to"* has been defined as "the opportunity to act more freely within some realms…through power sharing". In the case of empowerment, a sense of esteem or efficacy can be understood as "*power to",* where people have the power to make some sort of change on a lower level, through power sharing but not complete dominance over something. *"Power from"* has been defined as; "the ability to resist the power of others by effectively fending off their unwanted demands" (Riger, 1993, p.282). These three classifications of power are especially important within the context of an empowerment intervention. Riger (1993) makes the point that very often empowerment interventions tend to focus on *"power to"* where people's power to act is increased but very little is done to actually enhance their *"power over"* such things as policies and resources. This results in empowerment on basic levels without actually reaching optimal levels of empowerment.

In addition to an understanding of power, comes an appreciation of the negative effects that powerlessness can have on individuals.

3.2. The experience of powerlessness

The lack of power or powerlessness can be regarded as a corrupting and destructive force. Powerlessness has a direct impact on self-esteem, efficacy and self-actualization. Two important constructs that have been found to correlate with powerlessness is external locus of control and learned helplessness. External locus of control corresponds to powerlessness if external locus of control is regarded as the perceived lack of personal (or internal) control. If a person lacks personal control, this is likely to reduce self-esteem and efficacy and prevent the person from gaining mastery of his or her environment, thus, relating to powerlessness. The second construct, learned helplessness is believed to be closer to powerlessness (Ng, 1980). "*Learned Helplessness* is passive behaviour produced by exposure to unavoidable aversive events"(Weiten, 1995, p.528). According to Seligman (1975 in Ng, 1980, p. 133); learned helplessness "(1) reduces the motivation to control the outcome; (2) interferes with learning that responding controls the outcome; and, if the outcome is traumatic, (3) produces fear for as long as the subject is uncertain of the uncontrollability of the outcome, and then produces depression". Learned helplessness then is purely about a perceived lack of control and motivation as well as a person's belief that any intervention on their part will be useless. This is therefore more closely linked to powerlessness. In any event, the experience of powerlessness can easily be regarded as something that has damaging effects on a person's well-being (Ng, 1980).

3.3. The Power of Groups

Brown (in Wetherell, 1996) mentions that groups can either have positive or negative effects on individuals and in fact groups have the power to transform behaviour, attitudes and perceptions. It would be important then to understand the extent to which a person changes or retains their individuality within a group situation as groups have the potential to change a person through coercion or intimidation, which can lead to drastic consequences. Another potentially dangerous effect of the formation of specific groups is that very often people tend to identify with their own groups and other groups are regarded as "the other". In addition, known support from others often provides people with a sense of power and strength and people are more prone to resist external pressures when they have group support (Brown in Wetherell, 1996).

One of the most important processes to consider within the group context is conformity. "Conformity occurs when people yield to real or imagined social pressure" (Weiten, 1995, p. 663). A number of early experimental studies have been conducted in an attempt to understand the conditions under which people conform. It was found that in most cases, conformance was based on the need to be seen as "the same" as everyone else in the group. Also, when another person agreed with their responses, people conformed less and stuck to their initial responses (Brown in Wetherell, 1996). Closely related to conformity is obedience to authority within a group situation. Brown (in Wetherell, 1996) refers to obedience as 'compliance under pressure'. She states that when people conform it is usually because of the need to fit in with others and be accepted, however, obedience is a process that is far more dangerous. In this case, the influence of one person over another arises from social power and status. A hierarchical situation exists wherein a person with authority gives orders to other people who are afforded a lower status (Brown in Wetherell, 1996).Studies on obedience suggest that the situations in which people find themselves lead to their actions. For instance in a range of studies on obedience, Milgram found that situational factors took precedence over character traits or individual predispositions. Milgram concluded that obedience to authority can lead seemingly decent people to do horrendous things because of the pressure exerted on them. This finding was common in different social and cultural settings and it was found that most people can be coerced into doing things that violated their own morals and values if they believe that they are following orders. Furthermore, it was found that people find it easier to resist to the pressure of an authority figure when they had support from other group members (Milgram, 1974 in Zimbardo, 2004).

Sometimes people join groups with the hope of changing themselves, whereas in other cases people join groups with the intent of making an impact that will influence the entire group. Social Identity Theory deals with these issues as it focuses on an individual's identity within a group situation.

Social Identity Theory

Tajfel and Turner proposed the social identity theory as a response to questions regarding an individual's personal identity, motivations, judgements and perceptions when they become members of a group. They suggested that people begin to see themselves differently within the group situation and they subsequently begin to change the way in which they define themselves. They argued that most of the time people react to others as unique individuals, with a particular identity and personality. In a group situation however, this personal identity tends to give way to a social identity. In some cases, people are able to retain their personal identity within a group situation, especially when an individual strongly disagrees with the group. However, more often than not people within a particular social group begin to perceive themselves as someone with the characteristics of that group, and it is thus more common for the group, or social identity to take precedence. What happens is that instead of viewing themselves as individuals with distinct characteristics and personalities people begin to label themselves according to the group that they belong to. Turner (1982) has referred to this as "self-stereotyping". Turner argues that people stereotype themselves in terms of their social identities because they begin to perceive themselves according to the collective images that surround that particular group. Thus people's behaviour, attitudes, beliefs and perceptions are closely intertwined with these social or group identities (Brown in Wetherell, 1996).

Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory thus proposes a three stage psychological process. In the first stage, *social categorization*, people begin to organize themselves within socially constructed categories. These categories form the basis through which people organize perceptions of self and other. Along these dimensions, group similarities and differences can be established and people tend to come together based on their similarities whereas they diverge from people who are regarded as different. The second stage is referred to as *social identification.* Within this stage people re-define themselves in accordance with the social category that they have identified with. Not only do self-definitions change, but distinct value

systems are created within these categories. Thus a person's identity becomes linked to the social group as people's membership in a group comes to determine their value or status as a person. The third stage, *social comparison* focuses on the position of one group in relation to another. Tajfel and Turner argue that an individual's self-esteem is closely tied to the performance of their group, or the dominant perceptions of their group. In order for individuals to feel good about themselves they have to feel good about the group that they belong to. The group is thus viewed as either positive or negative in relation to other groups. Comparison between groups becomes the only means of group evaluation and it will determine the value systems of particular groups. If a group is regarded as favourable, then the self-esteem of its members will be high and vice versa (Wetherell, 1996).

Like all theories, Social Identity Theory is not without its criticisms. Brown (in Wetherell, 1996) discusses some of the major problems with this theory. Firstly, the difference between "social identity" and "personal identity" is not as clear cut and obvious as Tajfel and Turner suggest. In reality, there are no clear categories and there is a complex intermixture of all these issues. Also, people belong to many different groups and form their identities based on these different groups, some groups are of more importance than others and social identity theory does not focus on the strength of the social identity within different groups. Finally, this theory does not consider individual or cultural differences and instead it tends to generalize and apply concepts loosely. As is the case with most theories, however, it provides a framework within which the specific concepts and processes can be better understood.

This issue of "group identification" is a particularly important one within Muslim societies. According to Chesler (2005) most Muslim societies encourage collectivism or "group culture". In fact, she states that individualism is highly discouraged in Muslim societies as emphasis is placed on the group and the person's identity within the broader Muslim society is regarded as more important.

According to Ansari (2002), the principle of unity is a fundamental principle in Islam. Not only do Muslims emphasise the unity of God, but ideally unity should exist within the community as well. Muslims should regard each other as brothers and sisters and constantly try to ensure the well being of each other. This is in fact regarded as the social responsibility of every single Muslim. The unity of the *ummah,* or community is regarded as absolutely essential. According to the ideal teachings of Islam, Muslims should not fight amongst

themselves and in fact Muslims are taught to want for others what they want for themselves. Emphasis is placed on the good treatment of everyone in the community and an environment in which everyone is regarded as insiders is encouraged. The well-being of the community is regarded as the primary goal as it is believed that if a community functions well and the environment is positive, then individuals will naturally be content and individual well being will result (Ansari, 2002). Thus it is clear that a culture of collectivism or "group culture" is more emphasised than individualism within Muslim communities. Furthermore, this "group culture" is regarded as a positive aspect and in fact, individualism is regarded by many people as a form of selfishness. There are many serious implications that go with this type of thinking and it is important to bear this in mind, specifically when discussing group dynamics and issues of social identity and social power.

3.4. Changing Power Structures: Empowerment and related concepts

Power change is a very complicated area, but despite the complicated nature of this area, attempts to change existing power dynamics are continuous. This has resulted in a proliferation of interest in empowerment and more recently, empowerment has become a buzz word for many people in diverse fields. Perhaps at this point it would be useful to define exactly what is meant by "empowerment".

"Empowerment has been defined as the process (and result of the process) whereby the powerless or less powerful members of a society gain greater access and control over material and knowledge resources, challenge the ideologies of discrimination and subordination, and transform the structures and institutions which uphold the unequal distribution of resources and decision-making power" (Baltiwala, 1994 cited in Park, Fedler & Dangor, 2000, p.296). Mallane (1994) mentions that, the power that is spoken about in the empowerment approach is about an increase in self-reliance and internal strength and not about domination over others. It has been agreed upon by many people that "empowerment at the individual level of analysis is a process by which individuals gain mastery and control over their lives, and a critical understanding of their environment" (Zimmerman, Israel, Schultz & Checkoway, 1992, p.708). On a social or community level empowerment has been defined as; "the attempt to facilitate communities' attempts to reclaim their own political power" (Gibson & Swartz in Hook, Mkhize, Kiguwa & Collins, 2004, p. 472). In sum, the empowerment process has been defined as: "an intentional ongoing process centred in the local community, involving mutual respect, critical reflection, caring, and group participation, through which

people lacking an equal share of valued resources gain greater access to and control over those resources" (Cornell Empowerment Group, 1989 in Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995, p.570).

Empowerment, then, cannot be given to people; it is something that has to be acquired by people through a process. Furthermore, Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000) asserts that "empowerment is context and population specific. It takes on different forms for different people in different contexts"(p. 45). There are different types of empowerment such as psychological empowerment, political empowerment or social empowerment for instance. The different types or levels of empowerment will be discussed later on. At this point it is deemed necessary to first provide a discussion of empowerment theory.

3.5. Empowerment Theory

Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) point out that there has been an influx of research related to empowerment, not only within the field of community psychology, but in other fields as well. The educational and sociology fields, for instance have witnessed an even larger increase in empowerment based research and empowerment as a construct has been deemed an essential construct in understanding individuals, communities and organizations. Despite this, Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) express concern that this concept is commonly "inadequately conceptualized and loosely or casually defined". They argue that this construct needs to be more specific and a tighter definition is necessary. However, due to the popularity of the concept in diverse fields, such a task does become very difficult. This difficulty is further exacerbated by the fact that the construct of empowerment is an open-ended one, one that may not be uniformly applied as it takes on different forms in specific contexts, populations and times, as Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000) points out.

Nonetheless, there are particular concepts that can be agreed upon and used in different contexts. Empowerment theory draws on these common concepts and thus "empowerment theory is an effort to provide a conceptual framework for understanding processes and outcomes associated with the continuing struggle to make our lives, organizations and communities closer to our ideal" (Zimmerman, in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000, p.58)

Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000) makes it clear that "empowerment" and "power" are two distinct constructs. He states that although power and empowerment are

linked in that empowerment theory includes issues related to power, power relationships and the struggle for power, it must be realized that power and empowerment are two distinct constructs. As mentioned, empowerment, involves both processes and outcomes.

Empowering Processes and Empowered Outcomes

An important element of empowerment theory is the processes and outcomes that occur within an empowerment approach. Processes are regarded as empowering because it is suggested that "actions, activities or structures may be empowering". Subsequently, "the outcome of such processes result in a level of being empowered"(Swift & Levin, 1987; Zimmerman, in press; cited in Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995, p.570). In short, a process is regarded as empowering if it assists people in reaching their goals of becoming more independent, an empowered outcome refers to the effects of the process or intervention which can be directly studied or observed.

Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000), further indicates that both processes and outcomes will differ at the different levels of empowerment. He discusses empowerment at the psychological, community and organizational level and mentions that at all three levels, processes and outcomes will vary. Table 1 provides some examples of the types of processes and outcomes that might exist at the different levels of empowerment.

TABLE 1

A Comparison of Empowering Processes and Empowered Outcomes across Levels of Analysis

Levels of Analysis	Process ("empowering")	Outcome ("empowered")
Individual	-Learning-decision making skills -Managing resources -Working with others	-Sense of control -Critical awareness -Participatory behaviours
Organizational	-Opportunities to participate in decision-making -Shared responsibilities -Shared Leadership	-Effectively compete for resources -Networking with other organizations -Policy influence
Community	-Access to resources -Open government structure -Tolerance for diversity	-Organizational coalitions -Pluralistic leadership -Resident's participatory skills

Source: Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000, p.47).

Processes and outcomes at the different levels are directly related to each other as empowering processes on one level may influence the outcomes at another level. In any event an understanding of the processes and outcomes which occur at the different levels of empowerment is essential within an empowerment approach (Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000).

The role of the individual in Empowerment Theory

Empowerment is a process which focuses on increasing individuals' control over their lives. Within this approach, individual choice and self-determination is emphasised. Empowerment takes on a holistic approach and instead of viewing the individual in isolation, this approach recognizes that biological, psychological, social and economic aspects are all interconnected. Hence, individual empowerment is hindered if no changes in the environment are occurring (Arai, 1997). In agreement with this, Rappaport (1981, 1984 in Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995, p.569) mentions that; "Empowerment is a construct that links individual strengths and competencies, natural helping systems, and proactive behaviours to social policy and social change". Thus, individual well-being and progress is situated within the broader social and political context.

Instead of 'blaming the victim' the empowerment approach aims to search for environmental influences, and it goes beyond simply searching for negative aspects, but also focuses on identifying the positive aspects that can assist in the process. Thus it goes beyond simply 'fixing the problem' but aims at maintaining and enhancing wellness, or a positive state. In addition, empowerment theory suggests that individuals' or participants have an active role to play in the change process, in both the implementation of particular projects and in setting the agenda of a project (Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000).

It is important to note that although this all sounds very positive in theory, in practice many difficulties are encountered within the empowerment process. For instance in a community psychology empowerment project that aimed to support families of people living with HIV/AIDS, it was found that community workers ended up feeling overwhelmed and emotionally overburdened. These workers were selected from among the local community in Gugulethu, outside of Cape Town and they were given basic counselling skills training. With this training and their knowledge of the community it was intended for them to develop support and empowerment programmes within the community (Gibson & Swartz, in Hook et

al., 2004). According to empowerment theory, these workers should have been active agents of change within their community and they should have being making an impact and working towards mobilising resources and skills. Their role should have involved making decisions about this project and their knowledge about their local community should have been regarded as something positive and integrated within their activities. Instead, as Gibson and Swartz (in Hook et al., 2004) pointed out they found it difficult to access resources, received little funding, skills and knowledge and ended up feeling distressed. When a group of community psychologists offered their services in the form of additional training and skills development workshops for the community workers, the psychologists found that the community workers still regarded them as 'the all knowing expert' and thus it was very difficult for the psychologists to maintain a facilitative role.

This type of case study illustrates that the ideals postulated within theory is very often not easily implemented in practice. This difficulty is also encountered in the case of the intended role of the expert or professional within empowerment theory.

The role of the professional in Empowerment Theory

One of the aims of empowerment theory is to reduce professional domination and thereby increase individual autonomy (Arai, 1997). Thus, the role that the professional takes on is one of a facilitator or collaborator instead of an authoritative expert (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). In this way the participants are also regarded as a source of knowledge, as the professional as a collaborator learns from the participants' cultures, worldviews and life struggles. The information gathered is regarded as crucial for the empowerment process and participants are therefore also able to make valuable contributions. In this sense the professional gets to *work with* the participants and become a resource for the community, as opposed to the knowledgeable professional imposing his/ her interests, skills and ideals on the community. Hence, the relationship and the outcomes of the process will depend on the particular context within which the professional is working (Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000).

Once again, although this sounds good in theory, in actual practice this type of a relationship is not easily established or maintained. In the community project discussed in the previous section, community psychologists found it very difficult to play a facilitative role. The community workers regarded them as experts and put complete trust in them, believing that

the psychologists had more authority because they had the knowledge that community workers did not have. The community workers' participation in workshops decreased and they were not eager to share their own thoughts and knowledge because they felt that they were wasting the psychologists time and wanted to get all the advice that they could from the psychologists while they could. Despite their efforts these psychologists ended up feeling that instead of the community workers' being empowered by further knowledge and skills, their relationship was becoming one in which the workers were becoming dependent on the psychologists (Gibson & Swartz, in Hook et al., 2004). The lack of participation can be regarded as especially problematic as participation has been identified as an important part of the empowerment process.

Participation as an essential part of Empowerment Theory

Perkins & Zimmerman (1995) have identified participation in community organizations as one possible empowering process. Findings from a number of studies support this assertion. Zimmerman & Rappaport (1988 in Zimmerman et al., 1992) conducted a quantitative analysis of the association between participation and perceived control. Their findings indicated that "the combined variance of 11 measures of perceived control formed one underlying dimension that distinguished high-participation groups from low- or no-participation groups" (Zimmerman et al., 1992). It has been established that perceived control is a central component of empowerment. Similar results were found in a qualitative study conducted by Kieffer (1984). In this study, 15 in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals who emerged as leaders in grass-roots organizations. Three measures of perceived control (i.e. self-esteem, a sense of causal importance and perceived efficacy) were identified as being linked to participation. Although it was pointed out that this study cannot determine with certainty whether the individuals in this study felt empowered because of their participation or if they participated because they already felt more empowered than other individuals, the conclusion was nonetheless made that participation in community groups and activities increased individuals' sense of control. Based on studies such as the two mentioned here, participation is regarded as an important process within the empowerment approach (Zimmerman et al., 1992).

The Empowerment Process

Susan Arai (1997) discusses a four stage process of empowerment in an attempt to look more specifically at what happens when people become empowered. Her discussion builds upon

the work of Lord (1991) and has been supplemented with her own research. Within this process it is postulated that as individuals become increasingly empowered they move through the stages of 1) awareness, 2)connecting and learning, 3)mobilization (taking action), and 4) contribution (Arai, 1997).

In the *Awareness* stage, the individual begins to develop awareness on some level of a desire for change. Often awareness is demonstrated through prolonged expressions of anger and frustration. It may be spurred on by new information or new acquaintances and results in the individual accepting and planning to develop new directions for themselves. This leads to the second stage of *Connecting and Learning.* In this stage the individual begins a process of connecting with other individuals, groups and resources. This stage involves learning new skills and acquiring new information, thus, one of the outcomes of this stage is that the individual is able to expand his/her opportunities and choices. In the *Connecting and Learning* stage, the professional acting as a facilitator helps the individual to obtain practical and social resources. "As an outcome of this stage, individuals begin to increase their social network, decrease feelings of isolation, and increase self-esteem and self concept" (Arai, 1997).

Stage 2 sets the scene for stage 3, because as individuals begin to expand their resources, they get ready to take action. Stage 3 is therefore regarded as the *Mobilization/Action* stage. The role of the professional as a facilitator continues to be important in this stage as the professional helps to encourage the individual as well as assists by linking the individual to further resources. Participation is an important aspect of this stage. The individual may become involved in social groups or activities that are meaningful to him/her. This participation may lead to further opportunities for participation as well as increased feelings of competence. The final stage *Contribution,* involves integration of all the skills, knowledge and resources acquired in other stages. All of this is implemented within the everyday life of the individual. This stage demonstrates the individual's growth, the person experiences feelings of acceptance and belonging and is able to contribute meaningfully within the community. The role of the professional as facilitator is minimised here as the individual becomes more autonomous, competent and independent (Arai, 1997). Table 2 provides an outline of the process of empowerment:

TABLE 2

Potential Outcomes Of The Empowerment Process And Ways Of Supporting This Change (Adapted From Lord, 1991)

Stages of empowerment	What is Happening? (Individual Action)	Individual Outcomes	Roles of Supporters
Experiencing Powerlessness	♦ Social isolation ♦ Lack of control ♦ Unresponsive community support services	♦ Prolonged dependency ♦ Inability to influence	♦ Ignore capacities and strengths ♦ Label and treat all individuals the same ♦ Socially isolated individuals ♦ Make choices for people
Awareness	♦ Respond to new information ♦ Involvement in a crisis or life transition ♦ Respond to a change in context	♦ Becomes aware of a desire to change ♦ May express anger or frustration with their current situation ♦ Begins to develop new directions for themselves	♦ Respond to cues of readiness for change (anger, feelings of frustration, statements) ♦ Stimulate awareness through a visioning process ♦ Provide individuals with new information or contexts
Connecting and Learning	♦ Develop support relationships with people ♦ Connect with resources (financial, technical, vocational) ♦ Expand choices and opportunities	♦ Decreased isolation ♦ Increased self-esteem ♦ Increased sense of control ♦ Improved self-concept ♦ Expanding social network	♦ Provide moral or practical support ♦ Promote mentoring ♦ Provide a facilitating or linking role ♦ Act as an information resource
Mobilization / Action	♦ Engage in new activities ♦ Self-expression ♦ Involvement in new social groups	♦ Increased feelings of competence ♦ Increased sphere of participation ♦ Expansion of outcomes in the stage of connecting and learning	♦ Support the individual's participation in activities and social groups ♦ Encourage
Contribution	♦ Sense of being accepted as an active, contributing member of community	♦ Feeling of belonging and acceptance ♦ Incorporation of outcomes from previous stages into one's overall self-concept	♦ Encourage growth, continue to support only if needed

Source: (Arai, 1997).

Although this process has been clearly defined and neatly conceptualised, it must be emphasized that in practice things are not so easily delineated. As Arai (1997) points out, "empowerment is an ongoing and fluctuating process" and people will move between stages at different periods in their lives and in accordance with specific social events. Finally, a very important point made by Gibson and Swartz (in Hook et al., 2004) is that empowerment may exist only as an ideal rather than an actuality because while the theory sounds very positive, it is in fact very difficult to apply these concepts in practice. In agreement with this, Riger (1993) asserts that ; "many intervention efforts aimed at empowerment increase people's power to act, for example, by enhancing their self-esteem, but do little to affect their power over resources or policies" (p.282). She questions whether these attempts to enhance a sense of empowerment simply end up creating the illusion of power without actually having an influence on the distribution of power. Riger (1993) emphasizes that if empowerment initiatives do not influence the larger socio-political systems, then these efforts might be doomed to be ineffective.

Another criticism levied against empowerment theory by Riger (1993) is that attempts at gaining power becomes threatening to the dominant group and thus empowerment of disenfranchised groups might be dangerous. In many cases, empowerment results in increased competition for the same resources, thus exerting additional pressure on a community or social system (Riger, 1993).

Besides these, there are other more serious criticisms which have been made against empowerment theory, specifically when empowerment is applied to groups of people from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. Riger (1993) criticises the concept of empowerment for being too entrenched within a traditional psychological view which tends to favour individualism. She asserts that a belief in individualism lies at the heart of psychology's vision of human nature, and thus a great deal of research in psychology focuses on the assumption that a healthy individual is one that is self-contained, independent and self-reliant. She takes this further by mentioning that the "autonomous individual" in psychology is based very much on Western social and economic belief systems. For Riger (1993), this fundamental view of the individual has also shaped common understandings of empowerment. Thus, according to her, although definitions of empowerment include aspects such as control over resources or influence on social and political systems, in most cases

individual empowerment becomes the main focus instead of actual empowerment on social and political levels.

Riger (1993) thus mentions that the underlying assumption of empowerment theory is that groups' conflict with each other instead of co-operating, thus empowerment has been looked at mainly on an individual level. She writes that; "the mature adult in psychological research is characterized by mastery, control and separation, rather than interdependence or relatedness. Community psychology's emphasis on empowerment follows the pattern of placing primacy on agency, mastery, and control over connectedness" (Riger, 1993, p.285). For Riger (1993) this separation of the individual and the group or community within empowerment theory has serious implications on community psychology as a discipline because the 'sense of community' or connectedness is integral to community psychology. In short, the emphasis of empowerment theory on individualism is a major weakness and one that has serious implications, especially within the framework of community empowerment initiatives.

This criticism becomes even more significant when dealing with closed social systems. Tsoukas and Papoulias (1996) discuss social practices and reforms. According to them, social systems are based on particular self-understandings which are shared by the individuals who constitute a social system. They question the origins of these self-understandings and make the point that policies and reforms are shaped by the self-understandings of those people who are developing these policies and reforms. These policies and reforms which have been developed according to the self-understandings of a specific group of people then go on to influence other social systems (Tsoukas & Papoulias, 1996). What this means in terms of empowerment is that a particular social group or system functions according to its own self-understanding. Empowerment as a theory can be regarded as a policy for change, and this has been developed or shaped according to the self-understandings of individuals coming from a different social system. When empowerment is applied to a social system, then this system becomes influenced by the self-understandings of the theorists (policy makers). For this reason, social systems need to be properly understood in its entirety according to its own self-understanding, otherwise misleading conclusions about social systems and empowerment can easily be attained.

These criticisms against empowerment theory are of absolute importance, specifically within the context of a research study such as this one, where the social system is very specific and entrenched within social, religious and cultural ideology. However, there are nonetheless elements of this theory which can easily be applied, even to such a diverse and specific social system. Bearing all this in mind then, the focus of this discussion will now shift to the different types of empowerment.

3.6. Different levels/ forms of Empowerment

Although the different levels or forms of empowerment will be discussed separately here it must be emphasized that in reality there is not a clear cut division between these different forms and instead considerable overlap and oscillation between the different types of empowerment occurs.

3.6.1. Psychological Empowerment

Psychological empowerment occurs at the individual level of analysis. Defined broadly; "Psychological empowerment (PE) includes beliefs about one's competence, efforts to exert control, and an understanding of the socio-political environment" (Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000, p. 46). It also relates to self-perception, self-esteem and self-efficacy (Zimmerman et al., 1992). For Dangor, Alderton and Taylor (in Park et al., 2000), psychological empowerment involves an increased sense of identity and an understanding of and insight into one's reality. It can be seen here that psychological empowerment is not only concerned with empowerment at the internal level, but instead, an awareness of the external socio-political environment is also an important aspect of psychological empowerment. An important point to make here is that psychological empowerment is not a personality disposition; instead it is a construct which focuses on individuals' beliefs about their social and political relationships (Mishra & Spreitzer, 1998 in Seigall & Gardner, 2000). Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000) reiterates this point when he states that psychological empowerment is not an inborn trait but instead it is something that is earned, developed and ongoing (Zimmerman, 1990b in Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000). Three important components of psychological empowerment have been identified; namely the intrapersonal, interpersonal and behavioural components. The *intrapersonal* component refers to people's thoughts or perceptions about their capacity to influence social and political systems. It includes perceived control and hence motivation to exert control. It also includes cognitive factors such as self-efficacy. The *interpersonal* or *interactional* component

involves critical awareness and an understanding of the social and political environment. This includes an ability to understand causal agents such as who holds authoritative power in the community, the factors that influence decision making and the way in which one is connected to the issues at hand. This component thus refers to how people are able to use critical skills such as problem-solving or decision-making skills in their attempts to influence their environment. The *behavioural* component of psychological empowerment involves participation in community activities or organizations and thereby taking action to exert control. In short it involves some type of influence exerted on the socio-political environment (Zimmerman et al., 1992; Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000).

Perceived Control and Perceptions of Empowerment

Perceived control is a construct which is central to psychological empowerment and thus deserves to be discussed in some detail. According to Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000, p.48); "perceived control is the belief that one can influence outcomes". People perceive situations as either controllable or uncontrollable for different reasons. Locus of control is one of the elements of perceived control (Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000). In a previous discussion on powerlessness, internal and external locus of control have already been looked at, it was ascertained that high internal locus of control relates to empowerment. Another element of perceived control is self-efficacy, which relates to personal judgements concerning necessary behaviours that will assist in achieving one's goals. Self efficacy may determine how much effort and perseverance will be exercised in achieving goals. The final domain of perceived control is motivation, where a person's intrinsic needs are related to mastery of the environment. If a person does not feel internally motivated to participate and exercise change then mastery of the environment will be less likely (Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000). A person's level of perceived control then will impact directly on the empowerment process and will play a huge role in determining whether empowered outcomes are achieved or not. Siegall and Gardner (2000) emphasize the importance of individual's perceptions of their own empowerment. They state that if individuals do not have the perception that they are being empowered, the empowerment process will not be effective. In addition, even if resources are available, it is important that individuals are made aware of available resources otherwise they will have the perceived idea that resources are unavailable.

Psychological empowerment and research

Numerous research studies have been conducted on psychological empowerment at the organizational level. Some of which directly support the theory on psychological empowerment. For instance, Menon (1999) conducted a study with 355 employed individuals enrolled at part-time business courses at four universities in Montreal. The aim was to measure and define psychological empowerment from the perspective of the individual employee. A 9-item, 3 factor scale of psychological empowerment was developed. Principal component analysis of the 9-item scale yielded three factors corresponding to the three subscales. The results of this study indicated that "the psychologically empowered state was considered to be a cognitive state characterized by a sense of perceived control, perceptions of competence, and internalization of the goals and objectives of the organization.

Other studies have used psychological empowerment constructs to determine which organizational factors best support psychological empowerment of employees (Siegall & Gardner, 2000). Leadership qualities have also been reviewed in relation to psychological empowerment and psychological empowerment theory has assisted in understanding the specific characteristics of empowered leaders (Spreitzer, De Janasz & Quinn, 1999). These types of studies have been very useful in providing helpful insight and guidelines aimed at improving organizational practices with regards to empowering employees.

