"We know them but we don't know them":
A Grounded Theory Approach to Exploring Host Students' Perspectives on Intercultural Contact in an Irish University.

Ciarán Dunne

Volume I of II

PhD **2008**

DECLARATION

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ABSTRACT

"We know them, but we don't know them": A Grounded Theory Approach to Exploring Host Students' Perspectives on Intercultural Contact in an Irish University.

Ciarán Dunne

This study is concerned with intercultural relations among students in an Irish university. Specifically, the study explores host culture students' perceptions of cultural difference within the student body and their experiences of intercultural contact on campus, including the factors which inform such contact.

Using a grounded theory approach, 24 in-depth qualitative interviews were conducted with 2nd year undergraduate students from three courses. The data were rigorously analysed through a systematic process of coding, categorisation and theoretical development to produce findings grounded in students' personal comments and lived experiences. These findings indicate that although nationality and age are employed as markers of cultural identity, host students' construction of cultural difference is heavily informed by their perception of diverging value systems within the specific educational environment. These values are in turn reflected in students' reported behaviours, attitudes, and levels of engagement in the social and academic aspects of the university life.

The findings also identify multiple situational and student-specific factors which impact upon the likelihood of students engaging in intercultural contact and their actual experiences of such contact, including factors impacting upon intercultural relational development. Furthermore, the study highlights the crucial role educational institutions can play in fostering intercultural contact among students and offers suggestions for promoting intercultural relations on campus.

Overall, the findings indicate that host students perceive intercultural contact to be both complex and problematic. It is associated with heightened uncertainty and anxiety, and is commonly perceived to be more demanding, yet less rewarding, than intracultural contact. While students' tendency to gravitate towards cultural peers represents a major obstacle to intercultural contact, language barriers and the need to adapt communication style also emerge as important issues affecting intercultural encounters. At a time when many Irish higher education institutions are experiencing significant diversification within the student body, this research is both timely and necessary.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADHD	Attention-deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
AC	Analytical Chemistry (an undergraduate degree course)
BNPY	Psychiatric Nursing (an undergraduate degree course)
CAQDAS	Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software
CAT	Communication Accommodation Theory
DCU	Dublin City University
DES	Department of Education and Science
DIT	Dublin Institute of Technology
EB	European Business (an undergraduate degree course)
EU	European Union
HEA	Higher Education Authority
HEEU	Higher Education Equality Unit
HEIs	Higher Education Institutions
ICOS	Irish Council for International Students
IEBI	International Education Board Ireland
NCCRI	National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism
RCSI	Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland
SET	Social Exchange Theory
SAT	Speech Accommodation Theory
UCC	University College Cork
UCLA	University of California Los Angeles
UKCOSA	UK Council for Overseas Student Affairs

When doing studies of intercultural communication it is important to present to the reader the looks of the world for the participants, for this is what the participants are attending to and so are the only sociological 'facts' worthy of the name.

(Liberman 1995: 119)

International and multicultural student campuses represent ideal social forums for promoting cultural understanding; fostering tolerance of diversity; discovering alternative ways of thinking; and developing inter-cultural skills. Yet this can be achieved only if both staff and students are committed to achieving that aim and if intervention programmes are based on a sound understanding of the psychological and external variables which affect the formation and social dynamics of culturally mixed groups.

(Volet and Ang 1998: 6)

Chapter 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This opening chapter of the thesis comprises two sections. The first section introduces the study by presenting the primary research concern and research questions, the context within which the study is located, the purpose of the research and the motivations driving it. Following this, the second section provides a brief outline of each chapter of the thesis.

1.2 Presentation of Study

The current study is concerned with intercultural contact between undergraduate students attending an Irish university. It draws upon, and adds to, an existing body of research exploring intercultural relations between students in higher education. The need for research on intercultural contact among students is particularly salient in the Irish context, given that the last decade has witnessed a significant increase in the diversification of student populations in Irish higher education institutions (European Intercultural Workplace 2008).

Within the field of intercultural studies, research exploring intercultural contact between students in higher education has typically employed nationality as a proxy for students' cultural identity. Furthermore, in the vast majority of these studies, intercultural relations have been explored from the perspective of international students, largely ignoring the host (local) student population. This is regrettable, given that host students play an integral role in the quality and frequency of intercultural contact. With this in mind, the current study adopts an alternative approach to studying intercultural contact among students. Firstly, it focuses specifically on 'host culture' students. Secondly, the study explores these students' personal perceptions of culture and cultural difference within the university environment, and examines their experiences of contact with students they perceive to be culturally different.

The specific research questions driving the study are as follows:

(i) What are host students' perceptions of cultural difference among students within a specific institute of higher education?

(ii) What factors impact upon – facilitate or hinder – intercultural contact from the perspective of these host students?

(iii) What are host students' experiences of intercultural contact on campus?

In answering these questions, the study aims to make a valuable contribution to existing knowledge in the field of intercultural studies, specifically with regard to intercultural relations among students in higher education. By helping to identify barriers and facilitators of intercultural contact, the study seeks to inform strategies aimed at improving intercultural contact among students. Furthermore, by focusing on the host student population, the need for greater attention on host perspectives in the field of intercultural studies is being addressed. In addition to this, by adopting a qualitative approach to studying intercultural contact, the study is a response to Halualani et al.'s (2004: 284) argument that there is "a need for qualitative research on how individuals define and understand intercultural contact as well as their past and present contact experiences".

The study is driven by a strong personal interest in the field of intercultural studies and international education. It is also underpinned by my personal experiences, both as a student – host and international – and, more recently, a lecturer. It is inspired by a personal belief that a culturally diverse student body constitutes a *resource* which can be harnessed to foster educational enhancements at an individual and institutional level. Simultaneously, however, it is informed by the recognition that a culturally diverse student body alone will not generate such outcomes, but rather must be managed carefully to ensure that the potential benefits of student diversity are realised and the potential pitfalls avoided. Specifically, this involves ensuring positive and meaningful intercultural contact and relational development among students.

1.3 Chapter Outline and Structure of Thesis

The current study is data-driven. It deliberately privileges the voices of participants with the aim of exploring in detail their perceptions, opinions and lived experiences of intercultural contact. This is reflected in the methodological approach and the overall presentation of the study, including the sequence of chapters.

Following this introductory chapter, the thesis is presented in three parts. Part I, which comprises Chapters 2, 3 and 4, contextualises and justifies the current study. Chapter 2 focuses on the problematic concept of 'culture', and discusses diverse approaches to conceptualising and operationalising it for research purposes. Chapter 3 provides a detailed review of existing empirical studies exploring student diversity and intercultural relations between students in higher education. It highlights recent changes in student populations in the Irish context and points to a dearth of research within Ireland relating to students' intercultural contact. Furthermore, it reveals important lacunae in existing knowledge and concludes with the formal presentation of the main research questions. Chapter 4 focuses specifically on the methodological approach employed in the study. It provides detailed information on relevant methodological concerns relating to the study. This includes a discussion on the choice of a research methodology – grounded theory – the features of this methodology, and the implications of this choice for the overall research, including the structure of the thesis. It also chronicles the research procedure, explains the process of data collection and analysis, and discusses a number of additional methodological issues.

Part II presents the research findings of the current study. These are presented in Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. In each chapter, findings grounded in empirical data are presented and supported. Chapter 5 presents a grounded theory model on host students' perceptions of culture and cultural difference within the student body. Chapter 6 focuses on the level of intercultural contact taking place among students, specifically through a discussion of the concepts of 'Homophily' and 'Separation'. Chapter 7, the largest chapter of data analysis, focuses on students' intercultural acquaintance prospects, and identifies a complex set of factors which, from the perspective of host culture students, collectively influence the likelihood of interaction with students identified as culturally different. Following this, Chapter 8 focuses on students' reported experiences of intercultural contact, the factors which may moderate these, and how their experiences may inform future intercultural contact. Where the research findings presented in Part II relate to existing empirical findings, including those discussed in Chapter 3, reference to this is made within the chapters. With regard to theoretical concepts relevant to the findings, although these may be alluded to, they are not discussed in detail during these chapters, primarily because this may distract from the findings and also result is excessively long chapters.