However, as Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000) points out there still remain a dearth of research in this area, and the domains in which research on psychological empowerment can be carried out is vast. Furthermore, appropriate measurement devices are necessary to support research in this area.

3.6.2. Community Empowerment

Whereas psychological empowerment occurred at the individual level, community empowerment as the name implies occurs at the community or social level and is thus more concerned with groups. From a community psychology perspective, empowerment has been defined as "the process by which communities are reminded of their own power and are facilitated in their attempts to claim it" (Gibson & Swartz, in Hook at al., 2000, p.473). In a similar context, Dugan (2003) states that empowerment involves "processes through which disenfranchised social groups work to change their social surroundings, change detrimental policies and structures, and work to fulfil their needs.

Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000) points out that an empowered community will work towards establishing changes in the community which focus on the betterment of its citizens, and also provides opportunities for active participation of its citizens. Dugan (2003) mentions that for a group which is in the process of empowering itself, it is imperative that leadership and spokesperson roles remain within the group. In addition, decision-making must come from the group itself in order for the group members to develop and experience their own power.

Some important requirements or processes have been identified as playing an important role in the development of community empowerment. These will be discussed below.

Development of community groups/ organizations and networking

Dugan (2003) mentions that an organization gives disenfranchised people a voice as it provides a way in which the needs of people can be expressed. When people come together and form organizations, it is much more difficult for them to be ignored, thus, building a strong organization alters existing power relations. Once a group has been structured into a formal organization, they have to be considered in the community when important decisions are made.

In addition, networking and sharing between groups assists in community empowerment. For instance Wolf (2001 in Dugan, 2003) describes what she refers to as "power groups" of women, where women from different groups come together each month to discuss their plans with each other and to share resources, information or contacts. This type of networking between groups or organizations has been found to be very useful in the empowerment process. As Adams (1996) points out, empowered organizations within the community have the potential to combat a variety of oppressions.

Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000) is in agreement with this. He mentions that the extent to which a community is empowered can be assessed by looking at the structures and relationships which exist between community organizations. It is expected that an empowered community comprises well-connected organizations that provide opportunity for citizen participation. Also, an empowered community should ideally consist of a range of different types of organizations focussing on different areas necessary for community development such as neighbourhood crime prevention, planning or health care for instance.

Closely linked to this is the issue of available resources. Organizations will only be able to become empowered if the necessary resources are easily accessible.

Access to resources

Access to necessary resources is a crucial part of community empowerment. Resources include recreational facilities such as parks, playing fields, community centres; emergency and medical services, such as the police, fire department, hospitals or clinics; and general services, such as the media. Open and co-operative governmental departments might also be regarded as a significant resource (Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000). Money is another resource that directly influences levels of community empowerment. Dugan (2003) mentions education as an essential resource which is necessary for empowerment.

Education plays a crucial role in increasing individuals' understanding of the communities in which they live and the role that they play within those communities. Participants can only develop policies and structures of their own if they have an understanding of existing policies and structures. The way in which this education is received is important though, as participants need to empower themselves by actively and responsibly engaging in the learning process, instead of having 'teachers' dictate what should be learnt. Interaction and dialogue between participants and 'teachers' or anyone conveying the information is absolutely essential, because otherwise education can have a disempowering effect (Dugan, 2003).

The importance of access to resources cannot be overemphasized within the community empowerment framework. Taylor (in Craig & Mayo, 1995), points out that within the South African context, inequalities in resources is prominent and this has a direct influence on the existing power structures within the country. She warns that within the South African context, community empowerment has to be understood within the broader socio-political context. Since numerous imbalances exist, community empowerment initiatives in this context should specifically focus on not only provision of basic needs, human resource development and changing institutional frameworks, but more importantly it should also focus on developing the capacities of people in ways which significantly address the racial, class and gender imbalances which exist.

Community Empowerment in Practice: Some examples of initiatives

Adams (1996) describes a community initiative known as the 'Asian Resource Centre' which functions in Birmingham, England. This organization was established by a group of community members with the aim of addressing the inequalities faced by people in the Asian community. The first step was to identify and analyse the cultural and social systems that were prominent in that community. Thereafter, the specific needs of the community were identified and once the existing systems as well as the community needs had been identified, the organization set out to; "initiate, participate and assist in projects designed to protect their civil and human rights, to encourage freedom of cultural expression and encourage all Asians to reassert their cultural identity, self confidence and pride" (Birmingham Asian Resource Centre, 1987 in Adams, 1996, p.132). Thus, an initial awareness of inequalities led to active participation and implementation of activities aimed at redressing these existing inequalities.

In another example of a community empowerment initiative, O'Sullivan et al. (1984 cited in Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000), report a case study of a Native American community and its successful efforts to stop a relocation endeavour. Leaders within this community intended to build a dam that would flood the tribal homeland of The Fort McDowell Yavapai Indians. This community of only 350 people managed to successfully stop this project by using surveys to show the psychological impacts of relocation, uniting with local environmental groups and exploiting media resources. As Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000) mentions, this is an excellent example of a community empowerment initiative as it includes all the important elements necessary for successful community empowerment; that is proper use of resources (in this case the media), coalitions between organizations and critical awareness and active participation among community members.

An important community empowerment initiative which has already been referred to previously in the discussion of empowerment theory is the project in Gugulethu which aimed at supporting families of people living with HIV/AIDS. This particular project is referred to here again as it highlighted some very important difficulties and obstacles that can be encountered in community empowerment initiatives, such as possible dependence on professionals, lack of essential resources and community workers feeling overburdened.

Some of the most important considerations related to community empowerment have been mentioned here. It must be noted here that community empowerment can easily fall under the broader category of social empowerment, which encompasses both community, political and perhaps even economic aspects of empowerment. For the purposes of this research, these forms of empowerment have been discussed separately, but as mentioned previously all of these forms of empowerment are actually intertwined. A brief discussion of political empowerment and subsequently economic empowerment will follow.

3.6.3. Political Empowerment

According to Dangor et al. (in Park et al., 2000), the political dimension is not easily attained in the empowerment process. This could be attributed to the fact that political empowerment is often only addressed at a basic level, in which increased knowledge and consciousness about political rights, and knowledge about the Constitution of a country is the focus. While an increased awareness of political rights and political systems is undeniably an important facet of political empowerment, it involves much more than just that.

Besides an increased awareness about politics, political empowerment includes equal access to vote in elections, ability to stand as electoral candidates, active involvement in campaigning for elections and the height of political empowerment would be to actually hold a seat in parliament. Active participation in politics is an essential part of political empowerment because it leads to increased decision making abilities and opportunity to effect changes in the political system. "Meaningful political participation is more likely to make voters aware of their own contribution to the political process and the value of their votes" (UNIFEM, 2006, p.38).

On behalf of the United Nations Development Fund for Women a study was conducted in 2006 on the political empowerment of women in Jordan. This particular study shed light on some of the obstacles that need to be overcome in order to achieve political empowerment.

Firstly, prejudice was identified as a factor that hinders political empowerment. In this particular study it was found that societal prejudices against women had a significant impact on the political empowerment of women. Findings from the survey conducted showed that majority of the respondents believed that politics was more for men than for women. Also, more people indicated that if given the choice between voting for a man and a woman with

the same education level, they would vote for a man. This could perhaps explain the low levels of female candidates in elections and the low level of total votes for female candidates. Interestingly though, female voter turnout was found to be high, sometimes even higher than male voter turnout, indicating that even females choose to vote for males above females (UNIFEM, 2006).

Apathy towards politics was identified as another important negative factor for political empowerment. This study revealed high levels of political apathy, with only 11% of the respondents indicating that they thought politics was "the business of ordinary people", while 82.6% of the respondents felt that politics concerned small groups of people or government, and 6% associated politics with parliament. Not only does apathy relate to a general disinterest in politics, but it also involves people's perceptions that they are not capable of making decisions and changes within the political system. In this study only 3.5% of the respondents believed that they could make an impact (UNIFEM, 2006). Similar findings are discussed in a review of youth civic engagement and participation in the United States. It was found that although many young people volunteer their services and participate in social settings such as soup kitchens, neighbourhood clean-ups or mentoring centres, political engagement was very low. A 2002 youth survey showed that while 61% of college students had taken part in some type of community service, only 14% had participated in a government or political organization. A general apathy was displayed, and in fact it was reported in 2000 that only 33% of people aged 18-24 cast their votes in the presidential election (Glickman, 2004).

Another factor that was identified as an obstacle to political empowerment is the lack of skills and resources. In this study it was found that women lacked the resources necessary for lobbying and campaigning, this included funding, access to media and networking with relevant groups of people. It was thus concluded that skills such as fund raising abilities, or the ability to target specific groups of people that can be drawn upon for support, and resources such as the media is essential within the empowering process. It was also found that education is a very important resource and a positive factor in promoting political empowerment. In this particular study findings showed that people with higher levels of education were more open towards the political empowerment of women. It was also found that youth impacted on perception of women's political empowerment, where younger people

displayed more positive and open attitudes towards the political empowerment of women (UNIFEM, 2006).

It is clear from this discussion that political empowerment goes beyond a basic knowledge and awareness of politics, and like other forms of empowerment, political empowerment does not stand in isolation as it taps into the existing social and economic systems as well.

3.6.4. Economic Empowerment

Economic empowerment has been defined as the control of income and other key economic resources such as land or animals for example (Blumberg, 2005). Dangor et al. (in Park et al., 2000) discuss the empowerment of women, focussing specifically on women in shelters for abused women in South Africa. They have identified economic empowerment as one important area that requires attention. For them economic or financial empowerment involves the increase in economic and financial literacy as well as learning how to control one's own finances. They mention that skills like learning how to manage finances, budgeting and even basic financial literacy like knowing how to open a bank account for instance might be taught to women in order to empower them financially. However, they place emphasis on the fact that women should not become financially dependent on the shelter that they are in, because this would only lead to further disempowerment. In this case they advise that women should be taught the necessary skills and perhaps even provided with resources so that they are able to develop and sustain their own economic means when they leave the shelter (Dangor et al., in Park et al., 2000). This perhaps describes the ideal of economic empowerment; for individuals to become equipped with the necessary skills, knowledge and resources which will result in their own sustainable economic development.

Economic empowerment is analyzed by examining two key indicators; that is the crude activity rate and the refined activity rate. The *crude activity rate* represents the percentage of economically active members in society. It is calculated by dividing the total number of economically active members of the population by the total population. The *refined activity rate* relates the actual workforce to the number of potential candidates for entering the workforce. In the study conducted on women in Jordan, an analysis of both of these factors showed that women in Jordan were economically underdeveloped. Employment and ownership of property were identified as important factors for economic empowerment. In the Jordan study it was found that women are disadvantaged in both areas. Women have

lower levels of employment than men and less access to property, thus making economic empowerment far more difficult for women (UNIFEM, 2006). This is common in many other countries as well.

In South Africa a similar trend is evident. Research has shown that women are more likely to be economically disadvantaged than men. It has been found that women do the bulk of caring, unpaid work in the society thus restricting their time for paid work. Attempts are been made in South Africa to improve women's economic status, for instance a quota has been set for 60% of jobs to go for women, however, the proper implementation of these types of strategies are still far off and majority of the country's women are still economically disadvantaged (Budlender, 2003).

Economic empowerment brings about many advantages, specifically for women. Blumberg (2005) discusses the many advantages that come with women's economic empowerment and she states that; women's economic empowerment comes close to being a "magic potion" that boosts both gender equality and the "wealth and well-being of nations" (Blumberg, 2005, p.2). Among the advantages that she discusses is that economic empowerment provides women with self-confidence and decision making power within the household. It also allows for relative freedom of movement and influence in community affairs. Also, economic empowerment has been regarded as an effective way of reducing corruption and violence against women. Studies have found however, that a weak relationship exists between women's economic empowerment and distribution of child care duties, similar results were found in the case of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, where women's economic empowerment had very little effect on HIV/AIDS and STD infection rates. Culture appears to play a bigger role than economic status in these areas (Blumberg, 2005).

Once again it can be seen that economic empowerment is very closely embedded within the socio-cultural and political structures within different contexts, and in reality it is impossible to separate empowerment on these different levels.

3.6.5. Intellectual Empowerment

Kumon (2000) uses the term *Informatization* to describe intellectual empowerment. For him, this is regarded as the third phase of Modernization, following militarization and industrialization. He writes that if industrialization is fundamentally regarded as economic

empowerment then intellectual empowerment is enabled by an increase and sharing of knowledge and information. The digital world of the internet is regarded as an important tool for intellectual empowerment, and thus as might be expected in this "information age", technology comes to play a huge role within the framework of intellectual empowerment. This type of empowerment is continuous, but due to its complexity and scale, empowerment processes tend to take place unevenly (Kumon, 2000).

Education has already been mentioned as an important resource in other forms of empowerment discussed herein, in the case of intellectual empowerment however, education, in terms of an increase and exchange of knowledge and information could perhaps be regarded as the central tenet. The importance of education cannot be overemphasized; educational achievement has been regarded as a tool that could relate to both economic and political empowerment. In the case of economic empowerment, higher education levels should ideally lead to an increase in economic empowerment, with political empowerment, gains in education should lead to increased understanding and involvement in political activities (UNIFEM, 2006). In this way then, it the link between economic, political and intellectual empowerment is demonstrated.

Although intellectual empowerment is important, it is very difficult to discuss in isolation. This is because it very rarely occurs in isolation and it is common to find that intellectual empowerment occurs as a sort of by-product of other forms of empowerment. Intellectual empowerment then can perhaps be regarded as being embedded within every other form of empowerment and it has only been mentioned here as a separate from of empowerment for the purpose of discussion in this particular research study.

After having discussed all the major different types of empowerment, some attention will be given to the issue of women's empowerment. It needs to be emphasized again that the issue of women's empowerment is by no means a simple issue with overnight solutions. It has been mentioned that empowerment is a long-term process of development and learning in which systematic strategies are put into place in order to challenge prevailing structures (Kieffer in Rappaport et.al, 1984 and Karl, 1995). In South Africa, many steps have been taken to empower women, of all races, religions and cultural backgrounds in both urban and rural areas. Educating women has been regarded as an important means of empowerment (Karl, 1995) and this is just one of the strategies being put into place within the South African

context. Another example is that women have being given a voice in South African Trade Unions. Women's forums have been set up in unions since the early 90s and gender awareness training has been initiated in order to increase the sensitivity of males to the needs and concerns of women (Karl, 1995). In more recent years, we have seen an increase of women in positions of power in the business, educational and political sectors. These are just a few ways in which the issue of women's empowerment has attempted to be addressed in South Africa. Of course there are many ways and means through which empowerment can be achieved. Within the context of this study, women's groups will now be discussed as an empowerment initiative. Thereafter the focus will shift to a more direct discussion of women and empowerment and specific gender issues will be explored.

3.7.1. Women's groups as an empowerment initiative

Andrews (1996) believes that women across the globe are connected by a common gender identity. This connectedness goes beyond geographic distance or historical background because women are linked physically and spiritually. It is only a woman who will truly understand and be able to appreciate the experiences of another woman. She believes strongly that the key to women's empowerment lies in women uniting and working together. Based on similar thinking, women have come together to form groups and in general women's groups have made an important contribution towards society in various areas.

In a study conducted by Neidell (1998) it was found that Women's Groups played an important role at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development. Women belonging to women's groups were found to be actively involved in the event and boldly spoke out about issues relating to women's reproductive health and women's rights.

Similarly, both Shaheed (1995) and Jamal (2005) discuss how activist women's groups were closely linked to what is referred to as "the women's movement" in Pakistan. Women's groups were involved in mobilizing resistance against discriminatory laws and delaying the enactment of certain laws while contributing to amendments in legislature. Also, apart from legal and legislative matters, women's groups played an important role in speaking out against violence against women, by organising public campaigns that highlighted horrific cases of women's abuse and violence against women (Shaheed in Afkhami, 1995). However, despite these efforts, it was found that women's rights remained insecure and the majority of women remained unaware of what their rights were and remained uninvolved in speaking out

against their lack of rights (Jamal, 2005). Also, although women's groups were involved in campaigning against violence against women and lack of rights, they were unable to "come to grips with the issue in a manner that would modify the experiences of women subjected to it" (Shaheed in Afkhami, 1995, p. 93). Thus, while women's groups and women's movements concentrated on political issues to a large extent, women's groups in Pakistan struggled to deal with issues relating to personal oppression (Shaheed in Afkhami, 1995).

Another study focussing on community women's groups was conducted in Ireland. McMinn and O'Meara (2000) conducted a study on behalf of an organisation called Women Educating for Transformation (WEFT). The focus of this study was on the sustainability of community women's groups in the six Southern Border counties in Ireland. The aim of their research was "to identify the resources, supports and infrastructure necessary for their work to be sustained and developed at sectoral level" (McMinn & O'Meara, 2000, p.1). In this study a variety of methods were used to receive information about these women's groups. These methods included; interviews (group and individual), surveys, questionnaires as well as structured workshops. The sample included 88 women's groups and there were 5023 women involved, this meant that there was an average of about 57 women per group. The main activities of these women's groups included community education, socialising, arts and crafts, health, social change, training for employment, childcare and caring for the environment. The most common activity being community education and the least common activity being caring for the environment. It was found that "the majority of the women's groups are involved in community education, with almost half engaged in social activities" (McMinn & O'Meara, 2000, p.20).

The findings of the research indicated that economic, social/cultural and political disadvantages are experienced by women's groups. Economic disadvantage experienced by women's groups is caused by; limited access to funding, lack of transport, lack of resources for essential support services, especially child care, lack of volunteers, lack of suitable premises to undertake activities, lack of access to information and suitable training. Social and cultural disadvantage is experienced by women's groups because of; a lack of understanding of society about the problems concerning women, a lack of recognition and value of women's groups- many women's groups indicated that they are not taken seriously, conservatism and fear of 'feminism', difficulty in getting women to take on responsibilities and difficulty to get through to many women. Political disadvantages experienced by

women's groups is caused by; the fact that women's issues continue to be seen as peripheral, lack of power for women, remoteness from centres of power and decision making, lack of understanding within women's groups of the importance of networking and lack of collective voice for community women's groups (McMinn & O'Meara, 2000).

Thus it is clear that although women's groups play an important role in effecting change in various communities (even if this change is minimal), there are still many challenges that need to be overcome. It can be seen that these women's groups are still battling with issues of inequality and lack of power and the ideal of empowerment has yet to be achieved. The scenario is very similar within Muslim society.

3.7.2. Women's groups as an empowerment initiative in the Muslim community

In recent years, there has been an increase in the formation of women's groups within the Muslim community as well.

One example of such a Muslim women's group is a group in Malaysia that refer to themselves as "Sisters in Islam (SIS)".This group consists of professional women who are "committed to promoting the rights of women within the framework of Islam". This group was formed in 1988 and registered as a Non-Governmental Organization (NGO) in 1993 under the name "SIS Forum (Malaysia) Berhad". The mission of this group is "to promote an awareness of the true principles of Islam, principles that enshrine the concept of equality between women and men, and to strive towards creating a society that upholds the Islamic principles of equality, justice, freedom and dignity within a democratic state". The type of activities conducted by this group includes workshops, public lectures, press conferences, study sessions, and the publication and release of books and articles (SIS Forum Malaysia, 2006).

In the United States alone, there are a variety of Muslim women's groups that have been formed throughout the country. These groups are involved in a variety of activities including such things as promoting Islamic rights for women, encouraging networking among Muslim women, hosting of women's conferences and leadership programmes and sponsoring lectures on faith and feminism, promoting women's education and raising timely topics, such as discrimination among Muslims, providing legal referrals and direct Islamic legal advice regarding divorce, advocating social justice and human rights, providing temporary shelter

for women who have left abusive homes as well as working with women in distress, the homeless, and refugees (Religion Newswriters Foundation., 2006).

Abugideiri (in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 2001) discusses the important contributions and impact made by a women's group in America which was created in 1983. The National American Council for Muslim Women (NACMW) provides a forum to discuss women's issues while offering an Islamic solution. The main aims and objectives of NACMW is to educate Muslim women about Islam using the original sources as a basis of this teaching, to help women develop their own self-concept and gain confidence and thus to become self empowered individuals, and assisting women to contribute to society at large. NACMW focuses on enlightening women about their rights according to the primary religious texts. Training programmes, Qur'anic study circles and written publications are the means through which they endeavour to fulfil their aims. The group does not shy away from any issue that relates to women and issues such as domestic violence, leadership of women, women's role within the home and in relation to the husband, women's work and earning of money, to mention a few , have been the focus of many of their programmes. Many of the women in this group are converts to Islam or immigrants who do not have firsthand knowledge about Islam and thus this group plays an important role in empowering women by educating them with regards to their rights within an Islamic framework (Abugideiri in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 2001)

This trend is also evident in the U.K. For instance, a coalition of British Muslim women's groups and organisations have recently joint to form a campaign referred to as "Muslim Women Talk". This campaign aims to have interactive discussions with key role players in government. Some of the aims and objectives of this campaign include; "to harness social capital of Muslim women through public debate and channel their experiences and concerns through to government; to encourage the participation of Muslim women in decision making forums; to showcase and develop work already being done by Muslim women in the voluntary sector and to promote policies that are culturally and faith sensitive" (Muslim Women Talk, 2005).

Formalised women's groups have only recently begun to emerge within the South African Muslim community. Lately, however, there has been a growth of formalised, structured women's groups in many different geographical areas in the country. Muslim women's

groups are active in areas such as Johannesburg, Vereeniging (Roshnee), Heidelburg, Pretoria, Middelburg, Potchefstroom, Benoni, Bloemfontein, Kroonstad, Durban and Cape Town. These groups usually become known through word-of-mouth advertising, advertising via pamphlets and posters and in some cases through the local Muslim media. While some of these women's groups are formalised, registered organizations, others are community based groups. These groups also have specific aims and purposes.

Some of the activities that are carried out by these women's groups include counselling for women, life skills and awareness workshops, organising food hampers and distribution of sandwiches to the poor, collection of clothes and distribution of blankets to poorer areas in winter, hosting lunches and tea's for pensioners, establishment of an Islamic library, and various fund raising events such as hosting fun-walks, having lunches or cultural evenings or having motivational talks. The aim of these groups is to enhance and uplift society and to empower women through social work, education and awareness and giving to the poor and needy (Patel, 2004; Southern Suburbs Muslim Women's Forum, 2004). In addition, South African Muslim women aim to come together through a common network that will address issues affecting South African Muslim women.

3.7.3. The women's groups that participated in this study

The sample of this study comprises women from two different women's groups. These will be referred to as Group A and Group B in order to ensure anonymity of the groups. For this reason also, specific identifying information will not be included in this discussion. Table 3 presents an overview of the two groups.

TABLE 3- BROAD OVERVIEW OF WOMEN'S GROUPS		
	Group A	**Group B**
Goals **Why and when the group was formed**	• Formed as a means of giving back to the community and becoming more constructive • Established formally about 4 years ago	• Formed in response to family and social problems (such as increased divorce rates, drug abuse, parent-child difficulties). • Established about 3 years ago
Demographic Characteristics of members	• Indian-Asian Ethnic origin • 35-59 year age group • 4 women-tertiary education (undergraduate) 1 woman- Grade 8	• Indian-Asian Ethnic origin • 29-59 year age group • 2 women-tertiary education (postgraduate) 1 –tertiary (undergraduate) 2-Matric level education
Occupational status of members	• 2 women unemployed • 1 Full-time employed • 1 Part-time employed • 1 runs her own business	• 1 woman Full-time employed • 1 woman Part-time employed • 2-unemployed
Activities conducted	• Community and social work-e.g. fundraisers, handing out of food parcels/sandwiches, and blanket distribution to the poor... • Networking with Muslim and non-Muslim groups • Local and neighbouring areas • Men and women involved • Activities conducted on medium scale	• Educational and religious awareness workshops with other Muslim women in the local community. • Small scale activities • Limited advertising- spread via social network (through word-of-mouth).
Structure	• Formal structure • Chairperson, treasurer, secretary elected • Members join when they want to- no pre-requisites.	• Informal structure • All members same status (no chairperson, etc) • Members join when they want to- no pre-requisites.

Group A comprises of women who reside in the urban suburbs of Johannesburg. This group was formed with the intention of making a more meaningful contribution to society. The women in this group wanted to contribute to the community and become more constructive. The main activities of the group is charity and community work, such as handing out sandwiches to disadvantaged people at a neighbouring hospital, collecting blankets for poor people in winter and putting together food parcels for poor people in the Muslim month of fasting, *Ramadaan.* On a community level their activities include such things as raising funds to host community events such as concerts for children or luncheons and teas for the elderly. Although the activities of these women cannot be described as "large scale", they conduct a considerable amount of work in different areas in Johannesburg. Their activities involve people from different social classes (i.e. lower, upper and middle class people) and religious backgrounds.

The group has formally been in existence for approximately four years and prior to this many of the members were involved informally in the community. This group has a fixed structure; a chairperson as well as a secretary and treasurer have been elected. Members join the group whenever they want to, there are no pre-requisites and any woman who feels that she has something to contribute can approach the group to join. All women are accepted within the group. However, the group does not have any offices from which they operate. Most of the work is conducted from the women's homes. Meetings are most often held at the chairperson's home but sometimes at the homes of other members.

Although all the members of this group are Muslim women, their activities extend to people of other faiths as well. Both women and men benefit from the charity work being done and the community activities are open to people from both sexes. In fact, contrary to Group B, this group welcomes the assistance and involvement of males.

Group B functions in a closely situated urban area to Group A. The main activity of this group is community work and their aim is to create awareness of women's rights and women's roles in the family, within marriage and as mothers. This group was formed in response to escalating family and social problems within the Muslim community (such as increased divorce rates, drug abuse, parent and child conflict, and depression). This group has been in existence for approximately 3 years. All their activities are strongly based within an Islamic framework as it is their belief that Islamic beliefs and ideals need to be incorporated into people's 'modern' lifestyles in order for them to lead fulfilled lives.

Awareness is created through a series of educational and religious awareness workshops which are run at different times in the year. This group thus comprises of a qualified social worker, trained facilitators and religious experts (women are well versed in Islamic matters, including Islamic legal matters). The activities of this group are conducted on a small scale with a few women attending workshops at a time. Advertising is limited and the activities of this group are spread through the social networks of the women via word of mouth.

This group insists however that they do not have a hierarchical structure and that all members are regarded as equal. They hold the belief that each individual woman has an important role to play within in the group and each individual brings with her, her own knowledge and expertise that the others can draw on and learn from.

This group works only with women, although their activities are open to women from all faiths, only Muslim women have participated in their activities thus far. This can perhaps be attributed to the strong Islamic ethos that they postulate, which is evident in the group name itself. Similarly to group A, members join the group whenever they want to, there are no pre-requisites and any woman who feels that she has something to contribute can approach the group to join.

According to the women in this group, men and women should work in separate domains. They believe that women are best suited to understand the conditions and situations of other women and men are not equipped to deal with the situations that women find themselves in. They are also insistent upon maintaining the *hijab.* They therefore try to ensure that their activities remain within specific boundaries; for instance they are not comfortable to mix with strange men. The stance taken by this group is that women are able to make important contributions to society from within the boundaries set out to them in the Islamic *shari'ah.*

Although there are evident differences between the two groups, they share a commonality which cannot be overlooked. Both of these groups function within the broader social system in which power structures, as well as rules and regulations have already been set. In addition, these existing dominant structures ascribe to certain paradigms themselves (whether this is implicit or explicit), and thus view the social world, and specifically gender relations according to their own particular framework, understanding and set of beliefs.

3.8. Women, Gender Equality and Empowerment

Smail (2001) suggests that power is generated within and between larger socio-economic and cultural systems. "People are thus held in place within the social environment by the influences which structure it, and their freedom to change position or influence people and events is strictly limited by the availability of power within the sub-systems in which they are located" (Smail, 2001). A finding that is consistent within the previous discussion is that women's groups and women's empowerment initiatives very clearly highlight gender inequalities. Women still do not have equal access to resources, they have limited decision making power, they are unable to influence society at large, and there exists a continuous struggle for women's voices to be heard. Thus, although women are experiencing the need to change their situation, their efforts are limited by their lack of power, access and limited

ability to influence people in their environments. When discussing women's empowerment then, it is common to find that actual change in gender relations is very difficult to achieve.

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), gender equality and women's empowerment cannot be separated. "Equality between men and women exists when both sexes are able to share equally in the distribution of power and influence...A critical aspect of promoting gender equality is the empowerment of women, with a focus on identifying and redressing power imbalances and giving women more autonomy to manage their own lives" (UNFPA, 2007). Thus, while empowerment of women is necessary to achieve gender equality, empowerment itself cannot truly be achieved within the context of prevailing gender inequality and both gender equality and empowerment of women are therefore inextricably linked. It makes sense then that common conceptualizations of gender within a particular context will directly influence the empowerment of women and this should be borne in mind when focussing on women's empowerment in general.

According to Pietila and Vickers (1990, cited in Neidell, 1998) although the UN charter adopted in 1945 recognizes equality of the sexes, the UN agenda only began to address the concerns of women in the 1970s. Over the years, women's empowerment has been gaining momentum, whether through feminist movements or other forms of gender activism. Presently, many countries have deemed it fit to add the issue of women's empowerment to their agenda. In South Africa, this has been given high priority. Yet, the road to women's empowerment remains a long one with many obstacles and the reality is that in most cases women are still the most disadvantaged members of the population.

In a case study conducted by Neidell (1998), it was found that the issue of women's empowerment amassed large scale public and media attention at the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD). Although the main focus of this particular conference was on women's empowerment in relation to population and reproductive choices, women's empowerment in general was also highlighted. Thus, Neidell (1998) highlights the fact that this 1994 conference ended with a call for women's empowerment.