Part III, which comprises Chapters 9 and 10, discusses the research findings from a more abstract perspective and reflects on the overall research project. Chapter 9 has two primary functions. Firstly, given the large number of issues arising from the study, the chapter reviews and distils the findings outlined in Part II and presents an overall dynamic model encompassing these findings. Secondly, it identifies and engages in depth with existing theoretical concepts which relate to the current research findings. This elevates the findings to a more theoretical level and locates the study within a specific theoretical terrain. Lastly, Chapter 10 reviews the study, evaluates the research findings, discusses the contribution to knowledge, identifies areas for further study, and draws some final conclusions.

PART I CONTEXTUALISATION

CHAPTER 2: THE STUDY OF CULTURE

> *"How culture is defined will have implications for all aspects of the research process."*
> (Levine et al. 2007: 206)

2.1 Introduction

Any research relating to 'culture', including intercultural research, demands that the concept be defined and operationalised in order for it to be studied. This process should involve a discussion which acknowledges the complexity of the concept. Such a discussion should converge in a decision regarding how culture will be studied – a nailing of one's colours to the metaphorical mast – and provide a reasoned defence of the decision. This is precisely the aim of this chapter.

2.2 Culture is 'Fuzzy'

The current study is concerned with intercultural contact between students in an Irish university. According to Gareis (1995: 3):

> The term intercultural denotes situations involving two or more cultures and is used mainly to refer to relationships between people from two different cultural backgrounds.

Kim (1998: 12), meanwhile, defines intercultural communication as "direct face-to-face communication encounters between or among individuals with differing cultural backgrounds". While these are straightforward ideas, they are underpinned by the much more problematic and nebulous concept of 'culture'. Williams (1983; quoted in Kidd 2002: 9) suggests that "Culture is one of the two or three most complicated words in the English language", while Leung et al. (2002: 286) remark that "Culture has long been a fuzzy concept". With this in mind, it is unsurprising that the term has been subject to myriad definitions[1]. The polemic nature of culture and consequently its study is highlighted by Keating et al. (2002: 634):

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[1] Keating et al. (2002) point out that as far back as 1952 Kroeber and Kluckhohn identified more than 160 definitions of 'culture'.

> Culture is a highly complex construct and there is little agreement amongst management scholars and, indeed, researchers in other disciplinary areas, as to what constitutes this phenomenon and how it should be studied.

Among the many definitions of culture, that which has been proffered by Singer (1998: 30) is of particular interest:

> *A pattern of learned, group-related perceptions – including both verbal and non-verbal language, attitudes, values, belief systems, disbelief systems, and behaviors – that is accepted and expected by an identity group is called a culture.* (original italics)

This definition is important for several reasons. Firstly, it presents culture as something that is learned. Secondly, it argues that culture is based on perceptions, implying it is a subjective phenomenon. Thirdly, it suggests a number of components of culture, such as language, attitudes, values and behaviours, according to which cultures may be differentiated from each other. Lastly, by referring to an identity group, it implies that culture is a collective phenomenon. This idea is well supported within existing literature. Barnett and Lee (2005: 276) state that "Culture is a socially shared activity, and therefore, a property of a group rather than an individual". Furthermore, Levine et al. (2007: 207) comment:

> However, regardless of the specific definition adopted, it is usually agreed that culture is a collective phenomenon. It is, by definition, something that is shared among people belonging to the same socially defined and recognised group. Culture is something people have in common with some people but not with others.