Fedler and Tanzer (2003) discuss the issue of gender equality and state that in order for gender equality to be achieved, power imbalances that exist between men and women need to

be redressed. It has been found that inequalities exist between men and women specifically with regards to economic power, social power, physical power and inter-personal power and these imbalances would need to be redressed in order to achieve gender equality (Wikler in Fedler & Tanzer, 2003). These power imbalances also make up the focus of empowerment theory.

It has already been seen that women still have far to come in terms of political and economic empowerment. Although education levels of women are increasing, this has not been translated into gains for either political or economic empowerment (UNIFEM, 2006). It appears then that empowerment of women is in most cases addressed at the very basic level, without actually delving into the central issues of empowerment theory.

Kabeer (in Kabeer, 2000) writes that both official development agencies as well as social organizations have important contributions to make towards women's empowerment. It is clearly vital that equal access to resources is created. Furthermore, greater investments in women's health and well being is necessary, more access to paid activities is required and there should be clear evidence of women's active participation in political processes. Finally, it is not enough for women to be granted access to resources; instead true equity is based on women's ability to define their own priorities and make their own decisions (Kabeer, 2000).

In conclusion, the intricate relationship between gender equality and women's empowerment has been highlighted here. It is clear that common understandings of gender influence the distribution of power and subsequently affects the overall empowerment of women.

3.9. Conclusion

This chapter has focussed on issues related to power and empowerment and it is clear from this discussion that the very nature of these constructs is complex. Existing power structures have been established in society for many different reasons and while those who have been disempowered seek to regain power and mastery over their lives, those that hold the power are set on maintaining the power structures which sustain them. Power then can be both damaging and rewarding and it is a construct which is very easily abused. Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000) pointed out that while "power" and "empowerment" are closely linked, these are two different constructs. Empowerment theory encompasses issues of power, but the focus of empowerment theory is on the enhancement of individual's lives and

of communities. Participation in society, on different levels has been identified as an essential part of empowerment. Access to essential resources has also been regarded as important in any empowerment intervention. The different forms of empowerment have been discussed and the interconnectedness of different types of empowerment, on different levels has continuously been emphasized. It has also been established that many developments are still necessary for women's empowerment. Also, empowerment theory is far from perfect, and although the theory appears to be very positive, as mentioned by Gibson and Swartz (in Hook et al., 2004), actual implementation of empowerment theory and its concepts comes with many obstacles, making the ideal of empowerment very difficult to establish in practice. Further limitations of the theory have been identified by Riger (1993) and the strongest criticism against empowerment theory was that the focus on empowerment is largely on individual instead of group empowerment.

Although some notable initiatives towards women's empowerment have been made, women are still faced with many obstacles and women's empowerment still appears to be a far off ideal. Women in South Africa have also had to deal with many challenges, and the establishment of women's groups is one way in which women have been able to address the issues that they are faced with. With the establishment of these groups have come additional challenges as women have now been located within the broader society but still find themselves having to create a space that they are comfortable with within that society. In addition they continue to compete for access to various resources, and thus issues of power and empowerment are brought to the fore. Finally, it has been established that a very close link exists between women's empowerment and gender equality. With respect to the focuses of this thesis, there is both a specific focus on empowerment in relation to gender equality. Broader issues in relation to empowerment of women have also been investigated, through examination of the data.

CHAPTER 4 – *METHODOLOGY*

"The nature of the data and the problem for research dictate the research methodology"
(Leedy, 1993, p.139).

A qualitative research methodology was used in this study. Mouton (in Ferreira, Mouton, Puth, Schurink & Schurink, 1988) states that "the term 'qualitative' is an indication that this approach concentrates on qualities of human behaviour, i.e. on the qualitative aspects as against the quantitatively measurable aspects of human behaviour" (p.1). Qualitative research methods are involved with understanding and interpreting the meanings and intentions that underlie everyday human action (Mouton, in Ferreira et al., 1988). As opposed to more traditional quantitative methods, the researcher takes on a more interactive role and is not simply an outside observer. It has been acknowledged that within a qualitative research paradigm the researcher's actions can have a direct or indirect influence on the outcomes of the study. "It is therefore important that researchers are prepared to handle this interpersonal aspect of qualitative research with sensitivity and skill" (Oskowitz & Buskens, 1997 in Nzima, 2005b, p.51). When reviewing the aims of this research it was discovered that a qualitative research methodology was the best suited for this study.

4.1. Choosing a qualitative methodology

According to Cohen and Manion (1989), researchers are interested in understanding the nature of particular phenomena. Different researchers go about attempting to do this by employing the methods that they find most suitable and valid. Cohen and Manion (1989) discuss in detail two popular conceptions of social reality; the *positivist* approach and the *anti-positivist* or *interpretive* approach. These approaches are based on a set of assumptions. Firstly there are *ontological* assumptions which concern the very nature or essence of social phenomena under investigation. The second set of assumptions is of an *epistemological* kind, which involve the very bases of knowledge. The third set of assumptions concern *human nature* and focus specifically on the relationship between human beings and their environment. The final set of assumptions is referred to as *methodological* assumptions (Burrell & Morgan in Cohen & Manion, 1989).

The first three sets of assumptions will have a direct influence on the methodological concerns of the researcher as contrasting assumptions in these three areas will determine the different research methods and approach that will be employed. For instance, if a researcher

subscribes to a more objectivist or positivist approach to the social world and regards natural phenomena as measurable, quantifiable and external to the individual, then that person is more likely to choose more traditional research methods such as experiments or surveys. On the other hand, researchers who favour an anti-positivist or subjectivist approach will view the social world as been personal, man-created and subject to an individual's interpretation of his/her experiences. In this case, qualitative techniques such as participant observation for instance will be used (Cohen & Manion, 1989).

In addition to the positivist and interpretive approaches, Neuman (2000) discusses a third approach to research; the critical approach. The critical approach takes on strong value positions and is actively concerned with exposing false illusions about social realities. This approach thus goes beyond the surface to uncover the real structures that function within the social world with the aim of helping people to change their conditions (Neuman, 2000).

Table 4 below provides a summary of these three approaches to research:

TABLE 4: A SUMMARY OF DIFFERENCES AMONG THE THREE APPROACHES TO RESEARCH

		POSITIVISM	INTERPRETIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE	CRITICAL SOCIAL SCIENCE
1.	**Reason for research**	To discover natural laws so people can predict and control events	To understand and describe meaningful social action	To smash myths and empower people to change society radically
2.	**Nature of social reality**	Stable pre-existing patterns of order that can be discovered	Fluid definitions of a situation created by human interaction	Conflict-filled and governed by hidden underlying structures
3.	**Nature of human beings**	Self-interested and rational individuals who are shaped by external forces	Social beings who create meaning and who constantly make sense of their worlds	Creative, adaptive people with unrealized potential, trapped by illusion and exploitation
4.	**Role of common sense**	Clearly distinct from and less valid than science	Powerful everyday theories used by ordinary people	False beliefs that hide power and objective conditions
5.	**Theory looks like**	A logical, deductive system of interconnected definitions, axioms and laws	A description of how a group's meaning system is generated and sustained	A critique that reveals true conditions and helps people see the way to a better world
6.	**An explanation that is true**	Is logically connected to laws and based on facts	Resonates or feels right to those who are being studied	Supplies people with tools needed to change the world
7.	**Good evidence**	Is based on precise observations that others can repeat	Is embedded in the context of fluid social interactions	In informed by a theory that unveils illusions
8.	**Place for values**	Science is value free, and values have no place except when choosing a topic	Values are an integral part of social life: no group's values are wrong, only different	All science must begin with a value position; some positions are right, some are wrong

Source: (Neuman, 2000, p.85).

Based on the above discussion, the interpretive approach to research was chosen as the most applicable approach for this particular study. Within this approach the search for understanding is focussed on how individuals create, modify and interpret the social world (Cohen & Manion, 1989). It adopts a practical orientation as it is concerned with how

ordinary people manage normal, everyday affairs as well as with how people interact with each other (Neuman, 2000). Although qualitative methods are mainly used within this approach, it is not uncommon for a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to be used when this approach is adopted (Neuman, 2000; Cohen & Manion, 1989). The method employed in this study is purely qualitative in nature.

Another decision that had to be made when choosing a methodology for this study relates to what Cohen and Manion (1989) refer to as *reasoning.* They mention that there are ways in which people attempt to comprehend the world around them; through experience, reasoning and research. Aspects of research methodology have already been looked at. The way in which *reasoning* relates to this study will be discussed briefly here.

Three types of reasoning have been identified; *deductive reasoning, inductive reasoning* and *inductive-deductive* reasoning. Deductive reasoning is based on *a priori* or self-evident proposition. The chief underlying assumption is that valid conclusions can be deduced from the general to the specific. In short, assumptions are made based on previous knowledge and experience and then applied to specific cases. Inductive reasoning came about as an attempt to account for the shortcomings of the deductive approach. Inductive reasoning is not based on any preconceived notions and moves from the study of individuals to hypothesis formation and then to making generalizations. The assumption here is that if one maintained objectivity and collected enough data without imposing preconceived assumptions upon it then inherent relationships would begin to emerge. The inductive approach was followed by the inductive-deductive approach. This approach combines the two former ones and results in a "back-and-forth movement", where the researcher first operates inductively from observations to hypotheses formation and then deductively from these hypotheses to their implications. After revision, where necessary, the hypotheses could be submitted to further investigation (Cohen & Manion, 1989).

Both deductive and inductive reasoning can be identified at different points and on different levels within this study. Firstly, a deductive approach was used as research questions were formed based on prior assumptions about Muslim women and empowerment. This was substantiated by an inductive or more emergent approach as various theories discussed in the literature review provided new information and supported and validated previous assumptions. The theory as well as the research questions then formed the basis on which the

questionnaire and interview schedules were drawn up. In the data analyses, *a priori* coding categories or themes were formulated based on these instruments (questionnaire and interview schedules); however, this was further supplemented by allowing additional themes to emerge. The findings from the data which have been based on a specific group of individuals would in turn be used to make assumptions about a more general population. Thus, it can be seen that a "back-and-forth movement" between inductive and deductive reasoning is evident within this research.

Having discussed the rationale behind using a qualitative approach and its applicability within this study, the focus of discussion will now move towards more specific issues such as choosing a sample, developing instruments, the process of data collection and analysis of data. Table 5 provides a summary of this entire process:

TABLE 5: RESEARCH DESIGN TABLE					
SAMPLE	**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**	**DATA SOURCES**	**INDICATORS**	**INSTRUMENT/S**	**DATA ANALYSIS**
Consists of 10 Muslim women, each from two different women's groups in Johannesburg. (5 from both groups)	1. Is there evidence to suggest that involvement in women's groups contributes to empowerment of Muslim women on psychological, community, political, economic and intellectual levels?	Self –reported information received from open-ended questionnaire, focus group and individual interview. (Questionnaire responses transcribed; focus group transcripts and individual interview transcripts).	- Evidence of individual acting as agent of change. - Active participation in community activities/ organizations. - Evident networking with other community organizations. - Increased awareness of social and political systems. - Mastery of the environment, through greater decision making abilities and leadership roles. - Greater access to material and knowledge resources. - Contribution to the community.	- Open-ended questionnaire - Focus Groups - Individual interviews	- Computer-based Thematic Content Analysis - Qualitative Interpretive Thematic Content Analysis
	2. Are Muslim women being empowered with respect to gender equality through their involvement in women's groups?		*Psychological- Intrapersonal component of PE-* increase in perceived control (higher internal locus of control), motivation to make changes, increased self-efficacy. *Interpersonal component of PE-* evidence of critical awareness and understanding of social and political systems. *Behavioural component of PE-* Participation and action. *Community-* Forming community groups and evidence of networking. Increased access to resources. *Political-* Increased awareness of political systems. Evidence of active involvement in politics, such as voting, running for parliament, campaigning. *Economical-* Evidence of increased awareness and knowledge of financial matters. Evidence of financial independence. Greater access to paid work and greater access to property. *Intellectual-* Greater access to information (e.g. ability to use the internet as a source of knowledge). Greater access to education. *Gender Equality-* Equal access to resources, equal opportunities at all levels and within all sectors of society, shared power, equal decision-making ability.		

4.2. Development of research questions

Barrett (in Breakwell, Hammond & Fife-Schaw, 1997) states that once an area of interest has been specified for a particular research study, the researcher needs to develop a set of specific goals which are based on prior assumptions about a particular field of study. These goals or aims will form the basis on which the research questions are formulated. In order to investigate whether the chosen criteria for a particular study is feasible, it is essential that highly specific research questions are formulated. In addition, specific research questions will ensure that the data which has been collected will actually address the research questions. It is thus vital to use specific questions to inform the design of the research from the outset so that there is certainty that the data will answer the questions. It does not make sense to have broad research questions and then collect data which in the end cannot be used to answer the research questions (Barrett, in Breakwell et al., 1997).

This type of procedure was adopted when developing research questions for this study. Once the area of interest and aims of the study were identified, the researcher set out to formulate research questions. As mentioned previously research questions were formed based on prior assumptions about Muslim women, women's groups and empowerment theory. Initially four research questions were formulated. After a basic perusal of the literature relating to this topic, the questions were reviewed. It was found that the 4 research questions could be integrated to form two specific questions. The final research questions for this study are thus:

1. **Is there evidence to suggest that involvement in women's groups contributes to empowerment of Muslim women on psychological, community, political, economic and intellectual levels?**
2. **Are Muslim women being empowered with respect to gender equality through their involvement in women's groups?**

4.3. Sample

Purposive sampling was used in this research study. One of the reasons for using this type of sampling is when the researcher intends to do an in-depth study and gain a deeper understanding of a particular group of people. Purposive sampling "selects cases with a specific purpose in mind"(Neuman, 2000, p.198). The participants in this study were selected based on specific criteria (i.e. they had to be Muslim women and they had to be members of a women's group). Since the necessary criteria were predefined and very specific, this was regarded as the most suitable sampling strategy.

The sample was derived from two community Muslim women's groups in the Johannesburg area. Five women from each group participated in the study, thus the total sample consisted of ten women. The groups were initially identified through local advertising (such as newsletters and pamphlets which are distributed locally), and by word of mouth.

The sample comprised of women who occupy different levels within the respective women's groups (for e.g. from chairperson to ordinary member). 7 of the women have been involved in a women's group for approximately 4 years, the other three have been involved for approximately 2 years. The most common age ranges were the 30-35 and 42-47 year age range. 9 out of 10 were married and the average number of children for the women in the sample was 3. The highest level of education reached was a tertiary degree at Honours level and the lowest level of education reached was Standard 8, Grade 10 according to the new education curriculum. While half of the respondents had some sort of formal occupation and gainful employment, the other half were not employed. 9 of the respondents are involved in a women's group on a voluntary basis, only 1 receives a small stipend for her participation.

The women were briefed on the research process beforehand and all the women in the sample committed to participating fully in the study, over the necessary period of time. This required that they participate in completing a questionnaire, attending a focus group session and making time for an individual interview. A full discussion on the nature of the two women's groups and the types of activities that they undertake has been provided in Chapter 3 and will not be looked at here again.

4.4. Data sources and Instruments

Data were gathered through the use of an open-ended questionnaire, focus group sessions and individual interviews. This procedure has been based on the rationale mentioned by Kerlinger (1973, cited in Potter, 2004) and very successfully utilised by Potter and his colleagues in a study of university Engineering students. According to this rationale pertinent issues can initially be brought into a respondent's consciousness through the use of a questionnaire, and thereafter the questionnaire responses can be used to draw up subsequent interview schedules (Potter, 2004). Also, as stated by Potter (2004) repeated interviewing can be used as a way of clarifying issues and enhancing understanding of the issues at hand. This is the rationale behind the use of the individual interview, but could also apply to the focus group interview.

There were thus three data sources utilised in this study; namely, questionnaire responses, focus group transcripts and individual interview transcripts

Development of the Questionnaire

The initial questionnaire consisted of 4 sections; Section 1 focussed on personal or biographical details, section 2 was aimed at testing respondent's knowledge and understanding of empowerment, section 3 included 30 questions designed to elicit respondent's personal experiences, these questions were drawn up using empowerment theory as a basis and were very direct and focused. Section 4 comprised of open-ended questions which focussed on issues like challenges faced, or attitudes of other people towards the women's group for instance. It was considered unpractical to pilot the questionnaire as the general population from which the sample was drawn (i.e. Muslim women who are also members of a women's group) is relatively small, thus making it difficult to first pilot the questionnaire. Instead of a full pilot then, the questionnaire was piloted with one woman who fit the description of the women in the sample. The input received from this woman included feedback about the terminology as well as the length of the original questionnaire. This input as well as input from the supervisor of this study and input provided during a presentation of the research proposal was used to make necessary changes to the questionnaire.

The initial questionnaire was thus almost entirely reconstructed due to a number of reasons. Firstly, the questionnaire was found to be extremely long and sometimes repetitive, the researcher was urged to remember that the women in the sample had many commitments, not only to the group but within their family's as well. Also, section 2 was regarded as unnecessary and section 3 was found to be too directive and closed-ended. In general, it was felt that this initial questionnaire was not suitable for the proposed methodology of this study.

The final questionnaire (see Appendix G) consisted of three sections. Section 1 included biographical questions, Section 2 comprised of 10 open ended questions. Although the underlying basis of these questions was based on empowerment theory, the questions were not directive and did not include any of the actual terminology mentioned in the literature on empowerment theory. The questions were thus better suited to elicit information about the women's experiences. In Section 3 respondents were given the space to add any additional comments that they might have had. The final questionnaire was more open-ended and less structured than the original one and thus better suited to the chosen methodology.

The technique of laddering was used when drawing up the questionnaire. Laddering is a technique used in questionnaire design to elicit clear information about a person's belief system in a simple and systematic way (Rugg, 2003). When using the laddering technique the researcher switches to and fro between different levels of information. Laddering will ensure that there is a combination of general and specific information. The questions will switch from a general to a specific level and then back and forth. It will begin with more general, wider questions and then move to more specific and narrower ones and then back again to broad questions and it will continue in that manner (Mycoted, 2006). The logic behind this technique is that it ensures an ease in information flow and allows for different types of information to emerge.

Once the questionnaires were answered and collected, the focus group schedule was drawn up and focus group sessions were held.

Focus Group Sessions

According to Millward (in Breakwell et al., 1997); "the focus group is a discussion based interview that produces a particular type of qualitative data. It involves the simultaneous use of multiple respondents to generate data and it is the 'focused' and relatively staged nature of the focus group method that separates it from other types of group interviewing strategy" (p. 275). Vaughn and colleagues (in Puchta & Potter, 2004) have identified two core elements of focus groups. Firstly, a trained moderator is present with an interview schedule or prepared questions, and secondly, the main goal is to elicit attitudes, perceptions and feelings about a particular topic. Puchta and Potter (2004) also point out that this technique is commonly used in conjunction with other research techniques.

In this study, focus groups were selected to supplement the other instruments so that more meaningful information could be elicited. The focus group schedule was drawn up after the questionnaires were completed and collected. The reason for this was so that important issues raised in the questionnaires and brought into the consciousness of the respondents could be incorporated within the focus group interview schedule and thus it could be further discussed within an open forum. The focus group schedule comprised of approximately ten questions (see Appendix H). The researcher used the schedule as a guide and it was useful in

maintaining the structure of the focus group and ensuring that the discussion did not divert from the topic at hand.

Two focus group sessions were held, where each group comprised of respondents from the same women's group. There were thus 5 respondents in each group. The researcher took on the role of the interviewer in the session and made use of an independent note taker. Prior consent was received from the respondents to allow the note taker to be present. It might be important to note that the person taking notes was also a Muslim woman. This woman is also a professional in the psychology field and bound by the laws and regulations of the Health Professions Council of South Africa and she was thus familiar with the code of ethics which emphasizes confidentiality. It seems plausible that her presence in the session then would have influenced group dynamics only to the extent that the presence of the researcher herself would.

Although both focus group sessions were recorded on audio tape, it was also arranged to have an additional observer taking notes (Potter, Meyer, Pinto, Scott & da Silva, 2004). Following the procedures suggested by Potter (2004), the written notes could then be used in conjunction with the transcriptions from the audio tapes and this helped with clarification. Also, a seating plan of the session could be drawn up by the note taker and it was thus easier to clarify the comments that were made by each respondent. Figure 1 is an illustration of the seating plan for the focus groups. The same type of setting was used for each focus group. The sessions were held at the residence of one of the respondents. The residence that was the most convenient for all the respondents to meet at was chosen by the respondents.

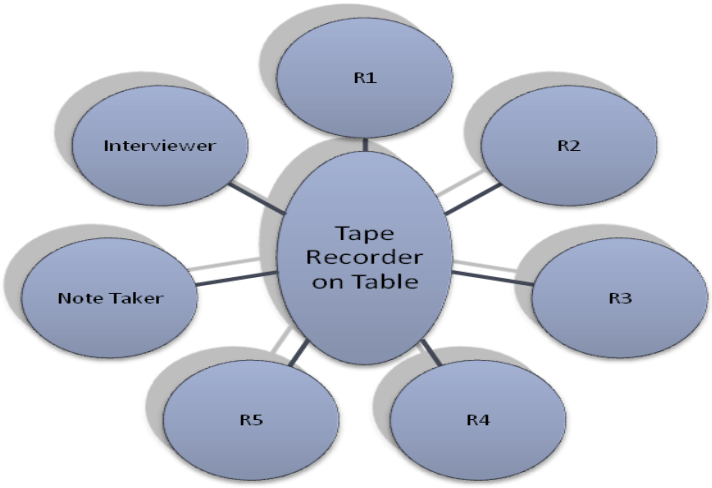


Figure 1: Focus Group Setup

The focus group sessions were followed up by an individual interview conducted with each respondent.

Individual Interview

Individual interviews were conducted subsequent to the focus group sessions. This served as a means of further clarifying information that was previously elicited and provided a medium for additional issues to be discussed. It also provided respondents who were quieter during the group session to express their thoughts and experiences in a less threatening situation. The questionnaire and focus group schedule were used as a guide to draw up the interview schedule for the individual interviews. The interview schedule (see Appendix I) comprised of approximately 11 questions which were all designed to elicit responses about the respondent's individual experience within the women's group.

4.5. Procedure

Initially three Muslim women's groups were identified as prospects for the study based on local advertising and word of mouth. All three groups were approached by telephonically contacting the chairperson or contact person on advertised material. The researcher identified herself and provided a short breakdown of what the study was about, and some basic information about the purpose and the aims. The contact person was told that an information session could be set up where the researcher could meet with the women's group to give a briefing of the study and what would be required from those women who chose to participate. Due to time constraints this offer was not taken up by any of the groups. Instead, the researcher was asked to provide all this information in a document which would be circulated to the group members. This document contained information on the purpose of the study, the procedure and instruments that would be used to gather data. Exactly what would be required from the women who chose to participate was clearly stipulated. Once this document had been circulated, names and contact details of all the interested women were forwarded to the researcher by the contact person. The researcher could then contact these women directly to make necessary arrangements.

Initially, however, most of the correspondence was conducted between the researcher and the identified contact person. The researcher only made contact with the other women at a later stage. The contact person in Group A agreed to circulate the questionnaire to all the members of that group and all the women found that more convenient. In Group B, arrangements were

made with each individual woman and the researcher dropped off a copy of the questionnaire at a place that was most convenient for all the women. One of the women requested that the questionnaire be sent to her via email. As already mentioned, the focus group sessions were held at the residence of one of the members. Individual interviews were conducted at each woman's residence.

At the onset 7 members of Group A agreed to participate, but two of the women withdrew due to other commitments. 5 women from Group B agreed to participate from the outset. The third group, which will be referred to as Group C here, withdrew from the study after the questionnaires were circulated citing different reasons for their withdrawal. One of the reasons was that the study was found to be too time consuming, the other reason was that the group members were uncomfortable with participating as they felt that this type of a study was intrusive and could potentially cause conflict within their group. They were particularly unhappy about the variety of techniques intended to be used and mentioned that they may have been more willing if they only had to attend the group interview. The final sample was thus 10 women from two groups who were all prepared to participate in the entire research process.

Questionnaires were initially handed out in the first week of August, 2006. The women were given some time to fill out the questionnaire as it was acknowledged that they had various other commitments. Thus, the completed questionnaires were received by the researcher towards the end of September. The focus group sessions were held in the first two weeks of October, and the individual interviews were conducted approximately a month thereafter, in November 2006.

Once all the data were collected the women were thanked for their participation and co-operation. In most cases the researcher was reassured that if she needed anything further she should feel free to contact the respondent's at any time.

4.6. Ethical Considerations

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) mention that although it is generally very difficult to get people to participate in and commit to research studies, it must be remembered that people have the right not to participate or to withdraw from a study at any time. It is crucial that the researcher does not infringe upon these rights and that ethical guidelines are strictly adhered

to. Three important ethical guidelines which pertain to this research have been mentioned by Bless and Higson-Smith (1995); *Privacy or voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality.*

Privacy or voluntary participation- Since social research often invades a person's privacy and requires that personal information is divulged, it is important to protect the privacy of the respondents. The right to privacy demands that the respondent must give his or her informed consent, and respondents must be made aware of the possible positive and negative outcomes that might occur as a result of their participation (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). In this study the respondents were given an information letter to read before any data collection commenced (see Appendix J). In this letter respondents were ensured that all information revealed in this study would be treated with respect and that privacy would be maintained throughout the process. Also, respondents were provided with basic information about the nature of the study, how and where the results would be reported and what would happen to the data after completion of this study. Furthermore, two consent forms were given to them to sign beforehand (see Appendix K). One consent form was a general one in which respondents gave their consent to participate in the study, in the other one they had to give consent for information from the focus group sessions and individual interviews to be electronically recorded. The data gathering process only began once the signed consent forms were handed in to the researcher.

Barrett (in Breakwell et al., 1995) emphasizes that it should be made clear at the onset that participation in any research study is voluntary and respondents have a right to withdraw from the study at any point during the study. This was also made clear in the information letter provided to the respondents in this study.

Anonymity- In many studies anonymity makes it easier for respondents to divulge information as they know that they will not be easily indentified. For many people anonymity is regarded as essential and it should be respected (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). In this study it was quite difficult to maintain anonymity because of the small sample and the nature of the chosen methodology. Since repeated data gathering methods were employed the researcher became very familiar with the respondents. It was made clear to the respondents at the outset that anonymity would be difficult to maintain. However, they were assured that their real names and identities would not be divulged in transcripts and in any discussion of the

research. In addition, the names of the women's groups were also not divulged. Thus, the researcher is the only person that was familiar with the identities of the respondents and has made a commitment to ensure that these identities are not divulged.

Confidentiality- Although anonymity cannot easily be attained in many studies, it is crucial that all information divulged be treated with confidentiality. This means that the data should only be used for the stated purposes and that no other person besides the researcher will have access to the information (Bless & Higson-Smith, 1995). In this study respondents were assured that confidentiality will be maintained. It was made clear to them that only the researcher and the appointed supervisor and marker of this study will have access to the information revealed.

Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) emphasize that it is the researcher's duty to ensure that the people who participate in a study are protected and not harmed in any way. This has been made a priority of the researcher in this study and therefore the above guidelines have been adhered to.

It should be noted that since this research has been conducted under the banner of the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, certain guidelines and procedures have been predefined by the university in order to ensure that any given research study does not infringe upon the rights of people in any way. Thus, before commencing with this study, a research proposal first had to be approved by the University Ethics Committee.

CHAPTER 5 - *DATA ANALYSIS*

"We only come to look at things in certain ways because we have adopted, either tacitly or explicitly, certain ways of seeing" (Silverman, 2000, p.143).

The data were analysed on two levels. A computer-based thematic content analysis was initially conducted. In this first stage of analysis the most dominant themes from the data were examined. This was followed by qualitative interpretive thematic content analysis. Thus, in the second stage of analysis the data were further scrutinized and linked to the initial research questions. The main focus of this chapter will be on the first stage of analysis, and although some discussion of the second stage will be included here, chapter seven, will include a more in-depth discussion of the data as it relates to the research questions.

5.1. Computer-based Thematic Content Analysis

Seale (in Silverman, 2000) mentions some advantages of using computers to aid qualitative data analysis. The advantages highlighted are that it ensures relative speed at handling large volumes of data, it improves rigour, it assists in the development of consistent coding schemes (which is especially beneficial in team research), and it helps when having to make sampling decisions. Some of these reasons were considered when choosing the form of analysis for the data in this research. Since computers assist in organising and managing large amounts of data it was considered to be a useful tool in the analysis of the data, especially since data was received from three sources and the volume of data was thus quite large.

The computer-based thematic content analysis was backed up by qualitative interpretive thematic content analysis because as Flick (2002) points out, computer-based qualitative analysis is still rather limited. He suggests therefore that computer analysis should not be used in isolation but instead; "computers and software should be seen as a pragmatic tool to support qualitative research" (Flick, 2002, p.261).

Atlas.ti- V5.0 was the computer software programme used to analyse the data. Pre-defined codes were initially developed. The research questions were used as a broad guide to assist with determining relevance and irrelevance of particular information from the literature which would be used for developing initial or *a priori codes* as they are referred to by Stemler (2001). The first step was therefore to link the research questions to information from the literature review. This involved a re-examination of the literature review in order to

determine the specific theoretical information that would be relevant to answering the research questions. From the literature *a priori* codes were derived by extracting the main ideas from the literature relevant to the research questions. These *a priori* codes can thus be regarded as theory-driven codes.

Once the *a priori codes* were established, each question in the questionnaire, focus group schedule and interview schedule was assigned a relevant code/s. Codes were assigned to questions based on the possible type of data that might emerge from that question (Table 6 provides a full breakdown of this). The reason for doing this was to create direction and a certain degree of focus from the onset. Assigning a code to each question made it easier to determine the type of information that would be relevant or irrelevant for answering the research questions.

TABLE 6– LINK BETWEEN RESEARCH QUESTIONS, *A PRIORI CODES* AND QUESTIONS FROM DATA SOURCES				
Research Questions	***A Priori* codes linked to research question**	**Questions from Questionnaire which *a priori code* was assigned to**	**Questions from Focus Group Schedule which *a priori code* was assigned to**	**Questions from Individual Interview Schedule which *a priori code* was assigned to**
1. Is there evidence to suggest that involvement in women's groups contributes to empowerment of Muslim women on psychological, community, political, economic and intellectual levels?	1. Participation in community activities 2. Increase in knowledge 3. Increase in awareness 4. Networking between groups 5. Obstacles and challenges 6. Sense of belonging 7. Increased self-worth/self-efficacy 8. Lack of access to resources 9. Individuals as agents of change 10. Increased problem solving skills 11. Contribution to community	1. Q.2, Q.5, 2. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3,Q.5, Q.6,Q.7 3. Q.1,Q.2,Q.3,Q.5,Q.6, Q.7 4. Q.1, Q.4, Q.7, Q.9 5. Q.6, Q.8,Q.9,Q.10 6. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.5, Q.6, Q.7 7. Q.1,Q.2, Q.3, Q.5, Q.6, Q.7, Q.9 8. Q.6, Q.8, Q.9, Q.10 9. Q.1-Q.10 10. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.5, Q.6, Q.7 11. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.5, Q.7,Q.9	1. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.5, Q.6, Q.7 2. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.6, Q.7 3. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.6, Q.7 4. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.5, Q.7 5. Q.1, Q.2, Q.4, Q.5, Q.7, Q.8 6. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.6, Q.7 7. Q.1,Q.2,Q.3,Q.6,Q.7 8. Q.1-Q.8 9. Q.1-Q.8 10. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.6, Q.7 11. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.5, Q.6, Q.7	1. Q.1, Q.2 2. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.8 3. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.6,Q.8 4. Q.1 5. Q.4, Q.5, Q.6, Q.9, Q.10 6. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.8, Q.9 7. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.8 8. Q.1, Q.5, Q.10 9. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3,Q.8, Q.9, Q.10 10. Q.1, Q.3, Q.8 11. Q.1, Q.9
2. Are Muslim women being empowered with respect to gender equality through their involvement in women's groups?	1. Participation in community activities 2. Networking between groups 3. Clash with existing power structures (power clash) 4. Obstacles and challenges 5. Lack of access to resources 6. Individuals as agents of change 7. Influence on relationships 8. Contribution to community	1. Q.2, Q.5, 2. Q.1, Q.4, Q.7, Q.9 3. Q.6, Q.8, Q.9, Q.10 4. Q.6, Q.8,Q.9,Q.10 5. Q.6, Q.8, Q.9, Q.10 6. Q.1-Q.10 7. Q.2, Q.4, Q.6, Q.8, Q.9, Q.10. 8. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.5, Q.7,Q.9	1. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.5, Q.6, Q.7 2. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.5, Q.7 3. Q.1, Q.4, Q.7, Q.8 5. Q.1, Q.2, Q.4, Q.5, Q.7, Q.8 6. Q.1-Q.8 7. Q.1-Q.8 8. Q.2, Q.3, Q.4, Q.7, Q.8 9. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3, Q.5, Q.6, Q.7	1. Q.1, Q.2 2. Q.1 3. Q.4, Q.6, Q.8,Q.9, Q.10 4. Q.4, Q.5, Q.6, Q.9, Q.10 5. Q.1, Q.5, Q.10 6. Q.1, Q.2, Q.3,Q.8, Q.9, Q.10 7. Q.1, Q.2, Q.6, Q.8, Q.9 8. Q.1, Q.9

The list of *a priori* codes was thus entered into the computer programme at the first stage of the analysis. The 'code-by-list' option in the programme was used while coding segments of data. Further codes emerged from the data itself as some segments of data could not be fitted into the original list of codes. These further *emergent codes* were added to the original list. Some direct phrases from the data were used as a code by using the 'code-in-vivo' option in the programme. Although there were many common codes identified between the three instruments, new codes emerged continuously.

The process of emergent coding was continued until every piece of data had been assigned a code. The process was very specific and focused because the researcher wanted to ensure that nothing important was left out of the coding process. This resulted in a very long list of codes, which was consolidated after the initial analysis. Table 7 provides a breakdown of all the codes; this includes the initial *a priori* codes, as well as the *emergent* codes derived from each instrument. The process used here is similar to the procedure outlined by Mayring (2000).

Appendix L displays full references for codes within the data. It shows exactly where a particular code occurs within each of the different data sources.

Table 7 : Breakdown of all codes			
A Priori Codes	Codes *emergent* from Questionnaire	Codes *emergent* from Focus Groups	Codes *emergent* from individual interviews
1. Clash with existing power structures (power clash)(F,I) 2. Contribution to community (Q,F,I) 3. Increase in awareness(Q,I) 4. Increase in knowledge (Q,F) 5. Increased problem solving skills (F,I) 6. Increased self-worth/self-efficacy (Q,F,I) 7. Individuals as agents of change (Q,F) 8. Influence on relationships (F,I) 9. Lack of access to resources (Q,F,I) 10. Networking between groups (Q,F,I) 11. Obstacles and challenges(F,I) 12. Participation in community activities (Q,F,I) 13. Sense of belonging(Q,F,I) *Q-this code was evident in the questionnaire data* *F- This code was evident in the focus group data* *I-This code was evident in the individual interview data.*	1. Commitment and time problematic 2. Continuous learning 3. Disagreement and criticism 4. Expanding horizons 5. Fulfilment of personal needs 6. Group as support system 7. Groups stronger than individuals 8. Increased self growth 9. Inculcating Islamic values 10. Islamic values questioned 11. Lack of community commitment 12. Other women don't take groups seriously 13. Positive reaction from family and friends 14. Realising potential 15. Sharing and giving 16. Strengthening relationships 17. Women relate to women better 18. Work for the pleasure of Allah	1. Changing value systems 2. Commitment and time problematic 3. Continuous learning 4. Deeper meaning and purpose 5. Difficult to operate without husband's support 6. Disagreement and criticism 7. Each individual contributes 8. Expanding horizons 9. Greater community needs identified 10. Groups as social interaction 11. Groups as support system 12. Groups stronger than individuals 13. Increase in knowledge 14. Increased self growth 15. Inculcating Islamic values 16. Initial scepticism 17. Lack of community commitment 18. Many gains and benefits 19. Meaning and purpose 20. Men are surprised 21. Organizational skills acquired 22. Other women don't take groups seriously 23. Positive reaction from family and friends 24. Positive response from community 25. Realising potential 26. Resources from fundraising 27. Sense of personal fulfilment 28. Sharing and giving 29. Strengthening relationships 30. Support from husbands	1. Boys and girls raised differently 2. Closed community 3. Commitment and time problematic 4. Continuous learning 5. Difficult to operate without husband's support 6. Disagreement and criticism 7. Expanding horizons 8. Greater community needs identified 9. Group as social interaction 10. Group as support system 11. Group gives women a voice 12. Group open to all 13. Group plays important role for individuals 14. Group understanding 15. Groups stronger than individuals 16. Growth and sustainability of group 17. Increased self growth 18. Inculcating Islamic values 19. Initial scepticism 20. Islamic values questioned 21. Lack of community commitment 22. Many gains and benefits 23. Meaning and purpose 24. Move from tradition 25. Other women don't take groups seriously 26. Pleasure of Allah 27. Positive reaction from family and friends 28. Positive response from community 29. Problematic to work in own community 30. Realising potential 31. Religion plays a role 32. Sense of personal fulfilment 33. Sharing and giving 34. Social responsibility 35. Strengthening relationships 36. Support from husbands 37. Unity between men and women

An *in-vivo* approach was adopted throughout the data analysis as direct quotes from the data were coded. This approach was used both in identifying the central themes as well as in reporting themes. Thus, the data could be explored by maintaining the exact words of respondents. After every piece of data was assigned a code within the Atlas-ti computer programme, the transcripts as well as other relevant information generated with the use of Atlas-ti were printed out. These additional printouts included a breakdown of all the codes, as well as lists of the relevant quotations which had been assigned to each code. In addition, these printouts included a reference line in the relevant transcripts where quotations for each code could be found. The frequency of each code within the data was also included in these printouts. Table 8 displays an example of how relevant quotations were related to particular codes in this initial stage of the data analysis. This table only includes some of the themes but quotations were assigned to each code in a similar manner.

The printouts were consulted during the clustering process, where related codes were clustered within particular thematic categories, and were further used to cross reference during the qualitative interpretive thematic content analysis. Also, these printouts were further consulted during discussion of the themes as it allowed for easier access to the data.

TABLE 8 – SOME EXAMPLES SHOWING THE LINK BETWEEN CODES AND QUOTES FROM THE DATA	
CODE	**SOME RELATED QUOTE/S FROM DATA**
Commitment and time problematic	"Balancing family life...and your responsibilities as a mother and a wife with your responsibilities as a member of a women's group" "I have sat up nights without sleeping..." "It is time committing, no definitely." "Yeah, I must say it's very uh, it's very, very challenging and uhm towards a function something takes a back seat..." "It involves a lot of commitment, time in preparing worksheets, researching valuable material for the workshops..." "Sometimes demanding..." "Overall, it's hard work, one has to be totally dedicated and motivated..." "Some projects does encroach on family time." "I think one has to put in double or even treble the effort to achieve something..." "No, often our families do suffer, especially when we get involved in big projects..." "Yeah, it takes a lot of commitment." "I think that's the biggest battle"
Lack of community commitment	"I suppose another challenge is to really get people committed all the time, we don't have that commitment." "Yeah, we really wish people could just commit themselves to the group." "...maybe a few more people involved but that's also very difficult, that's a challenge, nobody really wants to take on the responsibility..." "...the fact that we hadn't had a great attendance..." "Also sometimes the, uhm, trying to motivate people to attend..." "I wish I could get everybody to really be committed." "Yeah, involvement is there, but commitment is very difficult."
Group as support system	"We made lots of friends, and support, we support each other, it's like a support group." "Yeah, we all do, we help each other." "The other part of it is that you make very good friends and you have a lot of support." "uhm for me, it's uhm, how can I say, being able to call on others , uh, when you need them..." "No, I could never do it alone, because I needed, uhm support, moral support, help with the knowledge, because the knowledge they have I don't have." "I think it also, uhm, provides a very supportive role for women..."
Difficult to operate without husbands support	"Oh I forgot to mention that some women had to leave the group because their husbands didn't like that they were becoming too vocal." "Sometimes it can be difficult, especially with my husband, uhm, but I suppose I'm at that stage of my marriage where my husband is fine with me going off." "Yes, although, although the mother, the woman is the driving force in the home, she can't actually do all that much if her husband is not supportive of a lot of the things." "I think it would have made it much harder if they didn't support us." "They support us very much." "If they didn't support us, we wouldn't be able to carry on."
Initial scepticism	"Initially when we started off, it was like yeah; "oh I wonder what they're doing now..." "They don't feel you have potential to go out there and reach out to people, and when you do that they get, sit back you know; "oh! Oh, Ok!" "...so that's a challenge, because to them it's like, uhm, I never knew she had this trait, you know what I mean." "Yeah, people, sometimes people want to know, why, what exactly are you doing, do you have the know how..." "Very sceptical, very closed-mined I think."
Power struggle / clash	"He's talking about all the women, uhm, he feels that as men they should be directing us as to which route to take, uh, and you see that's where we clash..." "uh, yeah, negative feedback would be basically from a previous group that I was involved in, uhm, I don't know if it's because that many of these groups do similar work." "People don't take you seriously enough; sometimes men also are very , uhm, critical of women, uhm, they don't take you seriously." "What's very frustrating is that we have tried to get the jamaat on our side, I think that we are not given due because we are a women's group and they are all male." "Also, ladies are not taken seriously, not by males but by other females." "...Not only like everybody says it's the males, but also the females, people don't seem to think that it's worthwhile."
Contribution to community	"You can reach out to the community." "I think that as time goes on, you realise now that you want your life to be more than just you and your family; you want to reach out to other people as well..." "To uplift, to provide a support system, to unite people, to be a contributing factor in social difficulty." "To become actively involved in the upliftment of the community irrespective of social standing, race, gender." "I felt that I had the skills needed to be able to serve the community." "Basically to enrich myself and to try to do something positive for others as well and to be more constructive in society..." "I think I reached a, a like a stage in my life where I needed to give more to the community..." "I think it's also got to do with helping other women to realize what kind of potential they actually have and to actually see if we can tap into those potentials."
Increased awareness	"...I must say I've gone places and done things that I wouldn't have done if I hadn't been part of this group..." "To firstly, believe in the purpose of the group, which is to educate, enlighten and develop ourselves and others..."
Closed community	"I don't know, they just are like that, they're very narrow minded people..." "We're still very closed." "We're used to the community we were in before, the community was closer..."
Networking between groups	"I think it's better, on the outreach side of things, we now already know the people involved and the networking has improved." "I think the learning experience, for me, interacting with different people, not only interacting in the group, but interacting without, with other people as well." "Well, there's quite a few people that we work with, especially when we do our drives, you know, these people know us in the areas we go to..." "Oh yes, we have doctors, and we have professional women, we have the ordinary housewife..." "That's more or less what it is hey, it uh, it gives you an opportunity to meet other groups, to meet other communities and to see what's happening around."

With the use of Atlas-ti, frequency tables were also created. This was valuable in determining how often a particular code occurred within the data. Based on this, codes were divided into high frequency and low frequency codes (see Table 9 below for an outline of this). Co-occurring codes were also derived with the use of the computer programme. This assisted in establishing relationships between codes and linking data together. Once the data had all been coded a thematic content analysis was conducted by hand.

Table 9: Frequencies of Codes

High Frequency Codes	Low Frequency Codes
• Commitment and time problematic • Continuous learning • Contribution to community • Disagreement and criticism • Group as social interaction • Group as support system • Groups stronger than individuals • Increased self-growth • Influence on relationships • Lack of access to resources • Lack of community commitment • Meaning and purpose • Networking between groups • Obstacles and challenges • Participation in community activities • Personal needs fulfilment • Pleasure of Allah • Positive reaction from family and friends • Sharing and giving • Strengthening relationships • Support from husbands	• Boys and girls raised differently • Changing value systems • Clash with existing power structures (power clash) • Closed community • Difficult to operate without husband's support • Each individual contributes • Greater community needs identified • Group gives women a voice • Group open to all • Group plays important role for individuals • Group understanding • Growth and sustainability of group • Increased awareness • Increased problem-solving abilities • Increased self-worth • Inculcate Islamic values • Individual as agent of change • Initial scepticism • Many gains and benefits • Men are surprised • Move from tradition • Organizational skills acquired • Other women don't take groups seriously • Positive response from community • Problematic to work in own community • Question Islamic values • Realising potential • Religion plays a role • Resources from fundraising • Sense of belonging • Social responsibility • Unity between men and women • Women relate to women better

5.2. Qualitative Interpretive Thematic Content Analysis

Thematic analysis is commonly used to analyse qualitative data. Through the use of thematic analysis the researcher is able to encode qualitative information. Themes are usually used as the unit of analysis. "A theme is a pattern found in the information that at minimum describes and organizes the possible observations and at maximum interprets aspects of the phenomenon" (Boyatzis, 1998, p.4). In the analysis of data, thematic content analysis was used after the computer-based analysis. This meant that the thematic analysis did not have to commence from the beginning but could instead be conducted on the transcripts that had already been coded. The transcripts were printed out with the codes from the Atlas.ti computer programme and the thematic analysis was conducted from there.

After Atlas-ti had been used to identify major categories in the data, the first step was to go through all the codes in order to cluster them together into common themes so that the data could be presented in a more organized manner. Boyatzis (1998) discusses different forms and motivations for clustering themes together. One of which is conceptually clustering codes together based on similar unconscious motives or traits. This is the method that was employed here. The researcher went through the derived codes a number of times in order to find a broader category or theme in which the code would fall. In most cases, the *a priori codes* were relevant as the broader theme, and emergent codes that related to that particular theme was clustered therein. In some cases, certain *a priori* codes could be clustered within more dominant *a priori codes.* These codes then served as points of discussion within each theme. In some cases, emergent codes were more dominant and not present within the *a priori* list of codes, the dominant emergent codes were then used as the main theme and other related emergent codes were clustered within that particular theme (Table 10 displays the link between specific codes and final themes).

TABLE 10 – LINK BETWEEN FINAL THEMES AND FULL LIST OF SPECIFIC CODES	
Final Theme	**Codes related to theme**
1. Participation and contribution to community	• Participation in the community • Inculcate Islamic values • Sharing and giving to others • Networking between groups • Contribution to community • Each individual contributes • Greater community needs identified • Positive response from community • Social responsibility • Group open to all • Group shows understanding
2. Networking between groups	• Growth and sustainability of group • Expanding horizons • Different value systems • Greater community needs identified • Unity between men and women • Sharing and giving • Resources from fundraising
3. Power struggle / clash with existing power structures	• People Question Islamic values of group • Disagreement and criticism from some • Women don't take groups seriously • Power struggle / clash • Same community problematic • Men are surprised
4. Muslim community as a closed system	• Closed community • Closed community as protection • Community narrow minded
5. Groups as support systems and a form of social interaction	• Groups stronger than individuals • Sense of belonging • Strengthening relationships • Strong support structures • Women relate to women better • Group as social interaction • Group as support system • Joint decision making • Connection between women
6. Personal growth and fulfilment	• Continuous learning • Expanding horizons • Increase in awareness • Increase in knowledge • Increased self growth • Increased problem-solving abilities • Increased self-worth / self-efficacy • Needs fulfilment • Personal gratification • Realising potential • Sense of fulfilment • Changing value systems • Organizational skills acquired • Break from routine • Focus on self • Group encourages positive female identity • Stand up for oneself / given a voice • Realizing potential • Deeper meaning and purpose-Pleasure of Allah
7. Influence on personal relationships	• Positive reaction from friends and family • Influence on relationships • Support from husbands • Difficult to function without husbands support
8. Obstacles and challenges faced	• Collecting funds difficult • Lack of access to resources • Commitment and time problematic • Little support from community • Initial scepticism • Lack of community commitment

Codes with a common underlying basis were thus clustered together into broader themes. This resulted in a far shorter and more organized list of themes. A colour coding system was used where each broader theme was assigned a colour and while going through the codes, if a code was thought to fit within a particular thematic category then it would be colour coded according to that theme. The process of going through the codes was conducted a number of times in order to ensure that each code fitted in the best possible thematic category. Thereafter, the transcripts were read once more in order to find more latent content, which was also fitted within the final themes (Table 11 presents the final list of themes). Within each theme, both high frequency and low frequency codes which were relevant were included. The high frequency codes were discussed in more detail than the low frequency codes within the discussion of particular themes, however, both high frequency and low frequency codes were accounted for. The final list of themes is similar to the initial *a priori* list of themes and this indicates that there is consistency between what the data yielded and the initial codes. Since the *a priori codes* were derived from the literature and closely linked to the research questions, it can be deduced that the final list of themes could easily be used to answer the research questions.[*] The process used here was a back-and-forth process in which the focus moved from a broad one, to a narrow one and then back again to a broad one. Such a process served as an efficient means of scrutiny of the data.

Finally, a horizontal thematic analysis was conducted between the two focus group transcripts so that important comparisons could be made between the two and thus specific and more detailed information about the two women's groups could be derived.

Table 11: Final list of Themes

1. **Participation and contribution to community**
2. **Networking between groups**
3. **Power struggle / clash with existing power structures**
4. **Muslim community as a closed system**
5. **Groups as support systems and a form of social interaction**
6. **Personal growth and fulfilment**
7. **Influence on personal relationships**
8. **Obstacles and challenges faced**

[*] The direct link between the derived themes and the research questions will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 7.

Babbie (1995) discusses the difference between manifest and latent content that can be found when conducting a content analysis. Manifest content refers to "the visible, surface content-of a communication", whereas, "the latent content of the communication refers to its underlying meaning (Babbie, 1995, p.312). Here, the computer-based analysis was extremely helpful in identifying the manifest content. Qualitative interpretive thematic content analysis, however, provided more depth as it allowed for an analysis of the more latent content, and the analysis of its relationship with themes and issues raised by previous researchers working in the field. Qualitative interpretive thematic content analysis furthermore made it easy to make comparisons between the two focus group transcripts, something that could not easily be done in the computer-based analysis. Therefore it is believed that using both computer-based analysis as well as a qualitative interpretive thematic content analysis in conjunction with each other provided a more rigorous, comprehensive and systematic analysis of the data in this study, as well as a greater flexibility in relating clusters of themes as well as individual themes identified in the analysis back to themes identified in the literature review.

Furthermore, a model of triangulation was used within this study and it is believed that the use of triangulation assisted in increasing the reliability of this study.

5.3. The use of Triangulation in the study

"Triangulation may be defined as the use of two or more methods of data collection in the study of some aspect of human behaviour"(Cohen & Manion, 1989, p.269). Making use of triangulation helps to reduce bias and can contribute to providing a more detailed understanding of human behaviour as the researcher does not only rely on one method or source of evidence. Triangulation can be used at different levels within the study. Also, different types of triangulation have been identified. These include; *time triangulation, space triangulation, combined levels of triangulation, theoretical triangulation, investigator triangulation, data triangulation and methodological triangulation* (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Potter, 2004). Only the relevant forms of triangulation in this study will be discussed here.

Neuman (2000); mentions that the most common type of triangulation is *triangulation of measures.* In this case, researchers take multiple measures of the same phenomena by measuring something in more than one way. Potter (2004) discusses triangulation across data sources and instruments, which falls within this category. Three different instruments;

namely open-ended questionnaire; focus groups and individual interviews, were used to measure the same phenomena in this study. The researcher thus had access to written information provided from the questionnaire responses as well as verbal information received from the focus groups and individual interview. The questionnaire responses were transcribed for use in analysis, and in the case of both the focus groups and the individual interviews, interviews were recorded and transcribed. This ensured access to three different data sources. Evidence from the three different data sources could thus be linked together to substantiate the findings. (Table 12 and Figure 2 both display how triangulation was used in this study).

Since the three data sources were analysed separately and then compared and contrasted, it can be said that triangulation also occurred during the analysis stage of the research. Furthermore, the data were analysed through the use of computer based content analysis followed by thematic content analysis, which further illustrates the use of triangulation.

Through the combined use of the different data sources, empowerment could be evaluated on three different levels; i.e. *the intrapersonal, interpersonal and community level.* On the *intrapersonal level,* psychological as well as intellectual empowerment processes occurring within the individual could be evaluated by using a questionnaire and individual interview. Women in the study were given the individual space to discuss personal experiences and feelings and from the data yielded, important conclusions with regards to empowerment *within the individual* could be made. On the *interpersonal level,* empowerment at the group level was looked at. This was evaluated mainly through the use of the focus group sessions. These sessions allowed the researcher to observe particular group processes as well as the way in which the women saw themselves in relation to the group. Furthermore, with the combination of all three instruments empowerment processes which are occurring within the groups themselves and as a result of group membership could be understood and explored. Finally, since these groups function within the broader community, some of the experiences that they related provided important insights about the particular community to which they belong. Thus, by using the type of method and instruments that were used here, empowerment issues at the *community level* could also be explored.

It could also perhaps be said that *time triangulation* was also used in this study. Cohen and Manion (1989) mention that time triangulation occurs in two cases. In cross-sectional studies where data concerned with time-related processes are collected from different groups of

people at one time, or in longitudinal studies in which data are collected from the same group of people at different points in time. Although this study was not exactly a longitudinal study, the data were collected at different points in time from the same group. There was approximately a time difference of a month between conducting the three different instruments. Although this time period is relatively short when compared to longitudinal studies, it would have nonetheless given the respondents a chance to reflect on the issues that were brought into their consciousness, thereby providing different perspectives in the information gathered at later stages. Furthermore, the three different data sources, having been collected at different points in time could be used for checking and substantiating the evidence. This is in coherence with time triangulation as discussed by Potter (2004).

In short, the use of triangulation in this study made it easier to examine the data in detail and substantiate the findings.

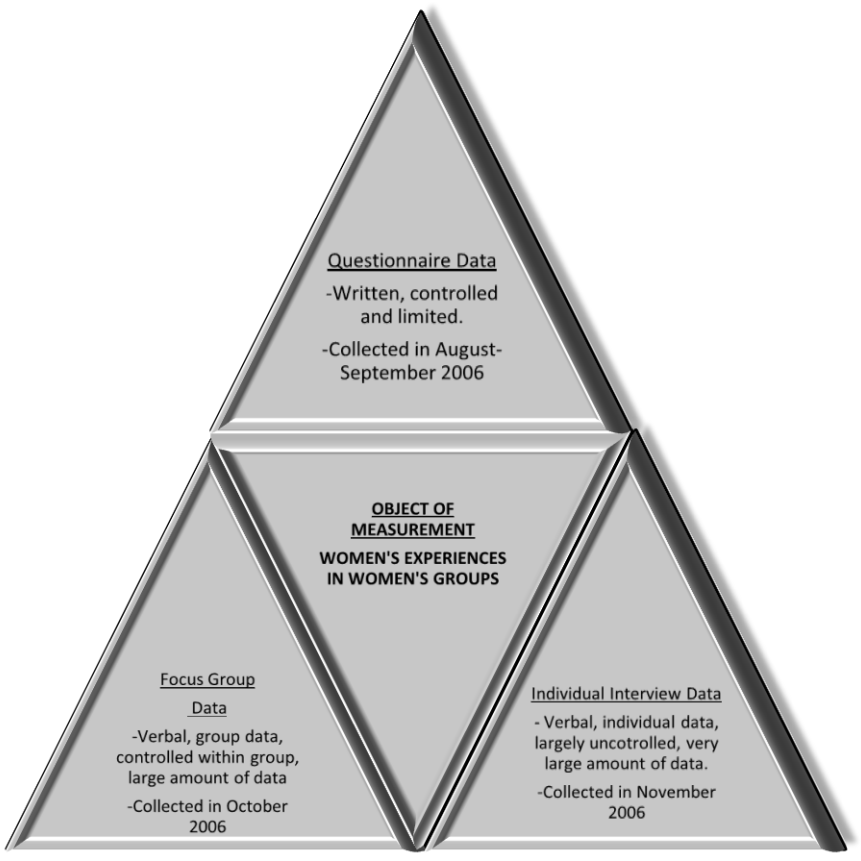


Figure 2- Model of Triangulation

TABLE 12– THE USE OF TRIANGULATION IN THE DATA ANALYSIS			
DATA SOURCE	**TYPE OF DATA YIELDED**	**HOW DATA WERE USED**	**TIME OF DATA COLLECTION**
Questionnaire (Responses Transcribed)	▪ Written data ▪ Controlled and limited	▪ Data used as a guideline for focus group and interview schedules. ▪ Used to verify initial *a priori* coding categories / themes. ▪ Data yielded was basic and lacked depth. ▪ Subjected to computer based thematic content analysis initially and qualitative interpretive content analysis on a basic level.	August-September 2006
Focus Groups (Transcripts of focus group sessions)	▪ Verbal data ▪ Controlled and limited within the group	▪ Additional emergent codes derived from data. ▪ Data used largely on a group level- important group processes and women's experiences as a group were evaluated. ▪ Large amount of data generated. ▪ Subjected to computer based thematic content analysis initially and qualitative interpretive content analysis.	October 2006
Individual Interviews (Interview Transcripts)	▪ Verbal data ▪ Largely unlimited and uncontrolled	▪ Further emergent codes derived from data. ▪ Instrument yielded many new codes relevant to more general themes. ▪ Individual experiences could be evaluated. ▪ Very large amount of data generated. ▪ Subjected to computer based thematic content analysis initially and qualitative interpretive content analysis.	November 2006

CHAPTER 6 – *DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS*

"Every person is worth understanding" (Dr Clyde Narramore)

6.1. Discussion of Themes

In chapter 5 the method of data analysis was discussed and it was mentioned that a list of themes were derived from the data. These themes will be discussed in some detail within this chapter.

1. Participation and contribution to community

This theme occurred consistently throughout the data, on different levels. In addition, it was a common theme between the two groups as women from both groups shared similar sentiments with regards to this. Firstly, most of the women indicated that they joined a group because they felt the need to do more for the community. They saw these groups as a vehicle through which community upliftment could take place and felt that through these groups they could fulfil their social responsibility. This is evident in some of the comments made by the respondents. One respondent believed that the purpose of a women's group is "*to uplift, to provide a support system, to unite people, to be a contributing factor (in social difficulty) in creating awareness".* Another respondent commented that; *"the purpose of a women's group is for the upliftment of our community and surrounding ones".* It was also mentioned that the reason for women joining groups is "*to become actively involved in the upliftment of the community irrespective of social standing, race, and gender".* Finally, one respondent made it clear that a huge part of the group was "*to emphasize that women play a very big role in society".* For some reason or the other these women felt that they had the potential as well as the skills and abilities to contribute to their community in a more meaningful way. Through their involvement in the groups they began to move from their private activities, such as running their homes and taking care of their families or their own careers, to more public activities, which involved participation and interaction with other people in the community.