As a collective phenomenon, 'groups' are therefore central to the concept of culture. Indeed, Gallois and Callan (1997) suggest that intercultural contact is a form of intergroup contact. Although there are many perspectives on what determines a 'group', Brown (2000: 3) posits that "a group exists when two or more people define themselves as members of it and when its existence is recognised by at least one other", with the 'other' being an individual or group of people who do not define themselves as part of this group.

Singer (1998: 28), however, also argues that because each person is a member of a unique network of cultural groups, including families, friendship groups, and nationalities, “*each person must be considered to be culturally unique*” (original italics), although they do not constitute a ‘culture’ unto themselves. Boylan (2006: 286) supports this idea, arguing that “since the communities we interact with are multiple, we are all multicultural, whether we realise it or not”. The point is also evident in the comments of Kluckhohn and Murray (1948; quoted in Smith and Bond 1998: 38): “Every man is in certain respects a) like all other men, b) like some other men, c) like no other man”. Furthermore, Hofstede (1994: 10) acknowledges that individuals are simultaneously members of multiple cultural groups, and suggests that “people unavoidably carry several layers of mental programming within themselves, corresponding to different levels of culture”. He suggests that these levels can relate to nationality, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, age, and social class, among others. However, accepting the idea that all individuals are culturally unique implies that “every interpersonal communication must, to some degree, also be an intercultural communication” (Singer 1998: 28). This argument is supported by Kim (1998: 13):

> All communication is ‘intercultural’ to an extent and the degree of ‘interculturalness’ depends on the degree of heterogeneity between the experiential backgrounds of the individuals involved.

Therefore, although culture is widely accepted to be a group phenomenon, it applies at both an interpersonal and intergroup level. This point will be further discussed in section 2.4.1.

2.3 Operationalising Culture based on Nationality

As has been stated, arriving at a satisfactory definition of culture is challenging. As Shenkar (2001: 519) remarks: “Complex, intangible and subtle, culture has been notoriously difficult to conceptualize and scale”. Wiseman (2002) points out that traditionally culture has been defined and operationalised according to pre-determined socio-political constructs such as nationality, race, and ethnicity. Kim (2005: 556) makes a similar point, remarking that “the term *culture* has been employed primarily as a label or category representing the collective life experiences of recognizable large groups such as a nation or a world region". This strategy of using nationality as a proxy for culture offers the advantage of making it relatively easy to operationalise and, therefore, conduct research. Indeed, as will be discussed in Chapter 3, the vast majority of studies exploring intercultural contact between students in higher education employ students' nationality as the criterion for cultural differentiation. Specifically, such studies use nationality to distinguish 'host culture' students from 'non-host' students, who are typically termed 'international students'.

It can be argued that operationalising culture according to nationality is a valid approach given the concept of national culture. According to Smith (1991: 14) a nation comprises:

> [A] named human population sharing an historic territory, common myths and historical memories, a mass public culture, a common economy and common legal rights and duties for all members.

Furthermore, he goes on to argue:

> More than a style and doctrine of politics, nationalism is a form of culture – an ideology, a language, mythology, symbolic and consciousness – that has achieved global resonance, and the nation is a type of identity whose meaning and priority is presupposed by this form of culture. (ibid.: 92)

Guibernau (2004: 135), meanwhile, posits that national identity consists of five elements: "psychological, cultural, territorial, historical and political". Indeed, even acknowledging the changing demographics of modern societies, Smith and Bond (1998: 69) point out:

> Nations are not necessarily monocultural, but many modern nation-states manage their internal diversity in ways that encourage the creation of national cultures.

Furthermore, from a pragmatic viewpoint, Hofstede (1994: 12) points out that when researching culture and cultural differences, nationality "is often the only feasible criterion for classification. Rightly or wrongly, collective properties are ascribed to citizens of certain countries".

Nonetheless, the appropriateness of this approach is open to question. As Levine et al. (2007: 208) explain:

> Another issue to consider is whether or not nations and cultures can be meaningfully equated for the purpose of a specific research project. Nations and cultures are sometimes confused and very often confounded in theory and research.