For many of the women, being a member of a group broadened their social circles as well as the type of activities that they were involved in, and it gave them the opportunity to move beyond the lifestyle that they had become accustomed to. One of the respondents summed this up by mentioning that; *"...to me it means that, I have, besides my daily routine, which is my husband and my children, I have another perspective to look at and to involve myself in where I feel like an individual, I feel fulfilled, that I'm not only playing the role of a wife and*

a mother and a granny, but I can fulfil my role as an individual in the Muslim society to help others. Many of the other women shared similar view points and as their involvement in the groups increased, they began to feel more and more that they needed to expand the types of activities that they were involved in and contribute more to other people as well. Another respondent mentioned that; *" I think as time goes on, you realise now that you want your life to be more than just you and your family; you want to reach out to other people as well".* For these women becoming active participants in the community gave them a sense of fulfilment, and provided the opportunity for them to share and give to others, albeit in different ways. Furthermore, the more actively involved the women became in the community, the more they began to identify further needs within the community.

This participation in the community is important because as it was mentioned in Chapter 3, studies showed that community participation was directly linked to empowerment of individuals and thus participation is regarded as an important process within empowerment theory. The likelihood of this participation having an empowering effect on the women in this study is further increased by the fact that each individual is allowed to express her own individuality through her participation in the women's group.

It was found that respondents contribute to the community in different ways, not only because the two groups differ in the types of activities that they undertake, but also because within each group, every individual woman came with her own set of skills, abilities and personality, which meant that the types of contributions made by each woman was different. As one respondent mentioned; *"I think there are different types of people you know, people get involved at different levels".* So, for some women their contribution to the community meant that they could share the knowledge and skills that they had acquired with other people in the community, with the aim of assisting those people. For others, their contribution involved handing out of blankets or sandwiches to the poor, or even raising funds. For each individual, the type of contribution made was dependent on her own unique situation. To sum this up, it was mentioned that; *"we all come from different backgrounds and have different skills",* and "*...certain people are better in certain areas and others are better in something else".* Similarly, "*within the group we all have different roles...but we all have a role and a purpose".* In agreement with this, someone else indicated that; *"we all have our own strengths and contribute to the group differently".* This further illustrates that every individual contributes to the community in her own unique way. Finally, it has been

mentioned by some respondents that they were unaware of the fact that they had the potential to make important contributions to community until they joined the group. One respondent remarked that; *"it has shown me that, you know if you really want to reach out to people you can, there's no such a thing as 'I can't', or 'I don't know how', and when you reach out to people then people respond".* In short, not only does participation in these women's groups give women the chance to share, their skills, abilities and resources with other people but it has also allowed the women to realise their potential to contribute to the community in a meaningful way.

According to Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory, which was reviewed in Chapter 3, an individual's self-identity becomes linked to a particular group and the group then determines how that person feels about herself. This might be an important thing to consider here because although these women are given the space to contribute or participate according to their own individual skills, abilities and personality traits, this nonetheless still occurs within the framework of the group. The way in which each individual woman makes a contribution then is still defined by the activities, aims and objectives of the group, and it is essentially the group which drives individual actions. So although the group might provide a comfortable space wherein these women are able to express their individuality, this might only be confined to the activities of the group, and if an individual's point of reference does not coincide with the group ethos then conflict might possibly result.

On a deeper, more latent level of analysis it was found that most of the women believed that they had some sort of responsibility towards society. They believed that they could not just live their lives for themselves and that they had the duty towards other people. For some women, this social responsibility was closely linked to religion as they believed that their religion teaches them about social responsibility and about helping others. Although some of them believed that religion was not the main reason for their contribution, and that they would have been involved in this type of work in any case, many of them saw their contribution to community as a religious obligation, a form of good that would assist them in gaining a high spiritual position. They believed that the more they had, the greater their responsibility to others and the more answerable they would be in the eyes of God. One respondent mentioned that; "*...I will bring to mind a lot of Qur'anic verses and Hadeeth (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad-Peace be upon him), where he has mentioned something to this effect that it is every Muslim's duty to uhm, help the next Muslim...having the*

knowledge has helped me to enjoin the good and forbid the evil, so it gives me a greater responsibility than that person that does not have that knowledge, so that's why I feel that I have to be involved".

Many of them take this responsibility seriously as they believe that they will be answerable to God about whether they have fulfilled this responsibility or not. This is clearly illustrated in the following comments:

"I think the bottom line is that on the day of Qiyaamat (Judgement) when Allah asks us; "so what did you do for my deen (religion)", we have something to say... that's one of the reasons why I joined this group and do these things, so I know I'm covered that day".

"How can I leave this dunyaa (world) without having passed on what I know, I cannot, I can't leave this world without having made a difference to something, to somebody".

"We must remind ourselves at all times that whatever we do is for the pleasure of Allah and we must hope for our rewards from there".

Thus it is clear that the contribution made by these women towards the community is embedded within their belief that it is their religious responsibility to do this. Some of them are consciously aware of this, while for others helping others is a part of their lives and their upbringing and they might not actually realise that their motives are closely linked to their understanding of their religious obligations.

This is closely linked to the fact that Islam, as a religion, encourages a "group culture", instead of "individualism". As was noted in Chapter 3, Ansari (2002) describes how the well-being of the community, as a unified force is regarded as essential within the teachings of Islam.

Another important advantage of community participation is that it provides the opportunities for these women to network with other groups and organizations doing similar work. This will be the focus of the next theme.

2. Networking between groups

As discussed in Chapter 3, networking as well as sharing between community groups and organizations contributes largely to community empowerment. Networking between groups is a theme that has been derived from the data in this study. It should be noted however, that this type of networking and continuous interaction with people from other groups and organizations is evident only in Group A in this study. While it has been shown that the women in Group B do find it important to draw on the skills, expertise and knowledge of others, and to share and interact with others, this is restricted to other women only. Since the women in Group B emphasize that they need to maintain the *hijab* at all times, they have less interaction with other groups. Thus, when discussing networking here, it should be borne in mind that this refers only to the activities of Group A.

Networking with other groups has been identified as crucial for the growth of the women's group. Interacting with other groups has allowed the women from Group A to enhance their skills and to expand the type of work that they do. Not only does this group network with other similar Muslim women's groups, but they also interact on a regular basis with groups that are involved in charity and social work in different areas of Johannesburg such as Eldorado Park and Soweto. These women feel that their interaction with other groups has opened up opportunities that they did not previously have. As one of the respondents mentioned; "*we now get invited to other groups when they're having some kind of uh, function, or even if they have between themselves seminars or something, you know, so you always get that opportunity to learn something else".*

In addition it has exposed them to people and situations that they would not have otherwise been exposed to. The following quote illustrates this very well:
"I must say I've gone places and done things that I wouldn't have done if I hadn't being part of this group, our outings, and also the people we've met through uhm, through being part of this group, like you know, other communities, like in Eldorado Park, uhm, and like the informal settlements, you wouldn't on your own, go to such places you know, and also it gives us a chance for our families to be exposed to this type of thing, because uhm, we live in such a safe environment and we're so cocooned in our own little suburbs that we don't know what's happening elsewhere".

It is clear that for the women in Group A, networking with other groups, as well as sharing ideas and resources has allowed the group to grow and the women to broaden their understanding of the world as well as expand their social circles and their entire way of thinking. In addition, this has allowed them to become more open to people from different cultures and backgrounds and it has also contributed to their personal growth.

Furthermore, this women's group gets together once a year with other Muslim women's groups from all over Johannesburg and surrounding areas (such as Vereeniging, Pretoria, Benoni and Springs). These groups share information and experiences with each other and usually discuss the type of challenges that they encounter. This is similar to the type of "power groups" mentioned by Wolf (in Dugan, 2003) which was referred to in Chapter 3.

According to Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000) an empowered community should comprise of well connected organizations or groups. In other words, a good networking system should exist between the different groups in the community. While the networking between groups could definitely be enhanced, it is clear nonetheless that networking and sharing between groups is an important element of the women's group under discussion and it has proven to be advantageous to the women in this group.

3. Power struggle / clash with existing power structures

With increasing community participation from women as well as women playing more active roles in areas that were previously considered to be the domain of men, one can expect some type of conflict to occur, even if it is only a conflict of interests. This brings to mind an important quote that was previously mentioned. Ng (1980, p.185) states that; "inasmuch as the less powerful party is interested in redressing the imbalance, the more powerful party wants to keep the imbalance". Thus a sort of power struggle ensues between the existing power structures and the group or groups which are perceived as a threat. It is interesting to note, however that the existing power structures need not only be male dominated. In fact, the data from this study has revealed that some sort of power struggle is evident between groups of women as well, as the women that make up the more dominant structures in the community seem to clash, on some level, with other, "newer" women's groups. In addition, it appears that some sort of struggle is evident in the community, based on differences in religious paradigm. Some attention will be paid to all three of these areas.

In the Muslim community within which this study was conducted, there are certain groups of people that hold the power. The data revealed that the most dominant power structure in the community is a group of religiously trained men, known as the *jamaat*, who run the affairs of the community, and make decisions with regards to the Mosques, what aspects and syllabus of Islamic education gets taught to children and even the types of activities that take place within the Muslim community. This means that this dominant group gets to make decisions with regards to Muslim women as well, and since they are the main bearers of Islamic knowledge and jurisprudence, people in the community look up to them and expect them to make relevant decisions. It is quite obvious then that any group, especially a group of women that threaten the "normal" way of doing things would be looked upon with disapproval. According to a respondent from Group A in this study, the main problem that exists between their women's group and the male *jamaat*, is that they think and see things very differently and for that reason they are unable to work together. This is evident in the following excerpt.

"He's talking about all the women, uhm, he feels that as men they should be directing us as to which route to take, uh, and you see that's where we clash, and that's, if you feel that, if they feel that they need to dictate to us or tell us how to do things then it's very difficult to work like that, you know for a simple example: If we are, if we are organizing a fun walk for the women in this community, the women and the children, the first thing we were criticized on was that we're putting the women on the street and that is not Islamically acceptable. Now for us we took it in a completely different way, it's a Sunday morning, instead of the women going and being seen in the shopping Malls or somewhere else, at least we're all getting together, we're raising money, it's a community effort, we're doing something good, they don't see it that way. So it's a very different viewpoint, very, very different".

Although this type of clash was more overt in Group A, some sort of clash between males and females was nonetheless evident in Group B as well. One of the comments made by a woman in Group B illustrates this; " ...*I find that there are lots of conservative men as well who do, uhm, uh, question our role and what we're doing, and I think that there are that group out there as well who are, what's the word, uhm, they, they don't take us seriously enough, you know, they think 'oh gosh, what do women know…they take us very lightly and not seriously enough, and I think that, you get the group that are very enlightened men who are very positive and encouraging and so forth and then you get a load of men who are not in*

that frame of mind and I think those are the conservative ones that still need to be enlightened I think."

From this it is clear that some sort of power struggle is evident between a certain group of males and females in the community and this has been experienced by the women in both groups in this study. The way in which they choose to deal with this differs. The women in Group B persisted with the work that they set out to do and although they mention that they were met with scepticism and criticism initially, they believe that time has proven that they are in fact making an important contribution. The work that they are doing has being spread by word of mouth and some husbands of the women that attend their workshops have had very positive comments to make. Also, this group has made conscious efforts to keep all their activities within the confines of Islamic *shari'ah* law and are thus perceived as less of a threat by the dominant male structures. In fact, their efforts are now welcomed by the major power holders in the community.

The women in Group A have chosen to deal with this situation by simply not giving in to the demands of the powerful male structures in society. It was mentioned that; "...*we try to do what we need to in the group and we don't ask them for permission, we don't give them the power to make decisions, we invite them, but we don't ask them for permission".* One of the major aspects of empowerment theory is the power of decision making. In this case, these women are consciously ensuring that their ability to make decisions is not taken away from them.

Another important element in this "power struggle" is that men believe that women lack the necessary Islamic knowledge and thus they feel that they (the men) should make decisions in the community because they have the required moral and religious knowledge and understanding. Furthermore, it seems that although women might disagree with men on some level, they seem to have internalised the notion that males are more knowledgeable when it comes to religious matters. The following quotation from one of the respondents makes this quite clear; *"You know the impression I got from the person who's in charge of this Jamaat, because I did phone him once and I had this talk with him, is that he feels that from an Islamic point of view, our Islamic knowledge is lacking and maybe he's got a point there."*

This links in very well with the discussion presented in Chapter 2, where it was mentioned that traditionally people agreed that Islamic knowledge and specifically interpretation of the Qur'an and Hadeeth was the domain of males. Although an evident shift in this belief is beginning to take place, it seems that this type of thinking is still deeply embedded within the minds of both men and women.

In addition to the clash between males and females in society, some sort of clash between existing and new female structures has also been identified. A continuous theme in the data was that other women do not take the work of the women's groups seriously. One of the respondents related a very negative experience that she had with women from another women's group when she joined a new group. She mentioned that; *"negative feedback would be basically from a previous group that I was involved in, uhm I don't know if it's because that many of these groups do similar workshops and things like that or what, and then the boundaries are crossed like; "is this your own or did you take this from us", and "maybe you're supposed to be doing this with us and not with them", and things like that"*

Although women were not able to pinpoint exactly why a struggle might ensue between them, one of the reasons suggested was that when any group gains recognition and acquires some type of power, they automatically feel threatened at the idea of this power being taken away and thus any new group begins to be viewed as the "rival". The women in this study appeared to be more consciously aware of the power struggle that existed between groups of women. This is clear from a comment made by a respondent from Group B; *"I think it's the fact that I don't want to create animosity in the community by going on the media and then making other people feel that I'm taking over their work or what they used to do, there are lots of this going on and I'd rather be in the background than be at the centre*".

This relates to an important point made by Chesler (2005). She mentioned that since women understand each other better and are more aware of the tactics through which women can sabotage each other, women are generally more sensitive to the conflict that might arise between groups that consist of only women.

The final aspect that will be discussed in this theme is a power struggle that appears to exist based on differences in religious paradigm. The women have mentioned that sometimes people attend their activities simply so that they can see what type of Islamic paradigm they

are postulating. This seems to be more of an ideological conflict which arises based on the way in which people understand and practice Islam. This aspect was recurrent in the data and it was evident in both women's groups that people in the community tend to question the Islamic values of the groups. To sum this up one of the respondents mentioned that; *"people are sceptical of whether you, first of all, are you kosher, what kind of Islam are you practising, are you Shari'ah compliant, are you Shi'aa are you Sunni..."*

This type of power struggle is not uncommon. In fact, in his study on the emergence of Islamic feminisms in South Africa, Jeenah (2001) alludes to the ideological struggle that exists between so-called "progressive" and so-called "conservative" Muslims in South Africa. Within the different paradigms, people's understandings of Islamic injunctions differ and this has an impact on the way in which they practice Islam. When viewing this within the broader context, it is easy to understand why a struggle would exist between the structures that have been in power for a long time and the structures that appear to be gaining momentum.

From this discussion it is clear that the interventions of both the women's groups in this study have had some sort of effect on the broader community and specifically on the existing power structures. Despite the ensuing struggle within the community, it appears that the Muslim community in South Africa is still a relatively closed community.

4. Muslim community as a closed system

Although this particular theme was not consistent throughout the data, it was evident in both the groups and is worth discussing here. It was revealed that the Muslim community in Johannesburg tends to be a rather closed community, in which people prefer to associate with others who they perceive as being similar to themselves. For many people, especially from the older generations, ideas about other people and other cultures have already been set in their minds and they are not very willing to change these ideas. With regards to the Muslim community it was mentioned by a respondent that; *we're still very closed...we're so narrow-minded...and we're not willing to change".* Also, another respondent remarked that; *"...it gives us a chance for our families to be exposed to this type of thing, because uhm, we live in such a safe environment and we're so cocooned in our own little suburbs that we don't know what's happening elsewhere..."*

Patel (2006) cited in Chapter 1 mentions that the demise of apartheid meant that people of different races and cultures now mix more freely with each other and the closed communities that once existed do not exist anymore. This presents a threat to many Muslims as they are exposed to people with very different value systems and beliefs than their own. It appears that some of the data in this study is consistent with this argument. It was revealed that Muslims feel that their lifestyles and value systems are more protected within a closed community. It was mentioned that; "*I think because we've being brought up that way, we want to instil, we think if we keep our children together, like all the Indians together, all the Muslim Indians, they're going to be protected from the ignorance of the non-Muslim".* So it seems that protection of values and ideas that are regarded as "Western" or alien to Islam is one of the reasons that the people in the community tend to be more closed. This is further illustrated in the following comment; "*she was very concerned with what is actually happening with the impact of the Western society on us and she felt that we need to, uhm, become more Islamically orientated in our way of life here and become, she was very concerned about drugs and you know uh, promiscuous lifestyle and, and lots of other things and divorce rates, she was very concerned about that..."* This just further illustrates that people in the Muslim community display a need to protect the community from influences that are regarded as detrimental to the Islamic way of life.

The other part of this is that people seem to feel that a spirit of "togetherness" was easier to foster when communities were more closed. Since people in South Africa are now free to reside wherever they like, the Muslim community is more scattered and Muslims live amongst other people, who they sometimes feel cut off from. One respondent remarked that; "*…and living in a community that's not completely, you know we're used to the community we were in before, the community was closer, here you don't like, have all Muslim neighbours on both sides..."* The "closed community" then is not only regarded as a form of protection then, but also as a form of support as well and that could be another important reason for people feeling that they need to maintain a closed community.

5. Groups as support systems and form of social interaction for women

This is a theme that was recurrent throughout the data and a common one between the two women's groups. For the women, being a member of a group meant that they formed stronger relationships with one another, it gave them a sense of belonging and it was regarded as a source of strength for them. Some of them went as far as to say that the group members have

become like family to them. As a result of their interaction within the group these women have created strong bonds between each other, their relationships have developed on a deeper level and they now look to each other for support and even guidance. The following comments derived from the data clearly illustrates that the groups have developed into a strong support structure for these women:

"... how can I say being able to call on others, uh, when you need them, for me, uhm, knowing that there's always someone to back you up."

"We sort of formed a support system for each other."

"It somehow brings out something in you, like you know, you feel you belong somewhere."

"It's also; it's also like uh, the idea of belonging to a group like this also, uh sort of like plays a role because it kind of gives you a feeling of you know, you belong somewhere, an identity."

"We made lots of friends, and support, we support each other, it's like a support group."

"No, I could never do it alone, because I needed, uhm, support, moral support..."

The support that these women receive from these groups extends beyond emotional support. These groups also provide women with more confidence and through their interaction in the group they are able to become involved in activities that they would not otherwise have being involved in. Many of the women mentioned that the group has given them the strength to conduct these activities and that they would never have done these things if they did not have the support structure provided by the group. They believe that groups are far stronger than individuals and more capable of implementing changes in the community. As two of the respondents mentioned:

"*I look forward to the activities that we have...doing all the activities that you would never do if you were on your own."*
"*...I thought it's better to do it in a group, then you know just what you do individually, it makes much more of an impact."*

It is thus clear that these groups provide a framework in which women can interact and become involved in activities that they would not necessarily have become involved in if it were not for the groups.
The final element of this theme is that membership in a women's group is a form of social interaction for these women. Many of them mentioned that through the group they have met many people that they would not have previously met. Group membership has allowed them to broaden their social circles and to increase their level of social interaction.

Andrews (1996) has mentioned that women's empowerment can be enhanced by the mutual support and sharing of experiences that women receive from one another. She has highlighted the importance of strong support structures between women and this links in very well here. It is evident from the above discussion that for the women in these groups, the support that they receive from their fellow group members has contributed to their self-growth and not only has it opened up new opportunities for them but it has also allowed them to grow and become stronger individuals.

Furthermore, as Brown (in Wetherell, 1996) has pointed out, groups are unique social structures which have the potential to alter the behaviour of those involved in a group. In this case, the support that these women receive and the strong relationships that they develop within these groups have created visible positive changes in their behaviour and interactions with other people. Finally, it has also being mentioned in Chapter 3 that it is easier for people to do things when they have the support of others and when they receive positive affirmation from their peers. This is also quite clear in the context of this study.

6. Personal growth and fulfilment

Not only have these groups provided a support structure for women, but it has also allowed them to grow and develop on an individual level. One of the positive outcomes of the interaction in these groups was that women felt that they had experienced some sort of self growth. Most of them mentioned that one of the best things about the groups was that it allowed women to grow intellectually, emotionally and socially. Although women's experiences of growth differed slightly, self growth was mentioned by every single woman at some point during the evaluation. Some of the comments made with regards to this were:

"It's made me more confident, uhm, in my communication skills..." "...because you are more confident about yourself and more positive you tend to scream a little bit less..."; "...the whole women's group thing, it has made me more positive about my role as a female in society..."; "On a personal level; it's uh, it's basically a lot of self growth, and gaining knowledge all the time..."; "...it's made me more confident, more open you know, and I think also I can deal with a lot more than before."; " ...I'm not as reserved as before..."; "...I've grown, I've been put in touch with my career, it has given me a purpose to my life, it has given it a lot more meaning..."

These types of comments are evident and recurrent within all three sources of data. The women viewed the group as a constant source of growth and continuous development. In addition to mentioning things like increased self confidence and development of a more positive outlook, the women mentioned some additional factors that they felt contributed to their growth. For example some of them felt that their problem-solving skills were enhanced as the group situation allowed them to discover new and more positive ways of dealing with conflict. Also, some of them indicated that because of the types of activities they were involved in, their organizational skills had improved and they were now able to organize events, at all levels, with relative ease. For some women, their experiences in the group was surprising as they were previously unaware of the potential that they had, thus, an important part of the growth process for them was realising that they actually did have the potential to make important contributions. All of this contributed to increased feelings of self-worth in these women, allowing them to feel that their lives were more meaningful and fulfilled.

"..It does give you a sense of fulfilment..."; "...to be quite honest I would say, for me it fulfils something, I don't know what, but it just makes me feel good, to help others or to be of assistance."; "...the good thing about it is that there's a lot of pleasure, there's fulfilment...". These types of comments indicate that not only do these women experience self growth, but they also encounter some type of fulfilment and for them it is as if their involvement in the group has somehow being able to fulfil some type of need that they might have had, whether on a conscious or unconscious level.

Another important aspect of self growth is continuous learning. It was revealed that the women experienced an increase in knowledge and awareness and for them, being a member of the group was an ongoing learning experience. Not only were they constantly learning

from other people and from their experiences, but they had to constantly keep in touch with what was going on in society and this required constant research and learning. Thus, as one of the respondents mentioned, they felt that they had become more constructive individuals in society.

This can be linked to the *intrapersonal* component of psychological empowerment as discussed by Zimmerman et al., (1992) and Zimmerman (in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000). Within this component perceived control, motivation and self-efficacy have been identified as crucial elements of psychological empowerment. From the above discussion it can be deduced that due to their involvement in these groups, there is an increase in the self-efficacy of these women. Also, they appear to be more motivated and in a better position to exert control in the community because they have realised that they do have the potential to be constructive individuals.

Furthermore, the results discussed here seem to concur with the results of studies cited in Chapter 3 when discussing empowerment theory. Zimmerman et al. (1992) made mention of studies in which participation in community groups and activities was directly linked to the *intrapersonal* component of psychological empowerment. Participation has already being discussed as a theme here and it seems that in this case also an important link can be made between women's increased growth and development and their participation in the community.

7. Influence on personal relationships

This theme will be discussed at two levels; firstly the influence that women's interaction in the groups has had on their families, including their children and close friends will be looked at and secondly the influence that that it has had on their relationships with their husbands will be discussed. The reason for discussing this separately is because different dynamics are involved when it comes to the husband's role in all of this.

According to the women from both groups, their involvement in a women's group has had a mainly positive influence on their relationships with their families. One of the disadvantages which will be elaborated on in the discussion of the next theme was that involvement in the group 'eats into family time'. Despite this, the women felt that their families benefited from their interaction in many ways. Firstly, their families tend to learn a lot from their experiences

as they share their experiences with their families and some of them have actually involved their family members in the work that they do. Also, as the women tend to become more aware and as they develop new skills and more effective ways of dealing with situations they seem to find better ways to deal with their own families. Furthermore, because they are experiencing a sense of fulfilment from the group, they are more at ease when they are at home with their children and families as they feel that they have a deeper meaning and purpose to their lives. As one respondent mentioned;
"...for a long time I was frustrated at home and I just wanted something to do...this activity in my life, uhm, it tends to control, or it tends uhm, to get rid of the frustrations of the daily routine that we're living in..." , and according to another respondent; *"...because we are involved in these things as well, our relationships tend to be better, with our husbands, with our families, with everything, with our children, and I think that's a positive effect, you know it's not only touching our lives in positive ways, but it's touching those closest to us as well."*

Although the women insisted that their husbands benefit from their involvement in the group as well and that their husbands are supportive, this aspect is not as clear cut as it might appear to be. While support from husbands was mentioned repeatedly on a manifest level, on a more latent level, it was discovered that this support from husbands firstly had to withstand some initial scepticism and secondly appeared to be subject to the approval from husbands. In other words, these women received support from their husbands because the husbands approved of the activities that they were involved in. In fact, another recurrent code in the data was that it was difficult to operate without their husbands support, which further illustrates that their activities are not completely independent and to a large extent their activities are dependent on their husbands. Interestingly, this was common in both the women's groups. This point is clearly illustrated in the following excerpts from the data:

"If they didn't support us, we wouldn't be able to carry on...I think it would have made it much harder".

"...a good purpose, you know what I mean, not going way out and doing things that, uhm, are not Shari'ah compliant, things that would upset your spouse..."

"...and you know from his side he was a bit apprehensive to allow me to do certain things because there wasn't, it wasn't in a controlled environment and it meant me having to uhm,

compromise my hijab (covering) and having to interact with other strange men. So from his side, he's very, he's very happy that I've got this experience in my life..."

"...most of our husbands are, I don't think we would have managed to stay in the group if they weren't; a lot of the ladies that left the group was because their husbands felt they were spending too much time with the group."

Women mentioned that they are easily supported now because their husbands realize that the work they are doing is for the good of the community. However, the following comments show that women initially had to prove themselves as they were met with some scepticism and negativity:

"They don't feel you have potential to go out there and reach out to people, and when you do that they get, sit back and you know; "oh! oh, ok" you know they get shocked that my wife can do that".

"...they, they don't feel that we have the resources, that we have the knowledge, uh, the skills and when you can pull something off like this, you know, it's like…they feel a sense of pride...they're pleasantly surprised...they respect you more..."

Receiving support from their husbands was regarded as an important thing to these women as they believed that obedience to their husbands is a religious duty which will earn them the pleasure of Allah. One woman mentioned an instance when some of them did rebel against their husbands, but even this rebellion was minimal and as this woman pointed out; *"we get forgiven"* and it does not cause long term conflict.

The results from a study conducted by Ahmad (1996) on professional women in India, is very similar to the results discussed here. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Ahmad (1996) discovered in his study that women only took up professions if they were supported by their husbands and they mentioned that they would not have done this without their husbands support. This brings us back to the broader discussion on the male as the head of the family, which was discussed in some detail in Chapter 2. The results from this particular study being discussed here show that similarly to many other Muslim women across the world, the women in this study also still maintain that the man is naturally the most suitable person to head the family. Obedience to their husbands is embedded within deeper religious beliefs that "men are the

maintainers and protectors of women". These women seem to have no problem accepting this as a truth and thus they regard the support from their husbands as an important prerequisite.

8. Obstacles and Challenges Faced

Although some obstacles and challenges faced by the women in these groups might have been mentioned within the discussion of other themes, it was believed that a separate theme was necessary to discuss the most dominant challenges and obstacles faced by these women's groups. Three specific challenges will be discussed herein; 1) commitment and time is problematic; 2) lack of community commitment; and 3) lack of access to resources. It should be noted also that these three challenges were amongst the codes that ranked the highest. Obviously then, all three of these challenges were recurrent throughout the data and were encountered by both women's groups.

8.1. Commitment and time is problematic

While the women have emphasized that they have had mainly positive experiences through their involvement in the group, all of them have admitted that a disadvantage of group involvement is that it requires a lot of time and commitment, something which they agreed is essential for the sustainability and smooth running of the group. This is particularly difficult when one considers the additional responsibilities that these women have. Having to make time for their husbands, their children, their families, their careers in some cases, and still ensure that they remain committed to the group can tend to be very stressful at times. In fact, some of the women find that when they are running big events or workshops, they actually have to work throughout the night so that they manage to fulfil all their responsibilities. Some of the comments made by the respondents with regards to this are as follows:

"I don't think there's really anything negative, the only thing is like I say sometimes your time, you know you're fighting for time, especially when we're doing major fundraisers or something it takes up your time, and your family time maybe suffers..."

"I would like to have more time, I find our time is always limited."

"I think that's the biggest battle".

"...it's very, very challenging and uhm towards a, function something takes a back seat, either the environment at home or the work takes a back seat..."

"Just sometimes I'm very busy and it's very hectic and it's a bit difficult to do everything..."
"I have sat up nights without sleeping..."

"Because as women, we can only, our time is only at night."

While it is clear that time constraints as well as commitment to the group is problematic, these women attempt to deal with this by working extra hard at certain periods to ensure that they have time for all of their responsibilities. Also, the women in the groups seem to be understanding with regard to this and there is that space given to members who are absolutely unable to commit at all times. Nonetheless, this remains a major challenge and also relates to the lack of commitment from the community at large.

8.2.Lack of community commitment

Another challenge encountered by these women's groups is that the general level of commitment from the community is poor. Although it was mentioned that the community supports the activities of Group A, such as their fundraising events or blanket and food drives, commitment from the community was generally problematic. In the case of Group B, although this group has advertised for their workshops in the local community, the turnout is still quite poor as people are not willing to commit to a long term programme. Also, the growth of both women's groups appears to be hampered by the fact that no other women are willing to commit to being members of these groups.

Below are some comments from the data that relate to this:
"*Yeah, involvement is there, but commitment is very difficult";*

"...And I think I also found that, uhm, I find that people are also very reactionary, I think that when problems arise in the community, that is when they want to do something about it, and I think when educative workshops like these do come about, they don't want to attend it because of general lack of commitment..."

"*I suppose another challenge is to really get people committed all the time, we don't have that commitment."*

"...the main thing is to get more commitment from other women to join..."
Thus it is clear that lack of commitment from the community was one of the major problems encountered in both women's groups. This challenge is ongoing and although women are continuously trying to find ways to combat this problem, it still remains a persistent challenge.

8.3.Lack of access to resources

In the discussion on community empowerment in Chapter 4, it was determined that access to resources is crucial for any community to become empowered. Required resources in a community included things such as; recreational facilities, community centres; emergency and medical services, education, money and general services, such as the media. It was revealed from the data in this study that although women had access to resources such as education and transport for themselves, some very important and necessary resources were not easily accessible, and in some cases where resources might have been available, women chose not to utilise those resources for specific reasons.

One of the most necessary resources for these groups is a community or recreation centre, which provides them with the space required to conduct their activities as well as perhaps a fixed office from where they can function. At the moment all their meetings and planning takes place at their own residences and there is no central meeting point. In addition, they do not have proper access to necessary office equipment such as I.T. equipment or photocopy machines for instance. Having access to these types of resources would save them a lot of time and it would enhance the general functioning of the group.

People resources are another thing lacking in these groups. They do not always have enough people to assist with the work that they are doing and this leads to them feeling overwhelmed and overburdened at times. In fact one respondent mentioned that there was a point where she felt completely overburdened and stressed out because of all the work that she had to do for the group and this made her question whether she should be involved in the group at all. In general respondents all agreed that having more people involved and committed would ease the burden and increase their overall work outputs.

An additional required resource mentioned by the women in Group A was transport. Although the women themselves have access to transport (most of them have their own cars), they mentioned that transport is necessary for the activities that they conduct. For instance, if they plan an outing with the elderly people in the community, they find that it is difficult to transport all these people to destinations that are further away. In this case they mentioned that it would be very helpful to have some means of transport, such as a bus that belonged to the group.

The media has been identified as a crucial resource for the empowerment process. It was found here that although the women in Group B could have access to the local media such as local radio stations or popular magazines, they have chosen not to make use of this resource for their own personal reasons. One of the respondents mentioned that making use of the media would bring the group into the limelight and this might be a cause for conflict with other existing women's groups in the community. Although the group is aware that utilisation of this resource would increase their response rate, they have opted not to make use of it. However, they are becoming increasingly aware of the fact that in future they might have no choice but to make use of the media in order to ensure the sustainability of their group.

Money is another resource that appeared to be rather challenging to achieve, particularly for the women in Group A. Although these women conduct activities and events for fundraising, some of them mentioned that it is very difficult to go out into the community and ask for money or sell tickets for events for instance.

The challenges highlighted here correspond with the types of challenges faced by other women's groups as well. For instance, in a study conducted by McMinn and O'Meara (2000) on women's groups in Ireland, it was discovered that although these women's groups are involved in important community activities including social work and education, these groups are still not taken seriously by the general community. In addition, these groups generally lack access to important resources including money, transport, equipment and a central place from where they can conduct all their activities.

6.2. Further comparisons between the two women's groups in this study

Most of the similarities and some of the differences between the two women's groups have been mentioned in the discussion of the themes above. However, it is believed that a more in-depth discussion on this is necessary.

When focussing on the different paradigms in which Muslim women define themselves, or are defined by others, Group A can perhaps be placed within the 'modernist' paradigm that was discussed in Chapter 2; Although these women might not actually define themselves in this manner, it is believed that this category is the most suitable one for them. The reason for placing this group within this paradigm is that they display a more open, liberal way of thinking. They believe that men and women can work together harmoniously to achieve positive outcomes. Also, these women appear to be less strict about observing the *hijab,* and they are more willing to intermingle with other people, in different areas. They do not believe that all the work they do should be done within the confines of their home. As was already mentioned, this group has networked with many other organizations in different communities. Also, their activities are more general and do not have a purely Islamic motive as an underlying basis. Although they believe that the support of their husbands is important, some of them are willing to transgress the boundaries where necessary, but this transgression is not major and does not cause major conflict in their homes. Finally, the women in this group believe that they are able to function independently from the male-dominated *jamaat*. While they have made attempts to liaise with these men, they have found that it is not possible for them to work together as they have a completely different outlook and viewpoints. They have thus resorted to going ahead with their planned activities even if this means that the *jamaat* is not pleased with it.

In contrast to this, it seems that it is very important for the women in Group B to earn the pleasure of the male *jamaat,* this was quite evident in the focus group interview as the women were pleased to hear that the men who hold the power in the community have very positive comments and attitudes about the work that they are doing. This group asserts that women are able to make important contributions to the community while still observing the rules of *hijab,* and they are absolutely insistent on following the rules of Islamic *shari'ah* law. They are very particular about whom they work and associate with and they ensure that all their activities include women only. Since they emphasize the observance of the *hijab,* they do not wish to venture out to other communities, nor do they feel the need to network with other

groups or organizations that do not comprise of women only. The underlying framework of this group is strongly embedded within an Islamic framework and they believe that their work is a duty that they, as Muslims, should be fulfilling. Their ultimate aim therefore is to uplift the Muslim community through creating awareness. They also display some negative attitudes towards "Westernization" or the infiltration of western ideas in the lives of Muslims as they believe that these ideas are contrary to Islam and thus corrupt the lives of Muslims. This group can easily be placed within the 'traditionalist' paradigm that has been discussed in chapter 2.

This fits in with findings from research conducted by Dangor (2001) as well as Jeenah (2001). They both conducted studies on Muslim women in South Africa and although their studies were very different, a common finding was that tendencies of Muslim women in South Africa vary from extreme, conservative type tendencies to more liberal and even feministic tendencies.

It is interesting that although the two groups in this study can be placed within very different paradigms, there seems to be more commonalities between their experiences than differences. They face similar challenges, display similar feelings towards the work that they are doing and their broader motives seem to be similar. This is not unusual though and in fact similar findings were mentioned by Kar (in Bayes and Tohidi, 2001), when she discussed women in Iran. According to her, although Muslim women in Iran represent three completely different and sometimes even opposing paradigms, they have begun to realise that they face common challenges and although the strategies they employ to deal with these challenges differ, they have discovered that they can all work together to achieve a common goal.

Another difference between the two groups worth mentioning is the internal structure of the group. Group B does not function according to a hierarchical structure, that is, they do not have a chairperson and so forth. Instead, all the members have the same ranking in the group and they usually make decisions together. Although Group A also insists that they all make decisions together, some of the women in this group have distinct roles, such as chairperson or treasurer. It was noted that this difference has a direct impact on the way in which the group members relate to each other; this was observable in the focus group interviews. Some of the women in Group A were far more dominant than others, they spoke more openly and clearly commanded the interview; also, it seemed that the other members in the group

constantly sought the approval of the chairperson. On some occasions some women would make a comment and then confirm it with her. Although a visible closeness between the women was observed, it was quite evident that more dominant members were the "power holders" within the group, and it seemed as if they had the final decision making power. These were the women who held the higher positions within the group. In Group B, however, the women spoke more freely and openly and they did not seek approval or reassurance from each other. They all seemed to be on the same level, despite age differences between them. They gave each other turns to speak and they functioned in a more democratic manner. It is believed that this difference can be attributed to the fact that distinct roles have not been defined.

This makes sense when viewing it in relation to the theory on group processes. As was discussed in Chapter 3, people are naturally more obedient to authority figures. Also, in the presence of authority figures or more dominant members, the other members of the group feel the need to conform to dominant ideas. Finally, group leadership and the style of the leader tend to have a direct influence on the other members of the group. It is evident that all these processes were occurring within the focus group session held with group A, and because group B does not have clearly defined leaders, these processes were not that obvious in the focus group session held with them.

CHAPTER 7 – *RE-VISITING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS*

"Research, then, includes not only the interaction between the researcher and the issue, but also the interaction between the researcher and his or her potential readers" (Flick, 2002, p.245).

Within Chapter 5 the exact process of analysing the data was discussed. This chapter aims to show the exact link between the research questions in this study and the themes and codes which have been derived.

7.1. The different levels of empowerment in relation to the women in this study

In an attempt to answer the first research question, the different types or levels of empowerment will be dealt with separately. The first research question is: "**Is there evidence to suggest that involvement in women's groups contributes to empowerment of Muslim women on psychological, community, political, economic and intellectual levels?"** This question will be dealt with first, by relating the themes which have been discussed in the previous chapter to the different levels of empowerment. While Table 13 provides a summary of how the different themes relate to levels of empowerment, this will now be discussed in some detail.

7.1.1. Psychological empowerment as it relates to the women in this study

The first theme that can be related to the psychological level of empowerment is "*participation and contribution to community".* From this it could be seen that the women in this study hold the perception that they have increased control over their environment. Through participation and involvement in their environment these women have been able to develop a greater awareness of what goes on in their community, thus making way for the belief that they have the ability to make important changes. However, caution needs to be emphasised when making conclusions in this regard because as Riger (1993) mentioned, empowerment interventions very often focus on an individual's power to do something without focussing on influence over resources or policies. Riger (1993) states that; "empowerment is sometimes equated with participation, as if changing procedures will automatically lead to changes in the context or in the distribution of resources" (p.282). So although the progress made by these women is very important, this progress will not result in any significant changes for these women unless it is situated within the broader social and political context in which these women operate.

The next theme that can be related to psychological empowerment of these women is; "*groups as support system and form of social interaction".* This theme has shown that the women in this study have gained an increase in confidence, motivation and self growth. For them these groups have come to be regarded as a source of strength and an avenue through which they are able to contribute to their community. This has allowed them to become active members in their community and many of them have mentioned that they would not have been able to become involved without the support of the group.

A theme which relates to this is "*personal growth and fulfilment".* From the discussion of themes in the previous chapter, it can be seen that growth is evident on an emotional, intellectual and social level. These women's problem solving skills have been improved through their interaction within these groups as they have begun to realize their potential and their self worth has increased. They now feel confident enough to be contributing members of their community and this has brought about more personal fulfilment, greater emotional well-being as well as increased self awareness.

Finally, as these women continue to be involved in these groups, they have noticed differences within their family structures. Women have indicated that they are more positive and they accept their roles within their families more easily because their involvement in these groups have allowed them to feel more fulfilled. They have thus reported that they have learnt to deal with their families in a more positive manner and this has not only resulted in a better family life for them, but it has also allowed them to feel emotionally healthier. This relates to the theme; *"influence on personal relationships",* which has been discussed in chapter 6.

Despite all these positive changes, it is once again important to view this within the context of empowerment theory in order to understand where these women can currently be situated within the ongoing process of empowerment.

Three important components of psychological empowerment have been identified in the literature. The *intrapersonal* component; the *interpersonal* component; and the *behavioural* component (Zimmerman in Rappaport & Seidman, 2000). From the discussion in Chapter 6, it can be deduced that the *intrapersonal* component of psychological empowerment was evident to a large extent. In terms of the actual emotional aspects of this component, it was

found that the women's levels of perceived control, motivation and self-efficacy have increased to a large extent through their involvement in women's groups. The themes *group as support system and form of social interaction*, and *personal growth and fulfilment* can be applied specifically here. Also, because of their *participation and contribution within the community* these women now have the perception that they can make important social changes.

In the interpersonal component it is suggested that individuals understand the social system as well as the power dynamics that exist within that system and the role that they play within that system. This component involves decision-making and problem-solving skills. With regards to this it can be said that the women in this study do display an awareness of the social system that they are a part of, as well as the existing power dynamics in that system. Also, they seem to understand the role that they play within this system. However, this awareness does not seem to have translated into action yet and the decisions that these women make still seem to be bound to the choices and preferences of others, for example their husbands. In the case of Group A, however, some of their decisions might actually have a direct impact on the existing power structures in society, for example, when they decide to go ahead with a fun walk even though the male *jamaat* disagrees with this. However, even these decisions seem to have a minimal effect as no obvious changes to the social system have been identified.

The last component of psychological empowerment is the *behavioural* component, which involves participation in the community as well as taking action to exert control. Again, even though participation in the community and some type of action is evident, there is no evidence to suggest that these women have actually been able to gain control and mastery of their environment. On a psychological level then, involvement in women's groups seems to have contributed largely to women's psychological empowerment on the *intrapersonal* level, but is limited in the other components.

7.1.2. Community empowerment as it relates to the women in this study

From the literature, the most important elements of community empowerment have been identified as the formation of groups, the development of strong networks between community groups or organizations and access to resources. The themes which have been related to this level of empowerment relate to these elements as well. Firstly, "*participation*

and contribution to community" is a theme that is very applicable here. Since active participation has been regarded as an initial step towards community empowerment, it can be said that the women in this study have taken the first steps in the process of empowerment. Once again the caution given by Riger (1993) that participation should not be mistaken as empowerment needs to be borne in mind and it should be remembered that the process of empowerment is a long and continuous one.

"*Networking between groups"* has also been identified as a theme which relates to this level of empowerment. Within the context of this study, networking was evident to a large extent within Group A, while Group B displayed some networking on a small scale. The networking done by Group A has resulted in stronger links between different community groups who do different types of work. This networking has contributed to their growth and has expanded their horizons. Empowerment theory suggests that networking should include a variety of activities so that people within the community can learn from each other's expertise and experience and so that skills and resources are pooled. Group A, thus has access to a variation of knowledge and experience which has come about through effective networking.

Riger (1993) mentions that whenever a serious attempt to gain power over structures or resources is made, this prompts a reaction from those who see themselves as losing power. This results in some sort of power clash between groups, and hence the theme; *"power struggle/ clash with existing power structures"* is significant within this level of empowerment. This was specifically evident in the case of Group A as their activities are conducted on a larger scale and also challenge the dominant views about what women should and should not be doing to some extent.

Another theme that can be applied here is; "*Muslim community as a closed system".* It was found that the Muslim community tends to be a closed system and this is regarded as a form of protection of values and culture. Changes are not easily accepted within this community and this makes community empowerment more difficult to achieve. This makes more sense when viewed according to the perspective of Tsoukas and Papoulias (1996). In their discussion of closed systems or self-referential systems, they discuss how these systems function according to their own self-understandings, which first need to be understood before applying outside self-understandings to these systems.

Finally, the theme *"obstacles and challenges faced"* can also be applied to this level of empowerment. Women still face many obstacles such as lack of access to resources, little support from the community and major time constraints. All of these challenges make community empowerment more difficult to achieve.

Figure 3 below illustrates the relationships between the women's groups and the community.

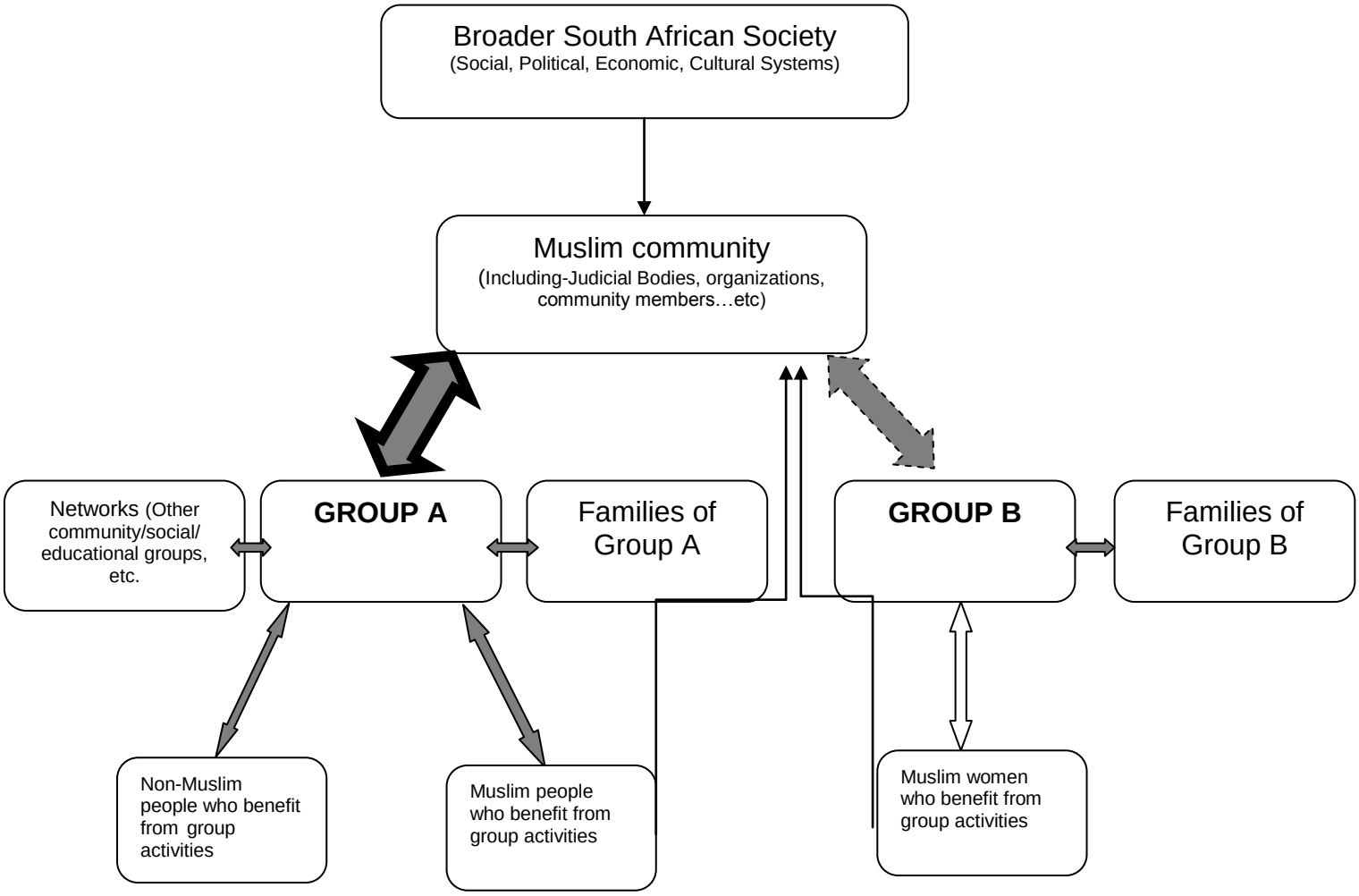


Figure 3- Illustration of Relationships between groups.

It can be seen from Figure 3 that the dynamics which have been created between Group A and the Muslim community in which they function is different from those that have been created between Group B and the Muslim community, although both groups are influenced by the Muslim community and they have an influence on the Muslim community. The power clash between Group A and the Muslim community is more evident as indicated by the dark

lines in the figure. In the case of Group B, the power clash is less pronounced, but does exist. Also, this group and their activities have been regarded as more favourable. This ambivalent relationship is indicated by the broken line in the figure.

The network system which has been established by Group A has an important influence on this group. Through networking, the women in this group have benefited in many ways, similarly, the groups with which they have networked have benefited from their particular skills, knowledge and experiences. Another important group has influenced both Group A and Group B and this is the families of these women. It has already been mentioned that involvement in these groups has had an influence on the women's families. In most cases they have reported a positive influence, but they have also identified challenges that their families have to face because of their involvement. However, they have all indicated that their family responsibilities come first and they have to fit in group activities around their families needs. Therefore, the figure above illustrates that the women's families and the women's groups both have an influence on one another. The grey arrows in the figure indicate relationships between both men and women.

Finally, the influence that these groups have had on other people, through their activities is illustrated in Figure 3. In the case of Group A, the women have been able to influence both Muslims and Non-Muslims. Group A's influence on Muslims has been related back to the Muslim community as an indication of how this group influences the Muslim community in which they function. Similarly, Group B's influence on Muslims has been related back to the Muslim community in which they function.

Finally, the Muslim community in South Africa does not exist in isolation, but is instead situated within the broader South African society. This means that the political, social, and economic systems in South Africa have a direct influence on the Muslim community and this in turn influences the situation of Muslim women.

The relevance of mentioning these relationships here is because empowerment theory has identified that the individual is not viewed in isolation and there is recognition that individuals are situated within the broader environment. Empowerment theory suggests that if there are not changes in the environment as well as changes in the individual, then the

process of empowerment is hampered. In this study, significant changes have been noticed in the women, as has already been mentioned.

Although these women have managed to create some sort of "space" for themselves within the community, it has been found that these groups receive very little commitment and limited support from their community and it has been mentioned that the community appears to be reactive and not proactive, that is they are willing to act only when they perceive something to be a threat to them. Furthermore, the community in which these women live has been found to be a closed community, one that does not readily regard change as a positive thing. Despite this, it is clear that there is some type of influence or change occurring within the Muslim community in which these women function. As the figure and discussion above illustrates, these women's groups currently do have an influence on the smaller groups, such as the family, or fellow groups (through networking), or the groups of people that benefit from their activities. Even in cases where the influence that these groups have is minimal, there is nonetheless some sort of influence which could possibly have major repercussions for the future empowerment on a broader social level.

Perhaps it can be said that steps towards community empowerment have been taken through the formation of groups such as these, and while these groups might be working hard to deal with the problems that exists in the community, these efforts have not yet been able to exercise significant changes in the community, however, the possibility for future changes has been highlighted through this.

7.1.3. Political empowerment as it relates to the women in this study

Presently there is no evidence to suggest that involvement in women's groups has contributed to the political empowerment of these women. Political empowerment not only focuses on an awareness of political issues but it also includes active participation in politics, such as voting, campaigning and holding seats in parliament. Politics was not even mentioned by the women in this study and it is clear that political issues were not the most important issues at hand. This is a very interesting finding when viewed within the global situation of Muslims. The important role that politics has come to play in the lives of Muslims around the world, both male and female, has been discussed in Chapter 2, and it was concluded that politics and Islam have come to be inextricably linked. The implication here then is that although politics might have direct effects on the lives of these women, they still might feel that religion and

politics are two completely separate spheres. While religion obviously plays a huge role in their activities, they have divorced politics from religion, and in a way have decided that politics does not have anything to do with them, which in today's time appears to be a very dangerous stance to take. The interesting part about this is that while political empowerment is clearly necessary, it is a form of empowerment which has not featured here at all. The themes that have been related to this level of empowerment is *participation and contribution to community, Muslim community as a closed-system and obstacles and challenges faced.* It is suggested that these themes could possibly relate to the lack of political empowerment because traditional ways of seeing women might lead women to believe that they have no place in politics. Also, the obstacles that women face, namely, lack of access to resources, lack of community support and limited time might be a result of their limited political empowerment.

7.1.4. Economic empowerment as it relates to the women in this study

If economic empowerment involves the control of income as well as the control of key economic resources such as land or property as well as increase in knowledge and skills that relate to economics, then it is clear that these women's groups only contribute minimally to the economic empowerment of women. All the women in the study, except one, are involved in these groups on a voluntary basis. The other woman receives a small stipend for her contribution to workshops. Through their activities, these women might have learnt how to deal with money better, (they did mention in the interviews that their organizational skills have improved, this includes the economic side as well) but this money has not influenced their own lives in any way as the money was raised or collected for the community or further community activities. It cannot be said then that they have gained economic control through their involvement in groups. If the women do have control of money or resources then it comes from personal activities; for example some of them have careers and are working, but as far as the group is concerned, it cannot be deduced that these groups create or even contribute on a large scale to women's economic empowerment. However, two themes have been related to this level of empowerment (*personal growth and fulfilment and obstacles and challenges faced).* These themes have been related here on a very basic level. Within personal growth and fulfilment it could be said that women have gained further knowledge with regards to how to manage and control money. Furthermore, monetary funds have also been identified as a resource that this is difficult for women to access.

7.1.5. Intellectual empowerment as it relates to the women in this study

Finally, intellectual empowerment involves access to knowledge and information and within this framework; education is regarded as an important resource. Within this study, a general increase in knowledge has been revealed. From their interaction and experiences in these groups, the women from both groups have been exposed to various forms of knowledge. Thus the theme *personal growth and fulfilment* is applicable here. Some of them, specifically in Group B have discussed how they have to continuously research the topics that they are dealing with in their workshops as well as other related topics. In fact, one woman in Group B mentioned that one of the most positive things about the group is that it allows for the flow of information and knowledge and women of all ages are able to learn new things. Furthermore, these women regarded the seeking of knowledge as part of their religious duty and they therefore strove to increase their knowledge. The women in Group A displayed similar sentiments and they have even begun a small Islamic library which functions from one of their homes. Overall, an increase in knowledge was recurrent throughout the data. It has also being mentioned that in the "information age", intellectual empowerment involves, to a large extent, the access to electronic forms of knowledge such as the internet, for instance. The women in this study did have access to electronic resources and although they might not use it as effectively as they could, they were nonetheless computer literate and capable of making use of electronic forms of knowledge. In fact, one of the women actually made it a point to purchase a computer and learn how to use it because she felt that this was necessary to enhance her work in the group. Other women specifically mentioned that their computer skills have improved because of the work that they have to do within the groups. It has thus being deduced that involvement in women's groups play a large role in empowering women on an intellectual level. *Participation and contribution to community and networking between groups* are further themes that have been related here as it is clear that participation and networking have contributed to the intellectual empowerment of these women.

Table 13 displays an overview of how the derived themes and codes relate to the first research question.

TABLE 13 – RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH QUESTION 1, DERIVED THEMES AND CODES		
Type of Empowerment	**Related Theme/s**	**Relevant Codes** *
Psychological Empowerment	1. Participation and contribution to community-On the *intrapersonal level* of Psychological Empowerment (PE) this theme relates to respondents perception of their ability to control their environment. With more participation and contribution within their community, the women's confidence has increased and they have begun to believe that they have the ability to make important changes within the community. On the *interpersonal level* of PE greater participation results in a better understanding of the functioning of the community (i.e. who holds the power, etc). On the *behavioural level* of PE participation and contribution to the community has provided a situation in which the initial steps towards change has begun. However, changes have been minimal. 5. Groups as support systems and form of social interaction- groups have been regarded as a source of strength which has led to increased confidence, motivation to contribute and enhanced self growth. 6. Personal growth and fulfilment- Occurs on the *intrapersonal level of PE.* Growth has been indicated on an emotional, intellectual and social level. Problem solving skills have increased. Realization of individual potential and increased feelings of self worth has been indicated. Women have described themselves as 'more constructive' members of society and they now believe that they have the ability to make meaningful contributions. More personal fulfilment, greater emotional well-being and increased awareness has also been indicated. 7. Influence on personal relationships- involvement in groups have led to more ease within families as women have become more comfortable with themselves and since they feel more fulfilled and emotionally healthier they have learnt how to deal with their families in a more positive manner.	▪ contribution to community ▪ increase in awareness ▪ increase in knowledge ▪ increased problem solving skills ▪ increased self-worth / self-efficacy ▪ sense of belonging ▪ continuous learning ▪ expanding horizons ▪ fulfilment of personal needs ▪ group as support system ▪ increased self growth ▪ positive reaction from family and friends ▪ realising potential ▪ strengthening relationships ▪ women relate to women best ▪ changing value systems ▪ each individual contributes ▪ group as social interaction ▪ groups stronger than individuals ▪ many gains and benefits ▪ meaning and purpose ▪ group gives women voice ▪ group understanding
Community Empowerment	1. Participation and contribution to community- active participation is essential for a community to become empowered. Thus, the first step towards community empowerment has been put into place here. 2. Networking between groups- Development of community groups and strong networks between groups is an important element of community empowerment. In this context, networking was evident to a large extent within Group A, Group B displayed some networking on a very small scale. The networking done by Group A has resulted in stronger links between different community groups who do different types of work. This networking has contributed to their growth and has expanded their horizons. Theory suggests that networking should include a variety of activities so that people within the community can learn from each other's expertise and experience and so that skills and resources are pooled. Group A, thus has access to a variation of knowledge and experience. 3. Power struggle / clash with existing power structures- Theory indicates that decision making power should be shared equally between all members of a community. This was not the case within this community, as a result of the women's activities; some sort of clash with dominant power structures within the community was evident.	▪ Clash with existing power structures (power clash) ▪ Contribution to community ▪ Individuals as agents of change ▪ Lack of access to resources ▪ Networking between groups ▪ Obstacles and challenges ▪ Participation in community activities ▪ Commitment and time problematic ▪ Disagreement and criticism ▪ Expanding horizons ▪ Groups stronger than individuals ▪ Inculcating Islamic values ▪ Islamic values questioned ▪ Lack of community commitment ▪ Other women don't take groups seriously ▪ Changing value systems

* See Appendix L for all code references

Community Empowerment cont...	4. Muslim community as a closed system- Community not open to changes as a closed community is regarded as a form of protection of values and culture. Thus change is not easily accepted which makes community empowerment more difficult to achieve. 8. Obstacles and challenges faced- (lack of community commitment, lack of access to resources, time constraints) - All of these obstacles hampers community empowerment as access to resources and community involvement have are essential for community empowerment. In this case resources are not been used sufficiently and many resources are still inaccessible for the women's groups. Also, there is very little commitment and support from the community.	▪ Greater community needs identified ▪ Group as social interaction ▪ Initial scepticism ▪ Positive response from community ▪ Resources from fundraising ▪ Strengthening relationships ▪ Closed community ▪ Group gives women a voice ▪ Group open to all ▪ Growth and sustainability of group ▪ Move from tradition ▪ Problematic to work in own community ▪ Social responsibility ▪ Religion plays a role ▪ Unity between men and women
Political Empowerment	1. Participation and contribution to community- on a basic level active participation in the community could lead to political empowerment as participation and community involvement includes interaction in the community at all levels. 4. Muslim community as a closed system- in the context of this study the women's involvement in politics was limited and there was hardly any mention made of politics, this could relate to the fact that the community is a closed system which holds a more traditional view of activities that are acceptable for women. –The demise of Apartheid in South Africa has had a direct effect on the lives of these women as communities have become more open and integrated and the closed system that women were used to is changing. 8. Obstacles and challenges faced- time constraints might be a hamper on political empowerment. Lack of access to resources- political awareness and involvement might also be regarded as an important resource which is lacking in this case.	▪ Closed community ▪ Commitment and time problematic ▪ Other women don't take groups seriously ▪ Difficult to operate without husbands support ▪ Disagreement and criticism ▪ Initial scepticism ▪ Power clash ▪ Participation in community activities
Economic Empowerment	6. Personal growth and fulfilment- on a very basic level this might relate to economic empowerment as some of the women made mention of increased financial literacy and skills. 8. Obstacles and challenges faced- lack of access to resources- financial resources falls within this as lack of funding was also identified as an obstacles (in Group A specifically)	▪ Increase in knowledge ▪ Increased problem solving skills ▪ Lack of access to resources ▪ Difficult to operate without husbands support ▪ Organizational skills acquired ▪ Resources from fundraising
Intellectual Empowerment	1. Participation and contribution to community- leads to increased awareness and knowledge as well as experience in different areas. 2. Networking between groups- knowledge and skills gained from interaction with other groups. 6. Personal growth and fulfilment- continuous learning was recurrent within the data. The women mentioned that through their involvement in women's groups they have learnt many new things and have expanded their horizons and some have even mentioned that their value systems have changed as they have become more open to different things. Increase knowledge included increased use of computers as well as researching relevant topic areas for activities.	▪ Continuous learning ▪ Expanding horizons ▪ Group gives women a voice ▪ Increased self growth ▪ Realising potential ▪ Increase in knowledge ▪ Organizational skills acquired ▪ Increase in awareness ▪ Increased problem solving skills ▪ Individuals as agents of change ▪

7.2. Empowerment and Gender Equality within the context of this study

Table 14 displays how derived themes and codes relate to research question 2 (**Are Muslim women being empowered with respect to gender equality through their involvement in women's groups?)**

From this and the discussion in Chapter 6 it can be concluded that the women in this study are not being empowered with respect to gender equality through their involvement in women's groups. It is clear that despite the efforts and contributions made by these women, they are still faced with many inequalities. Although these women's groups have provided a support structure for these women and contributed to their personal growth and development in very positive ways, they have at the same time highlighted social inequalities and disadvantages of women in the South African Muslim society.

One of the major inequalities faced by these women is that of unequal power and influence. These women have limited influence within the community and even more limited power. The impact that they are making is small and yet this impact has resulted in some sort of clash (even if just on the ideological level) with the dominant power structures in the community. This illustrates that there is a need to hold on to power and that women have to struggle in order to gain power within the community. Access to power is thus very difficult to acquire.

In addition to women having unequal power in general, it was also found that they have limited decision making abilities, specifically within the broader community. In most cases the major decisions are made by men. It was found that men are regarded as having more religious and moral knowledge and they are therefore accepted as the main decision makers in society and women have come to accept this as the norm. Women's efforts are not taken as seriously as they should be and whenever women embark on a project, they are met with criticism and scepticism. Furthermore, the data indicated that the Muslim community in South Africa is still a very closed community, one that does not accept change easily. This has a direct impact on the work that these women are doing. While these women are increasingly experiencing the need to make significant changes and to contribute to the community in a more meaningful way, their efforts are impacting on the way in which society functions and thus a clash is evident.

TABLE 14 – RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESEARCH QUESTION 2, DERIVED THEMES AND RELEVANT CODES		
	Related Theme/s	**Relevant Codes**
Are Muslim women being empowered with respect to gender equality through their involvement in women's groups?	1. Participation and contribution to community- increased participation from women and the outcomes of participation alters existing gender relations within the community. 2. Networking between groups- also challenges more dominant ideas of women's seclusion and no intermingling between sexes as networking involves intermixing and exposure of women to a variety of outside groups. 3. Power struggle / clash with existing power structures- An evident power struggle has been identified within this particular community, particularly between men and women but also between the women from these groups and other women in the community. It has been seen that men are still regarded as the primary bearers of Islamic knowledge and women are still expected to listen and accept what the men have to say. Some of the women within this study have raised issue with that as the viewpoints of the "power holding" males tend to differ from those of the women. 4. Muslim community as a closed system- This theme is important within this context because people tend to hold fast to their traditional views of gender and are not very open to changes specifically within this area. 7. Influence on personal relationships- Support from husbands- most of the women in the study indicated that it is difficult for them to work without their husbands support. For them approval from their husbands is important and many of them hold the view that the man is the head of the house and that men and women have a complementary role to play within the family. 8. Obstacles and challenges faced- a) commitment and time problematic- women have greater responsibilities within the home which limits their other activities and in some cases creates a double work load for them. b) Lack of community commitment- women's work are still not taken seriously by many people and initially these women were met with a lot of scepticism. There is still lack of commitment from the community towards the activities of the women. C) Lack of access to resources- unequal distribution of resources, e.g mosques are more accessible to men.	• Clash with existing power structures (power clash) • Contribution to community • Increase in awareness • Increase in knowledge • Increased problem-solving skills • Individuals as agents of change • Influence on relationships • Lack of access to resources • Networking between groups • Participation in community activities • Changing value systems • Commitment and time problematic • Difficult to operate without husbands support • Disagreement and criticism • Expanding horizons • Initial scepticism • Lack of community commitment • Men are surprised • Other women don't take groups seriously • Support from husbands • Boys and girls raised differently • Closed community • Group gives women a voice • Groups stronger than individuals • Islamic values questioned • Move from tradition • Problematic to work in own community • Realising potential • Unity between men and women

Other inequalities and disadvantages that these women face were also brought to the fore through the experiences that they have related. Firstly, it was found that women struggle with committing to these women's groups because of major time constraints. These women are still mainly in charge of running their households and caring for their children thus restricting their time to do other activities. When they do take on additional work, such as becoming involved in a women's group, then there appears to be extra pressure on them and they seem to have a "double burden" at times when they have to commit more to the women's groups, like when they are planning activities for instance. In addition to this, it appears that the community is not willing to commit to these groups. Community commitment is limited and support from the community could definitely be improved upon. This relates back to the point that women do not have sufficient influence in the community to draw people in to commit to their activities and support their efforts.

Furthermore, it has also been discovered that women have unequal access to necessary resources such as community centres, the media, recreational facilities and equipment. This makes it more difficult for women to conduct the activities that they would like to and it hampers the influence that they have on the community as it restricts what they are able to do.

A careful perusal of the data and some of the literature has indicated that the women in this study adopt the "gender balance" position that was discussed in Chapter 2 of this dissertation. These women are willing to accept that men are more dominant in certain functions and areas as they believe that men and women are complementary to each other and that they have specific functional roles. This was evident in both women's groups, although it does appear that the women in Group B ascribe to this position more strongly. Essentially all the women in this study have accepted their roles as mothers and wives. They believe that they are able to run their homes and make important contributions to society at the same time. Although they do believe in mutual consultation with their husbands', they have accepted their husbands' as the final decision maker within the family. Thus, approval from their husbands' and support from their husbands' are regarded as essential. Furthermore, they have conceded that it is very difficult to function without their husbands' support and approval and they are thus willing to give up some of their independence in order to please their husbands'. Furthermore, for the women in Group B, human agency and the freedom to "be oneself" appear to be more achievable when they are separated from men. In the interviews, these women mentioned that they believe that women understand other women better and that

having a man involved in their activities hampers what they can achieve. In fact, they have made it clear that the exclusion of men from their activities has made it easier for them to work and they are quite insistent upon maintaining this separation. So while empowerment theory suggests that women's empowerment should come about by including women equally in all sectors of society, these women seem to believe that they are empowered by remaining separate from men. This separation of the domain in which men and women function links in with the "gender balance" position which was previously discussed. Since an inextricable link has been made between women's empowerment and gender equality, it seems obvious that these women are not being empowered in respect to gender equality.

When relating these findings back to the aims of *South Africa's National Gender Policy Framework,* it can be seen that Muslim women's empowerment is a more complicated issue as religious viewpoints and positions taken by women directly influence their empowerment. On a strategic level, although gender equality is not evident for Muslim women in all sectors, it appears that women themselves accept the subject positions assigned to them and are only willing to make changes to a certain extent, if it is in coherence with their own beliefs. For instance, the women in this study are comfortable with making changes within the community, but they are more reluctant to make changes within their families as they believe that the "gender balance" position is more applicable and appropriate. On the basic level, it appears that women's empowerment is more successful. The women in this study have most of their personal basic needs met, their economic needs are been met, they have had access to education, many of them have received university or college qualifications and some of them are employed. Empowerment on the basic level appears to be more achievable and realistic in this context than empowerment at the strategic level

CHAPTER 8- *CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS*

"Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, man or woman: You are members one of another." (Qur'an- Chapter 3: Verse195)

8.1. Women creating a "space" for themselves

Within the context of this study, it is believed that the women in both women's groups have somehow managed to create their own space within society, albeit in very different ways.

The women in Group A appear to be in a continuous state of re-defining their gender roles. These women are very much aware of the power dynamics which exist in their community. For them it seems that in order to create a space for themselves within society, where they can be recognised as a group that contributes significantly, they have had to challenge the dominant societal structures, and it appears that they are willing to do this as they have their own understanding of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.

The women in Group B however, have managed to create a space for themselves within the society by accepting the male structures and working in coherence with them. By ensuring that their activities fit within what is regarded as "acceptable" in society, these women have managed to achieve the respect of the males in the society. After having had to deal with initial scepticism and negativity, this group is now recognised as a group which is able to make a marked contribution towards uplifting the lives of Muslim women. In this case it appears that these women made a conscious decision to work within the domain of the existing power structures, and this has allowed them to secure a significant space within society.

Perhaps it is important to note here that the underlying frame of reference that these women use is undoubtedly religiously inclined. Religion and religious texts and injunctions are the driving force behind the actions of these women. In Group B this is more explicit as these women very boldly state that they use religion to inform all of their actions. Furthermore, their activities aim to re-instate religious injunctions in the lives of women. This point is important within this context because it indicates that these women are enhancing their space in society by equipping themselves with the relevant religious knowledge. The implication of this is that women are beginning to realise that religious knowledge and understanding should

not only be restricted to males which opens up the way for changes to be made in the community.

This is more implicit in the case of Group A. From an in-depth analysis of their interview transcripts the fact that they use religion as an underlying frame of reference is evident as well. However, the way in which religion is used here differs. In this case, these women make use of religion to enhance their arguments and to secure their space within the community. They make the decisions as to whether they are willing to accept or reject popular religious interpretations.

8.2. Evaluating empowerment theory within the context of this research

One of the criticisms against empowerment theory is that the concepts postulated within the theory are very idealistic and in reality these concepts are very difficult to put into practice (Gibson & Swartz in Hook et al., 2004). Gibson and Swartz (in Hook et al., 2004) have discussed this by applying empowerment theory to a community intervention in Gugulethu. They concluded that the main tenets of empowerment theory are difficult to implement in practice. Not only is there a general lack of necessary resources, but traditional roles assigned to people is difficult to overcome. In their discussion for example, community workers insisted on treating psychologists as the "knowledgeable expert". Similarly, Dangor et al. (in Park et al., 2000) have concluded that in practice empowerment theory usually only manages to focus on the basic elements of empowerment.

These results been echoed within this study. It has been concluded that in the case of the women in this study, although the process of empowerment has begun, empowerment as an ideal, according to empowerment theory still appears to be far off. Women still encounter many obstacles and difficulties on a daily basis, lack of access to necessary resources being one of the major obstacles.

In addition, there is an additional element which cannot be ignored when making conclusions about empowerment within the context of this particular research study. Once again, the argument put forth by Tsoukas and Papoulias (1996) as well as that discussed by Riger (1993) is of absolute importance here. Tsoukas and Papoulias (1996) discuss the caution that needs to be taken when dealing with closed systems because these systems function according to a specific set of beliefs and ideologies which they refer to as "self-

understandings". They mention how the self-understandings of other groups can easily be imposed on systems that have very different beliefs and understandings. This is very important when drawing conclusions about empowerment within this study. It makes sense that the women in this study will view empowerment according to their own set of beliefs and understandings which can easily be misunderstood or misrepresented. As mentioned earlier for instance, for many of the women in this study, empowerment can only come about if men and women function in separate spheres of society. In addition, it has been mentioned that these women are comfortable with the subject positions (that is as wives, mothers and home makers) which have been assigned to them and they do not see the need for change in this area. This type of belief might not fit in with the mainstream ideas of empowerment, but these women clearly regard this as empowerment.

What needs to be considered then is the way in which empowerment is evaluated. Empowerment theory can be criticised for being too general, for not taking different contextual issues into consideration, and for failing to allow for different conceptualizations and understandings of empowerment. What is put forth in empowerment theory is based very much on a "Western", notion of empowerment and the extent to which this theory can be applied cross culturally is questionable. Bearing this in mind, it is highly possible that the women in this study have an aversion towards empowerment similarly to the way in which many Muslim women display an aversion towards feminism. These women might not want to be "empowered" in the sense in which empowerment is discussed within an empowerment theory framework, because they might be under the impression that this does not fit in with their religious or cultural beliefs. Their different ideas about empowerment then might be the very reason that they are not being empowered on all levels. The basic elements of empowerment theory such as issues discussed within the intrapersonal component of psychological empowerment for instance, might be regarded as more suitable and appropriate and this could explain why empowerment has taken place mainly on this basic level. These issues are crucial when making conclusions about women's empowerment and more particularly Muslim women's empowerment. If such issues are not taken into consideration then conclusions regarding empowerment in such unique contexts will be very one-sided and subjective.

Similarly, as Riger (1993) argues, notions of empowerment focus largely on the individual, as concepts such as mastery and independence have come to be regarded as "empowerment",

and connections between groups are undermined within empowerment theory. It has previously been mentioned that a "group culture" is more favoured within an Islamic framework than individualism and in fact, individualism has been looked upon rather negatively within Islamic societies. If empowerment is limited to the individual level, then there might be important processes of empowerment occurring at the group level which might be overlooked when applying common notions of empowerment theory. This research has made attempts to highlight some of the ways in which empowerment might be occurring at the group level, however this is also limited as these processes have been discussed largely within an empowerment framework.

It is thus clear from this study that empowerment theory has some major limitations. While limitations exist in all theories and cannot easily be controlled for, these limitations should be borne in mind when drawing conclusions. Similarly, there is no research study that is without its limitations on a methodological level, and this study is not an exception. Some of the limitations in this study will thus be discussed and some suggestions for further research will be made.

8.3. Limitations of the study and suggestions for further research

Although some of the advantages of the flexibility of the researcher's role in a qualitative study have been discussed earlier, the subjectivity of the researcher in a qualitative research study can be a major limitation, not only in limiting what is highlighted for examination but also in how data are interpreted. In this particular study, the researcher came from the same cultural and religious background as the respondents and this is likely to have limited what has been focused on in the research process, as well as the way in which the findings have been viewed and presented

The very fact that the researcher understood the framework from which these women function could have hampered the way in which they responded. For instance, the women might have been concerned about the researcher's expectations about them and they could possibly have attempted to respond in a way that would please the researcher. Also it might have been easier for the respondents to be more open if they had been interviewed by someone who they regarded as "different" from themselves, and with whom there was less identification. Furthermore, the researcher could have possibly taken important things for granted instead of focussing more on it. It is clear that certain things were regarded as

implicit knowledge for the researcher and thus valuable information with regards to these women's roles, their interaction and response to particular cultural norms were overlooked. It would have been more valuable if the researcher asked more questions with regards to these issues instead of assuming things and taking things for granted. In any case, it would be very interesting to see what types of results would be revealed if the same type of study was to be conducted by a researcher that came from a very different background and who was unfamiliar with the community in which the research was conducted as well as the prevailing religious and cultural framework.

Furthermore, the women that participated in this study could all be described as middle-class, urban women. As the literature has revealed, this particular group of women generally have more advantages and more opportunities than other women. It can be seen that these women have access to education, most of them have received some sort of tertiary education, with some of them holding postgraduate degrees, they had access to the workforce, some of them are still active in their careers and they relatively enjoy many conveniences, such as being able to drive their own cars for example.

It is thus expected that very different results would emerge if a similar study was conducted by a different researcher, or with different subjects in a different context. In fact, the actual outcomes of groups such as these might be completely different, causing varying conclusions to be drawn about women's groups, or even the condition of Muslim women for that matter. Furthermore, it might be argued that the intellectual empowerment of these women and perhaps even the degree of psychological empowerment displayed could be attributed to their predisposed social position and opportunities instead of to their interaction in the women's groups.

Perhaps the most important limitation of this study involves limitations which are inherent in the methodology as well as the chosen method of data analysis. The chosen methods in a qualitative study have huge potential to influence the results which are yielded. For instance, had different questions been asked in the interviews, very different results might have been yielded. Also, if different theoretical arguments had been engaged in, the study would have taken on a very different form.

Within the context of this study, however, it is believed that a multi method approach assisted in strengthening the research in this regard. The use of three different instruments to gather data allowed for information to be checked a number of times and it allowed the researcher to qualify the results by gaining clarification about issues from the respondents themselves. However, methodological weaknesses cannot be completely eradicated.

Although the advantages of using a focus group technique have been highlighted, there are some important limitations that are worth mentioning here. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995) mention some disadvantages of using a focus group technique. The most important limitation is that individuals are very often not allowed to express themselves freely because of social desirability. The effects of social desirability are increased in such a situation because members of a group become concerned with conforming to what others are saying. This issue is of particular concern within the context of this research because in both focus group sessions the women all belonged to the same women's group. Social desirability would thus be further increased in this case. Also, the implications of the women's interaction within the focus group sessions would be more severe as it would directly impact on their roles in the women's group that they belong to.

In his discussion of focus groups, Flick (2002) mentions that ideally focus groups are more appropriate with a group of strangers instead of people who are friends or who know each other very well, because the level of things taken for granted tends to be higher when the people in the group are familiar with one another. This was evident within the context of this research; however, based on the nature of the research, focus groups had to be conducted with women who were members of a women's group and thus familiar with one another. In this case, this limitation could also serve as a strength because there was more time to discuss the issues at hand without having to focus on things that were obvious. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that many things were taken for granted and thus remained implicit instead of been brought in to the discussion. This has naturally had a major influence on the discussion that was generated within the focus group sessions.

In addition, Flick (2002) goes on to mention that, it may be difficult for the moderator to accommodate all the participants because the dynamics of the situation and the group will result in some individuals dominating while others might refrain from entering into the discussion. Although active attempts were made by the researcher to try and involve all the

women in the discussion, some of the women still tended to dominate the discussion and this appeared to fit in with their various positions within the women's group. Despite these limitations, valuable information was derived from these focus groups sessions and these sessions gave further insight into the dynamics of the women's groups under investigation. Besides the limitations of using a focus group technique, further limitations in the methodology were evident as well.

Both Silverman (2000) and Boyatzis (1998) highlight the potential limitations which could occur in coding data when making use of content analysis and thematic content analysis. Silverman (2000, p.147) has mentioned that; "the first and more obvious problem is that every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing". Similarly, Boyatzis (1998, p.1) writes that; "Thematic analysis is a way of seeing. Often, what one sees through thematic analysis does not appear to others, even if they are observing the same information, events, or situations".

What this essentially means is that one researcher might miss out on important information which another researcher might easily pick up on. Having one coder of the data then is a huge limitation as the results are still based very much on the subjectivity of the researcher. That is, the researcher makes the choices of which data are important, what codes are established, which quotes are used in the discussion as well as how the overall results are reported, all this based on the researcher own "way of seeing". As Silverman (2000) emphasizes, every individual is in a constant process of "coding" what we see and hear and caution needs to be taken in what is coded. Also, Boyatzis (1998) mentions that researchers make sense of seemingly random information by perceiving patterns or themes and once again this perception tends to be rather subjective. The ideal then would be to have a group of researchers to code the same data, thus making the data more reliable.

In the case of this particular research, a group of researchers could not be employed to code the data, for obvious reasons such as time or financial constraints for instance. However, the researcher employed a rigorous coding strategy and made use of both computer content analysis as well as thematic content analysis. In addition to this, the data was checked numerous times and likewise chosen quotes were checked in order to ensure that the data was been portrayed accurately. Also, there were three different readers of this study and it is believed that the comments from these readers assisted in making the study more objective as these three readers all had a different cultural as well as academic background. Their

expertise in different fields of research also varied. Nonetheless, the results of this study should be read with a certain amount of caution and it should be borne in mind that the results portrayed and discussed here is just one out of many "ways of seeing".

8.4. Evaluating the criteria of a qualitative research study

Guba and Lincoln (in Madaus , Scriven & Stufflebeam, 1983), have highlighted certain criteria by which to evaluate a qualitative research study. These principles will now be discussed in relation to this study.

The first condition that they discuss is *credibility,* in which the research should accurately represent the subject area as well as the people being studied. One suggested way to determine if a study is credible is to go back and verify the results with the respondents. While the final results of this study were not actually verified with the respondents, it could be said that the individual interview served as a form of verification. This interview was conducted after receiving some initial data and the researcher was able to use this as a form of validating whether her initial examination was accurate. While the respondents might not actually agree with all the points brought out in the discussion, attempts to represent them in the most accurate way were made. Perhaps if time permitted then an additional evaluation method could have been employed to determine how these women feel about the final results, and this might then give the study further credibility.

The second factor discussed by Guba and Lincoln (in Madaus et al., 1983) is *transferability.* Here the focus is on the applicability of the findings in one context to another context. While quantitative studies are concerned with generalizing findings, here the researcher aims to establish some degree of transferability by ensuring that enough thick description is available. While the findings in this study correlate with other related studies to a large extent, it is believed that there are some issues that are very context specific, so while these findings could be applicable in other settings, caution would have to be exercised and making generalizations would then be very dangerous.

Dependability is the third condition that has been mentioned. Here the concern of the researcher is with changes in the topic area chosen for study as well as the design. This involves a refined understanding of the setting (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 in Nzima, 2005a). In the case of this research, because the researcher came from the same community as the

respondents, she initially believed that she had a very good understanding of the setting. In fact, this proved to be a limitation as many things were regarded as obvious and thus taken for granted. However, as the research process continued, the researcher was forced to re-evaluate her understanding of important issues, and it is believed that this refined understanding allowed for more objectivity on the part of the researcher. So, something that was initially identified as a limitation somehow changed along the way, allowing the researcher to make choices about the data in a more open and better informed manner.

The final factor discussed by Guba and Lincoln (in Madaus et al, 1983) is *confirmability*. The concern here is whether the findings can be confirmed by another person. Employing an additional coder to ensure credibility was not something that was regarded as practical within this study. Firstly, due to time constraints and secondly because of the large volume of data, it was considered impractical to have an additional coder. Also, this might have infringed on the confidentiality that was promised to the respondents as they were told that only the researcher, supervisor and markers would have access to the data. Marshall and Rossman (1989 in Nzima, 2005) suggest certain strategies for ensuring credibility besides using an additional coder. Two of these strategies were employed here; these were checking and re-checking the data and free note taking. Finally, it is believed that using a computer-based analysis, followed by thematic content analysis provided more credibility to this study.

8.5. Conclusions

Many of the findings discussed here are consistent with findings discussed in the literature on this topic. Firstly, the results from this study are similar to those found in a study conducted by McMinn and O'Meara (2000) on women's groups in Ireland. In that study it was also found that women's groups highlight the disadvantages and inequalities of women. It was found that the community did not take women's groups seriously and that women's groups remained on the periphery despite being in existence for a long time. The women in these groups lacked access to necessary resources as well as decision making and general power. Also, empowerment of women in these groups was only visible at the basic level of analysis.

This final finding has also been emphasized by Dangor et al. (in Park et al., 2000) where they found that empowerment of women almost always occurred only at a very basic level. It was also consistent with conclusions derived by Gibson and Swartz (in Hook et al., 2004),

wherein they mentioned that empowerment sounds very good in theory but is actually very difficult to achieve in practice.

Another finding of this study which is consistent with the literature is that the women in this study regard men as the main knowledge bearers when it comes to religious matters. Various authors discussed previously in the literature (such as El-Azhary- Sonbol in Yazbeck-Haddad & Esposito, 2001; Saadallah in Kabeer, 2000; Shaaban in Afkhami, 1995; Wadud-Muhsin, 1992) have focused on the tradition of male dominated religious interpretation and how the religious domain has historically been regarded as the domain of men. Despite the common notions of gender within the South African Muslim community it was found that women are beginning to realize that they are capable of playing an important contributing role within society and within their homes, this finding is consistent with Akhmat's (2005) discussion on the topic.

Andrews (1996) mentioned that women are able to serve as a means of support and strength for one another, this finding was dominant within this study as a consistent theme in the data was that women receive support and comfort from these women's groups. Also, group processes discussed in the theory on groups is evidently taking place within these women's groups as well. Finally, Smail (2001) has mentioned that power is generated within the larger socio economic environment and subsequently influences the lives of individuals. This was very evident within this study as it is clear that the roles women play, their understanding of gender issues, the amount of power and influence that they have as well as the access that they have to the community and to necessary resources are all determined largely by the society in which they live.

To sum up, it has been found from this study that although these women's groups do have many positive outcomes, they only contribute to women's empowerment to a certain extent. It can perhaps be said that the empowerment process has being set into motion but an actual state of empowerment has not yet being reached and still seems quite far off. As mentioned this is not unique to the women in these groups and in fact these findings correlate very strongly with the literature on empowerment and specifically women's empowerment. It has been previously emphasized that empowerment is a complicated process which takes time, this is further complicated when it comes to women and the results from this study further emphasize this.

The overall conclusion that can be drawn from this study with regards to the situation of Muslim women in South Africa is that although South African women enjoy relatively more freedom than their counterparts in other areas of the world, there are still commonalities between Muslim women. For instance, the different paradigms in which women can be placed, such as "modernist" or "traditionalist" is common in other countries as well and similar trends have emerged with regards to how women define themselves in countries such as Pakistan, Iran or Egypt for instance. Also, Muslim women in South Africa appear to have similar feelings with regards to the role of the male in the family or in society, and so it can be said that South African Muslim women are not isolated from the trends relating to Muslim women in the global society.

In terms of the limitations of this study, it is clear that the findings of this research are tentative and exploratory. Nevertheless, this study has yielded interesting findings which add to the existing literature on women's groups. The findings of this study highlight the role that two women's groups play within the Muslim community in South Africa. In particular, this study provides insights into common understandings of gender and positions taken with regards to gender among a number of women within the South African Muslim community.

While they focus on the perceptions of particular women, these results also provide a broader insight into the nature of Muslim society within South Africa and the role that women play in that society. The researcher was forced to broaden her understanding of a community that she believed she knew very well. This proved to be a very valuable learning experience. At the same time, it is believed that this study has provided information about a subject that is not commonly discussed within empowerment studies or even gender studies. Important conclusions with regards to the way in which Muslim women in South Africa perceive themselves were made and furthermore, the gender roles within Muslim society were explored.

Other important insights for the researcher emerged from the use of triangulation in the research design, and the way in which emergent findings strengthened the study as it elicited different types of data. It therefore appears that this type of design could be used in any study and is applicable to different cultural groups as well and perhaps one of the biggest strengths of this study is the design that was used

Furthermore, this research has presented an evaluation which can be used by the research respondents themselves to better understand the strengths and limitations of the groups that they are a part of. Finally, this study is essentially exploratory in nature and it serves as a starting point for further research in this area. It is hoped that this study provides the impetus for further studies that relate to this topic, and that these results be used in a positive way to assist in enhancing the empowerment of Muslim women in South Africa.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A- Amina Goondiwalla Articles

Amina, a principled scholar who paved the way for women

BY YUSSUF NAZEER
Independent News Feature Service

BETWEEN the early Fifties and Sixties many 'Indian' parents believed that a Standard 5 education in primary school was sufficient for girls once they had learned to read and write. Their chief educational pursuit was to learn how to be excellent cooks, good wives and speedy family multipliers.

And the pleadings of female pupils who wanted to further their studies in high school fell, in most cases, on deaf ears. Some were even made to leave school after Std 3 or 4 by myopic and overprotective parents for all the wrong reasons they dismally believed was right.

Thus, the number of girls in those days who were allowed by liberal parents to study as far as matric and university, were few and far between. One such pupils was Amina Goondiwalla.

In 1960 after passing Std 5 at the Bree Street Indian Primary School, she entered the Johannesburg Indian High School (JIHS) where she spent three years to complete her "junior certificate".

At the time the apartheid government opened its first "Indian" teachers training college in Fordsburg to churn out teachers who would replace white lecturers in Indian group area schools. The junior certificate was then the minimum requirement needed to enrol for a teacher's course.

Goondiwalla, a lover of children, decided there and then to continue her studies by becoming a teacher, which was indeed a rare pursuit in those days amongst Transvaal Muslim females.

She enrolled in 1964 for the two-year course.

The Fordsburg-based college was set up in the same premises as that of the JIHS which was, in fact, being phased out under the Group Areas Act. The students were now forced to travel long distances to attend high school in Lenasia.

This led to protests, demonstrations and marches around the Fordsburg school.

Nevertheless, she completed her teacher's course and in 1966 took up a junior teaching post at the Bree Street Indian Primary where she in fact began her childhood schooling in the 50s.

In 1968 she married. Not satisfied with her junior achievements with limited potential, she decided to pursue higher qualifications. After the birth of her first child in 1969, Goondiwalla took her next "giant step for a woman's progress" to get a matric certificate that would open the doors to higher achievements.

Now as a 22-year-old mother, bogged down with teaching, running a home, rearing a baby, and attending to other school and family commitments, she doggedly pursued her matric through correspondence and passed.

"I strongly believe that I am the architect of my own academic future and that I had to create the opportunities to make things happen, rather than sit back and indulge in wishful dreaming," said Goondiwalla.

This opened the way for her next step – to go for a teacher's diploma at a training institute in Laudium, Pretoria. It was a full-time two-year course.

"I applied for study leave which the department gave me. And so I travelled everyday between Johannesburg and Pretoria to attend classes until I succeeded in getting my desired diploma," she said.

By now most teachers would have been satisfied with these academic achievements, but not Goondiwalla now nearing her 40s.

In 1984 she embarked on another two-year correspondence course on higher practical teaching methods that was being offered by the Springfield College of Education in Natal.

Once again, she passed with distinctions.

As the years flew by, he higher educational contributions she made to schools where she taught began to pay off. She gave a large part of her teaching service to Lenasia's Model and Flamingo primaries.

In January 1992 Goondiwalla was promoted head of department (HOD) at Bree Street Primary. In 1997 she was appointed acting principal and towards the end of that year was awarded the post.

As unique as it was in the annals her schooling career began and culminated at the school through decades of achievements.

When schools opened in January, principal Goondiwalla was absent. She had retired after spending more than 35 years in the education profession.



Her final message to learners everywhere is: "Study, study, study. Read, read and read. Gain as much knowledge as possible. Stay away from drugs, drink, crime and immoral behaviour. They destroy the mind, body and soul."

Many bid farewell to Amina Goondiwalla

35 years of service to the education fraternity

AN educator who has had a roller-coaster career has finally downed the chalk.

Amina Goondiwalla, principal of Bree Street Primary School in Mayfair, retired at the end of last year after 35 years of service.

"Having been in education since 1966 I have seen many changes, the most prominent being that early in my career women were not eligible for senior management posts," she recalled.

"The highlight of my career was the fact that I have been able to touch the lives of thousands of learners who have passed through my hands.

"For many I taught Grade 1s and the satisfaction of knowing that those are literate when they leave at the end of the year cannot be surpassed."



Amina Goondiwalla...retiring after 35 years of teaching.

Amina feels the same joy, when learners she taught years ago approach her in the street to introduce themselves.

"When they share their success stories I feel honoured to have been a part of their lives."

Like her teaching career, Amina has been left with mixed feelings on her early retirement. But, she has the opportunity of reflecting on the various people who shaped her life-experience over the years — learners, colleagues, parents and the communities of Lenasia and Mayfair.

"I would like to thank all those who who helped me along the way. Each and everyone has enriched my life in some way."

Amina said she would like to spend some time doing things she did not have the opportunity, due to the demands of teaching.

Appendix B- Circular distributed by South African Muslim women

"Praise be to Allah who made me a Muslim woman..."

The ambassador of Afghanistan upon arriving in New York was shocked to see a "civilized" and "cultured" nation using a woman to advertise a lollipop. Women are used to advertise lollipops, ice creams, cat food, laxatives and basically every other commodity even carcasses of cows! Their situation is laughable. The irony is that the above has been done with their consent. The same women sympathize with Muslim women assuming them to be oppressed and restrained in their "oversized night clothes" (Quote: Ingrid Seward- editor of Majesty magazine).

YOUR SYMPATHY IS NOT NEEDED!

This is the response of many a practicing, fundamentalist, extremist, liberated Muslim woman. *"We are proud to be Muslim, dress Muslim, eat Muslim, sleep Muslim, die Muslim and live life according to the advises given to us by our Creator, the All-Knowing, All Powerful and our beloved Prophet Muhammad (Sallallaahu-alayhi-wa-sallam). He liberated us as women at a time when the western civilization in France was debating whether women are human or animal".*

Here is further proof for the uninformed.
"*Blessed be God, king of the Universe, that thou has not made me a woman". (Jewish mans prayer)*
"What is the difference, whether it is in a wife or a mother it is still Eve the temptress that we must be aware of in any woman". (St Augustine)

We as Muslim women have the right to:

- Be accorded respect at all times under all circumstances. Men have to be sympathetic to the emotional nature of women.
- Financial stability-the male is the maintainer of women.
- Spend her wealth (inheritance, gifts, allowance) as she pleases. She is not obligated to spend it on her home or her family.
- Protection-her husband, father, brother must accompany her to take care of her and ensure that no harm befalls her.

Islam has issued guidelines for women to preserve their dignity. Muslim women do not stoop to the degrading level of "western" and "progressive" women who in the process of equality lose their femininity , are undignified, uncouth and extremely masculine.

To those of you have been misled by "WESTERN PROPAGANDA" doctored by foolish and ignorant individuals – ponder on the following media and camera tricks:

- Insertions are placed into the footage
- The time and location of the clipping can never be verified, eg. Palestinians celebrating the attack of America.
- Pitiful stories and image that portray an untrue image of the Taaliban, eg. Executions and assault of women and children.

We do not need your pity and we certainly do not need your approval! We are Muslim, we are proud of our identity; we aim to follow the commands of my and your Creator who knows best as to how we should lead our lives. I CHOOSE, to live my life like this so let me be!

"Islam started off as a stranger and it will return as a stranger, so glad tidings to the strangers, they are those who revive my Sunnah which the people after have corrupted". (Tirmidhi)

Recommended Reads:
"The Ideal Muslimah"- Dr Muhammad Ali Hashimi
"Daughters of Another Path"- Author unknown
"The Hijab...Why?"- Dr Muhammad Ismail
"Dearest Sister, Why not cover your modesty?"-Abdul Hamid al Balali
"Beyond Schooling"- John Gatto, Hamza Yusuf and Dorothy Sayers
"Women in Islam and Muslim Society"-

Appendix C-Invitation to Women's Network Meeting

You are respectfully invited to attend a consultative meeting on Saturday 31 March 2007, Insha Allah

•Venue: Bait-un- Noor Centre
Topaz Street
Ext. 5 Lenasia

•Directions Turn left in Protea at Shiraz Delta
Continue next traffic light at Protea and Bangalore
Continue pass Church to the right at Bluepointer
Next right turn into Topaz
Drive till end of Topaz
Bait-un- Noor directly ahead.

•**Time** 8:30 for 9:00 **Termination** 3:30

•The Agenda is an Exciting mix of information sharing, Qiraat recitation by Rabia Sayed, motivation and sharing in a spirit of mutual respect and belief in the Ummah's need for cohesion and unity.

•Your presence is necessary and your contribution vital to this process, which continues on Sunday 1st April 2007.
•Please attend; and bring your friends along to share this wonderful vision with us.

• Jazakalla

Assalaamu Aleikum wa Ragmatuallahi wa Barakatu

The INTERIM South African Muslim Women for Truth, Justice and Peace (MWT) has been initiated by a core group of Muslim Women to establish a South African Muslim Women's Network to represent Muslim Women and their views and to link this to the mainstream Women's Movements in South Africa, Africa and the Diaspora.

Our immediate concerns are to network and consult widely with women throughout South Africa, to develop a network of existing women's organisations working in diverse areas from professional to grassroots sectors.

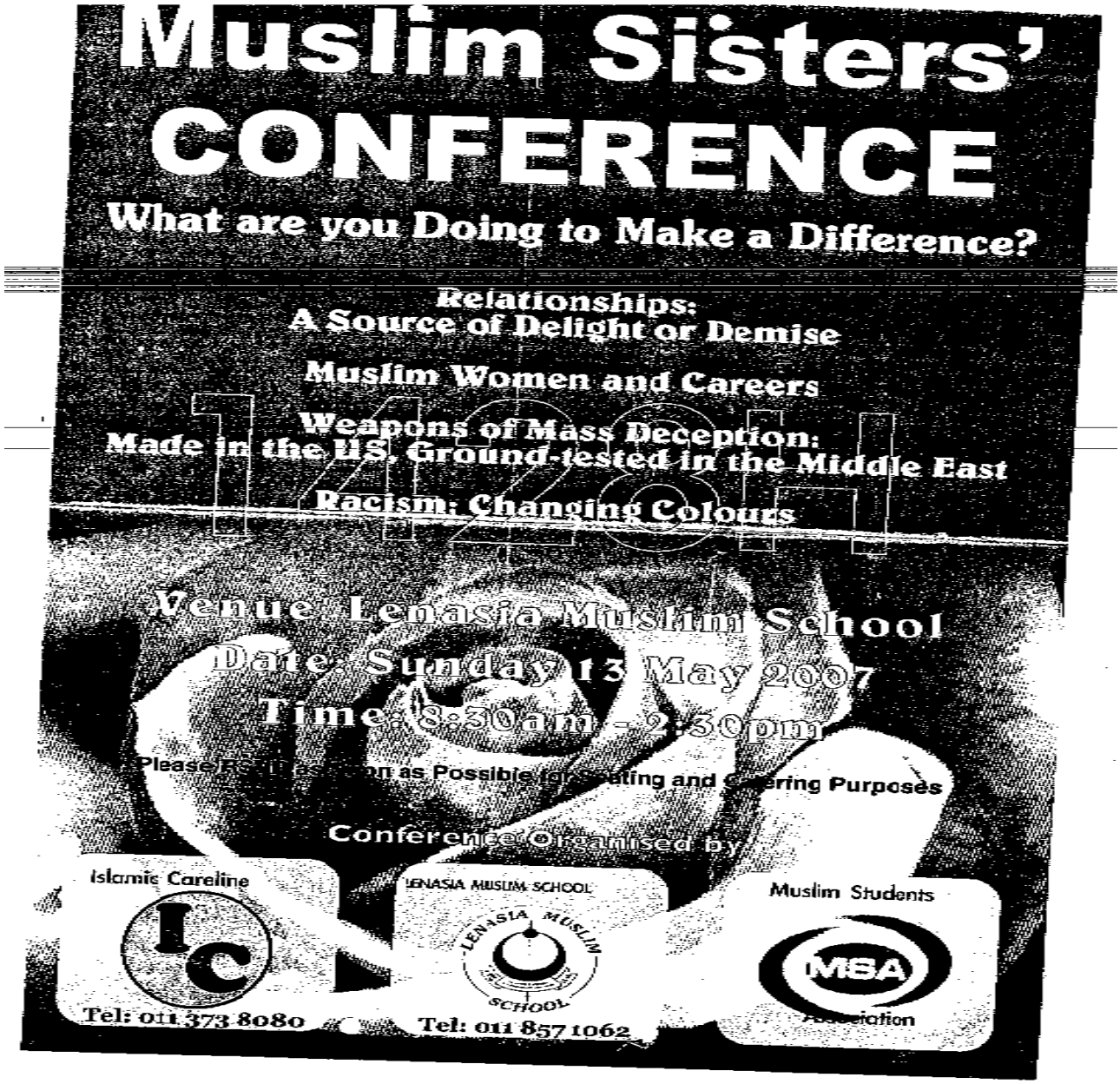
Our vision is to unify women to represent themselves in their diversity on national and specifically Muslim issues irrespective of culture, linguistic or social status.

We hope to reflect accurately the concerns, talents, work, and interests of women and to connect with women nationally on the Continent and internationally to build a strong Muslim Ummah Insha Allah.

To launch the process we have identified the 12 Rabi-Ul-Awwal 1428 -31 March and 1st April 2007, for our first Gauteng based consultation with area representatives and Muslim Women's organisations. .It is significant that this consultative meeting is the birth date of our Beloved Nabi, The Noble Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w.)

Core Values: Truth, we submit to Allah alone and Muhammad (s.a.w.) is the final messenger sent to guide Humanity with Justice in Peace.

Appendix D- Pamphlet for Muslim Women's Conference



Appendix- E- Invitation to Conference on Muslim Women

INVITATION

The Cultural Section of the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in conjunction with the South African Muslim Women's Network is honoured to invite:

You and your partner

to attend the Conference on
"Muslim Women and Contemporary Challenges"

Your Presence will be highly appreciated.

Venue: Auditorium Hall , Groenkloof Campus, University of Pretoria

Date: 28th July 2007

Time: 10:00am

LUNCH WILL BE SERVED.

Supported By:

CARING WOMENS FORUM – PTA

LAUDIUM MUSLIM WOMENS ASSOCIATION (LAMWA)

LAUDIUM CANCER CARE Group

SOUTH AFRICAN MUSLIM WOMENS NETWORK

MUSLIM EDUCATIONAL TRUST

ISLAMIC RELIEF FUND- FEED A CHILD A DAY

Conference on "The Role of the Muslim Women in Contemporary Challenges"

Programme

A) Morning Session

10:00 - 10:05	Recitation of the holy Koran
10:05 – 10:10	Introductions by Muslim Women's Network
10:10 – 10:20	Opening by His Excellency Mr. Mohammad Ali Ghanezadeh Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran - Pretoria
10:20 – 10:40	Mrs. Fatima Allie from Cape Town
10:40 – 11:00	Prof. Wesal Agherdin (Wits University)
11:00 – 11:15	**Break for tea**
11:15 – 11:35	Prof. Jeiry Covadia (The University of KZN)
11:35 – 11:55	Mrs. Zuleikha Mayat (Durban)
12:00 – 13:00	Panel discussion
13:00 – 14:00	**Lunch and Prayer**

B) Afternoon session

14:00 – 14:20	Prof. Lubna Nadvi (The University of KZN)
14:20 – 14:30	Recitation of *Naat* by Rabiya Seyed
14:30 – 14:50	Mrs. Zubeida Jaffer (Cape Town)
14:50 – 15:10	Moulana Shekh Mohammad Nur (Soweto)
15:10 – 15:40	Panel discussion
15:40 – 15:50	Vote of Thanks by Mr. Ali Pourmarjan Iranian Cultural attaché
15:50 – 15:55	Closing *Du'aa* by Rabiya Seyed

Appendix F- Article Reporting on Women's Conference (Advertised in Appendix E)

The role of Muslim women in contemporary challenges

Magboeba Davids

The cultural section of the Embassy of Islamic Republic of Iran in conjunction with the South African Muslim Women's Network hosted a Women's Conference, "The role of the Muslim Women in contemporary challenges" on 28th July 2007 at the Groenkloof Campus, University of Pretoria. The Islamic Unity Convention Women's Forum was invited.

Attending and participating in conferences have their benefits. It is the platform where we can inform, educate and engage in dialogue with representatives of other communities in a civil manner.

The conference learnt from presentation papers from the Islamic Republic of Iran, and papers delivered by academia from South Africa on a national level. Unity of purpose was displayed, with a strong presence of delegates from all provinces in South Africa.

The hosting forum set the tone of the conference referring to the womb, being the "matrix" of future generations. The gift of motherhood is synonymous with mercy, nurturing and compassion. The different forms of oppression that impacts on her wellbeing and development was highlighted. For example, women in the presence of war, dictatorship in Islamic countries and the low percentage of women presentation in a democratic South Africa regarding policy making.

Topics such as Muslim personal law and the HIV aids pandemic were highlighted once again. These discussions have a tendency to reappear at conferences because the leadership is not serious enough what it comes to tackling these two issues, which have a great impact on women and society. Delegates suggested that authority be challenged on both concerns.

Even though the model of Lady Fatima (AS) was presented as a solution to the challenges of Muslim women, Sr. Fatima Allie advised that the power is in women to make the change within themselves, in order to change society. She challenged women to oppose man-made laws. And focus on the given rights as ordained by Allah.

"From the laps of mothers men aspire to spiritual heights".

Mrs. Nahid Azam Rum Panahi from the Islamic Republic of Iran presented a detailed graph of women's development in the Republic since they dislodged themselves from imperial rule. She based her talk on surah Nahl verse 97: *"Whoever works righteousness, Man or woman, and has faith, Verily, to him will We give a new life That is good and pure, and we Will bestow on such their reward According to the best of their actions"*

Other papers were delivered by Mrs Wesaal Agherdien on legal rights and Muslim personal law; Prof. Hoosen Coovadia on HIV AIDS; Mrs Zuleikha Mayat on the Challenges facing women through time and modernity; Ms. Lubna Nadvi on Women in politics and Moulana Sheikh Mohammad Nur on Gender equality in Islam.

The conference closed with a panel discussion, based on the papers delivered. Some pertinent questions were raised at the conference. Muslims still need to be reminded of their personal obligations which retard social progress.

Muslims still have an opinion to what Allah has ordained for man.

The rights of women are not being taken seriously, even by authority.

Women are not being consulted regarding issues affecting them e.g. talaq. On the question of a Shariah court it was stated there is a need for qualified people to fill these positions.

The Muslim community is in need of leadership that has the ability to lead before and after Salaah.

The believers, men and women, are protectors, of one another; they enjoin what is just and forbid what is wrong (9:71)

Mr. Ali Pourmarjan, Iranian Cultural Attaché closed the conference with the vote of thanks.

The Islamic Unity Convention Women's Forum extends sincere gratitude to the organisers of the conference. We trust the unity of purpose that was displayed at the conference, will continue. Insha-Allah.

The IUC Women's Forum's Sanu ar-Rushd (Path to Maturity and Responsibility) programme ensures young women are properly equipped to deal with contemporary challenges

Appendix G: Questionnaire

Questionnaire

SECTION 1- BIOGRAPHICAL / PERSONAL DETAILS

Biographical Details:

First Name: ……

Surname: ……...

Age:

18-23	
24-29	
30-35	
36-41	
42-47	
48-53	
54-59	
60+	

Marital Status: ……

Number of children: ……

Highest Education Level reached: …….

Occupation: ……...

Are you currently employed? (If yes, please state whether part-time or full-time)

……..

Contact Details:

Postal Address: …….....

……..……

……..Code: ……

Residential Address: …….....

……..……

……..Code: ……

Telephone No: (Home)…….....

(Work)……

Cellular Phone No: ……

E-mail address: ……..

What is the name of the women's group that you belong to?

……..

What position do you hold within the group (e.g. chairperson, secretary, ordinary member)?

……

How long have you being a member of this women's group?

……..

Do you receive any remuneration (payment) for your services or is your involvement on a voluntary basis?

……..

SECTION 2- OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

The following questions are specific to your experiences and feelings as a member of a women's group. Please try to answer all the questions.

1. What do you think the purpose of a women's group is?

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2. What does being a member of a women's group involve?

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3. Why did you join a women's group?

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4. How did you become involved in a women's group?

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5. a) What were your expectations when joining a women's group?

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b) Have your expectations being met?

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6. How would you describe your overall experience as a member of a women's group.

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7. What would you say is the best thing about belonging to a women's group?

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8. What would you say is the worst thing about belonging to a women's group?

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9. a) How do people react to you as a member of a women's group?

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b) Why do you think that people react to you in this way?

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10. What are some of the main challenges or difficulties that you encounter as a member of a women's group?

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SECTION 3- ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

The space below is provided for any further comments. Please feel free to add anything that you feel was not covered in this questionnaire.

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Thank you for taking the time to fill out this questionnaire!

Appendix H-Focus Group Schedule

FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

Topics to be discussed in Focus Group Sessions:

1. **What is the purpose of a women's group?**
   - Do these groups only serve a purpose within the community, or do they serve a purpose for the members of the group, on a personal level as well?

2. **What does it mean to be a member of a women's group?**
   - Do you think that someone needs to have a particular personality or skills in order to be a member of a women's group?

3. **What are the positive outcomes of participation in a women's group?**

4. **What are the negative outcomes of participation in a women's group?**

5. **What type of expectations do you have of women's groups?**
   -What do you expect to get from the women's group (on a personal and social level)?
   - Are these expectations being met?

6. **How and why do women become involved in women's groups?**
   -Do you think that this has anything to do with the type of person that you are and your own personal life goals?

7. **What type of experiences do you have as participants in a women's group?**
   - Are your experiences positive or negative?
   - What role have these experiences had in shaping the person that you are and in shaping your life in general?
   - Have these experiences changed your life, i.e. do you feel that your life has changed since becoming a member of a women's group?
   - If your life has changed, how has it changed?

8. **What are some of the challenges that are faced by women's groups?**

9. **Are there any additional comments or issues that you think is important that we haven't already discussed? If so, what are these?**

Appendix I- Individual Interview Schedule

Individual Interview Schedule

1. Why did you join a women's group?

2. What role does the women's group you belong to play in your life?

3. What do you like the most about being a member of this group?

4. What do you like the least about being a member of this group?

5. Is there anything that you dislike about it, If yes, please elaborate?

6. What are some of the personal challenges that you encounter as a member of a women's group?

7. How do you deal with these challenges?

8. What influence has this women's group had on your life?

9. How has this affected the people around you?

10. If you could change anything about the women's group that you belong to, what would that be?

11. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your experience in a women's group?

Appendix J- Information Letter

I am currently studying towards my Masters Degree in research psychology at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. I am thus required to conduct a research study.

My topic for the research that I am conducting is; “An exploration of women’s groups as an empowerment tool for Muslim women in South Africa”.

I intend to collect data for this study through the use of questionnaires, focus group interviews and individual interviews. Although anonymity cannot be guaranteed, responses will be analysed as group responses and not as individual responses. No names or personal information will be divulged in the discussion of this study and the researcher and appropriate supervisors are the only people who will have access to the information revealed in this interview.

It is understood that you are required to reveal personal information about your feelings and experiences and you are thus assured that absolute privacy and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the research process. Also, your participation in this research study is voluntary and you are allowed to withdraw from the study at any point if you wish to.

Information from the questionnaire, focus group interviews and individual interviews will be used to draw up conclusions and discussions around the topic of Muslim women’s empowerment and women’s groups in South Africa.

The findings of this study will be reported and discussed in a research dissertation, which will be handed in to the relevant parties at the University of the Witwatersrand. An abridged report of the research study will be made available to you on completion of the study.

All the information from the questionnaires as well as the recorded and transcribed information from focus groups and individual interviews will be destroyed on completion of this research.

You will be given 2 consent forms that will have to be signed by you before the data gathering process begins. In the first form you will be asked to give your informed consent to participate in this study, in the second form you will be asked to give your consent for all information from the focus groups and interviews to be recorded. Please ensure that you are absolutely comfortable with participating and that you fully understand the purpose of this research and how your responses will be used before signing the consent forms.

I thank you for your time and co-operation

Zarina Hassem
Telephone: (011)614-0361
Cellular No: 082 632 8002
E-mail: zhassem@hotmail.com

Appendix K-Consent Forms

Consent form

I …… (Participant's name) hereby declare that I have voluntarily consented to participating in a research study entitled; "An exploration of women's groups as an empowerment tool for Muslim women in South Africa", conducted by Miss Zarina Hassem, who is studying towards a Masters Degree in Psychology (by dissertation only) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

I have been fully informed of the purpose and aims of this research study and I understand the implications of my participation. I give full permission for any responses provided by me to be used as necessary in this research.

Signed……date……at……
……

Consent form for electronic recording

I ……. (Participant's name) hereby give my permission for all information provided by me during the focus group session and the individual interview to be electronically recorded for use in a research study entitled; "An exploration of women's groups as an empowerment tool for Muslim women in South Africa", conducted by Miss Zarina Hassem, who is studying towards a Masters Degree in Psychology (by dissertation only) at the University of Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

Signed……date……at……
…….....

Appendix L – References of codes within data

Explanation of Code References: The following describes where particular codes from the data analysis can be found within the respective data sources.

Please note the following:

A- This means that a code can be found in the Questionnaire, the number next to the A indicates the question number within the questionnaire transcripts.

BA- Means that a particular code can be found within the Focus Group 1 Transcript.
BB- Means that a particular code can be found within the Focus Group 2 Transcript.

CA- Means that a particular code can be found within the Individual Interview 1 Transcript.
CB- Means that a particular code can be found within the Individual Interview 2 Transcript.
CC- Means that a particular code can be found within the Individual Interview 3 Transcript.
CD- Means that a particular code can be found within the Individual Interview 4 Transcript.
CE- Means that a particular code can be found within the Individual Interview 5 Transcript.
CF- Means that a particular code can be found within the Individual Interview 6 Transcript.
CG- Means that a particular code can be found within the Individual Interview 7 Transcript.
CH- Means that a particular code can be found within the Individual Interview 8 Transcript.
CI- Means that a particular code can be found within the Individual Interview 9 Transcript.
CJ- Means that a particular code can be found within the Individual Interview 10 Transcript.

List of *A Priori Codes* with references within data										
Clash with existing power structures (power clash)	BA	BB	CF	CG	CH	CJ				
Contribution to community	A(1,3,5a,6)	BA	BB	CA	CB	CC	CE	CF	CI	CJ
Increase in awareness	A (2,6)	CD	CG	CJ						
Increase in knowledge	A (1, 2,6)	BA								
Increased problem solving skills	BA	BB	CB	CC	CF	CG				
Increased self-worth/ self- efficacy	A (1,6)	BA	CA	CC	CJ					
Individuals as agents of change	A (1)	BB								
Influence on relationships	A (1)	BA	BB	CA	CB	CC	CD	CE	CF	CH
Lack of access to resources	A (10)	BA	CF	CG	CH	CI				
Networking between groups	A (1)	BA	BB	CB	CD	CE				
Obstacles and challenges	A (6,10)	BA	BB	CA	CD	CE	CF	CG	CI	CJ
Participation in community activities	A (1, 5a)	BA	CB	CC	CD	CE	CF	CG	CI	
Sense of belonging	A (3, 7)	BB	CB	CC	CD	CE	CF	CJ		

List of emergent codes from Questionnaire with references within data			
Commitment and time problematic	A (2, 6, 8, 10)		
Continuous learning	A (7)		
Disagreement and criticism	A (9a,9b, 10)		
Expanding horizons	A (5a, 6)		
Fulfilment of personal needs	A (6)		
Group as support system	A (6)		
Groups stronger than individuals	A (3, 6)		
Increased self growth	A (5a, 6)		
Inculcating Islamic values	A (4)		
Lack of community commitment	A (10)		
Other women don't take groups seriously	A (10)		
Realising potential	A (7)		
Sharing and giving	A (3, 5a)		
Strengthening relationships	A (4)		
Women relate to women best	A (6, 7)		
Pleasure of Allah	A (3)		

List of emergent codes from the focus groups with references within data			
Changing value systems	BA		
Commitment and time problematic	BA	BB	
Continuous learning	BA	BB	
Difficult to operate without husbands support	BA	BB	
Disagreement and criticism	BA	BB	
Each individual contributes	BA	BB	
Expanding horizons	BA	BB	
Greater community needs identified	BA	BB	
Group as social interaction	BA	BB	
Group as support system	BA	BB	
Groups stronger than individuals	BA	BB	
Increase in knowledge	BA	BB	
Increased self growth	BA	BB	
Inculcating Islamic values	BB		
Initial scepticism	BB		
Lack of community commitment	BA	BB	
Many gains and benefits	BA	BB	
Meaning and purpose	BB		
Men are surprised	BB		
Organizational skills acquired	BA		
Other women don't take groups seriously	BB		
Positive reaction from family and friends	BA	BB	
Positive response from community	BA	BB	
Realising potential	BB		
Resources from fundraising	BA		
Sense of personal fulfilment	BA	BB	
Sharing and giving	BA	BB	
Strengthening relationships	BA	BB	
Support from husbands	BA	BB	

List of emergent codes from Individual Interviews with references within data										
Boys and girls raised differently	CA									
Closed community	CA	CE	CF	CG	CI					
Commitment and time problematic	CA	CC	CD	CE	CF	CG	CH	CI	CJ	
Continuous learning	CA	CB	CD	CG	CH	CJ				
Difficult to operate without husbands support	CA	CD	CF	CG						
Disagreement and criticism	CA	CF	CG	CJ						
Expanding horizons	CB	CC	CD	CE	CF	CG	CI	CJ		
Greater community needs identified	CD									
Group as social interaction	CA	CB	CC	CD	CE	CF	CG	CH	CJ	
Group as support system	CA	CB	CC	CD	CI					
Group gives women a voice	CA									
Group open to all	CF									
Group plays important role for individuals	CB	CD	CE	CF	CG	CI				
Group understanding	CE									
Groups stronger than individuals	CB	CC	CD	CE	CF					
Growth and sustainability of group	CA	CB								
Increased self growth	CA	CB	CC	CD	CE	CF	CG	CH	CI	CJ
Inculcating Islamic values	CG	CH								
Initial scepticism	CA	CF	CG							
Islamic values questioned	CA	CF	CH							
Lack of community commitment	CB	CD	CE	CF	CH	CI				
Many gains and benefits	CC	CG								
Meaning and purpose	CD	CG	CI							
Move from tradition	CC	CF								
Other women don’t take groups seriously	CA									
Pleasure of Allah	CB	CD	CG	CH	CI					
Positive reaction from family and friends	CC	CD	CE	CF	CH	CJ				

Positive response from community	CD									
Problematic to work in own community	CJ									
Realising potential	CG									
Religion plays a role	CB	CC	CE	CF	CG	CH				
Sense of personal fulfilment	CA	CB	CD	CE	CG	CI				
Sharing and giving	CA	CB	CC	CD	CF	CG				
Social responsibility	CC	CE	CF	CG	CH	CI				
Strengthening relationships	CB	CD	CE	CG						
Support from husbands	CA	CC	CD	CE	CF	CG	CH	CI		
Unity between men and women	CF									