This point is echoed by James (2005: 326), who posits that “Nationality is a more easily defined concept than culture; nations have fairly well-defined borders; cultures do not. Nations are distinct entities; cultures are not necessarily”. Smith and Bond (1998) point out that operationalising culture according to nationality implies cultural homogeneity within the national borders and may ignore *intra*national diversity. Indeed, Sarbaugh (1998: 26) argues that the homogeneity of a group will determine the usefulness of using specific labels, and posits that studies which operationalise culture based on nationality or race “often conceal more than they reveal”, partly because they may fail to acknowledge *intra*group variations. Furthermore, referring to the increase in human mobility over the last fifty years and the resulting growth of diversity within many nations, Stone (2006: 340) argues that “‘traditional’ cultural boundaries and identities have become blurred and difficult to separate”. As such, the idea of cultural homogeneity at a national level comes under scrutiny and with it the merits of nationality as a proxy for culture.

Focusing specifically on the educational context, Dunstan and Drew (2001: 3) raise further concerns about operationalising culture according to nationality:

> Fundamentally, we note that the terms we commonly use to distinguish ‘international’ and ‘local’ students in our universities may not be particularly useful when describing the demographic structure of our campuses, although these are well-understood functional terms. When addressing a discussion of diversity on our campuses, we acknowledge a blurring of distinctions in terms of cultural background, of many of our resident and international students.

Likewise, Asmar (2005a: 292), referring to the rapid diversification of student demographics, suggests that the traditional dichotomy between local and international students is no longer valid, given that “the local and the global are no longer two separate fronts”. Ippolito (2007: 749), meanwhile, refers to “how home students’ increasingly diverse nature results in interconnectedness of home and international students’ multiple identities”.

The implication, therefore, is that a decision to operationalise culture based on nationality represents a ‘trade-off’ in which the benefits of such a decision should outweigh the shortcomings (Levine et al. 2007). Within the context of a world defined by ever-greater human mobility across national boundaries, it can be argued that the drawbacks associated with this approach are increasing to such an extent that the shortcomings will come to overshadow the advantages of this approach – if they have not already done so. Indeed, this is perhaps the reason why Lee (2006) operationalises culture based both on students’ native language as well as nationality.

2.4 Operationalising Culture as Shared Characteristics

Stemming partly from issues associated with using nationality as a proxy for culture, Wiseman (2002) explains that more modern conceptualisations of culture have instead viewed culture as a set of learned values, beliefs, norms and behaviours shared by a group of people:

> With this shift of focus, the operationalization of culture is not where members were born or the color of their skin, but on the commonalities in and interpretations of their behaviours (Wiseman ibid.: 208)

Collier and Thomas’ (1988: 113) definition of cultural identity as one’s “identification with and perceived acceptance into a group that has shared systems of symbols and meanings as well as norms/rules for conduct”, reflects this conceptualisation of culture. This perspective, however, has significant implications for our understanding of culture, and how it may be studied. Specifically, it implies that groups previously not defined as ‘cultures’ may now be defined as such, given that they display the characteristics outlined in this conceptualisation. As Klyukanov (2005: 9) argues, “the term culture can be applied to any group of people based, for example, on nationality, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, or physical (dis)ability”. This point is also made by Kim (2007: 238): “the term *cultural identity* is employed broadly to include related concepts such as subcultural, national, ethnolinguistic, and racial identity". Essentially, this conceptualisation therefore extends the scope of the 'cultural net' to encompass groups which heretofore may have been viewed as 'subcultures'.

As an example, Keating et al. (2002: 638, original italics) refer to the idea of "*student* culture", which implies that there is a set of values, norms, and behaviours which students typically share. However, it is possible that the nature of 'student culture' may be informed by national cultural values, and consequently may vary according to students of different nationalities, thereby highlighting the different levels of culture to which Hofstede (1994) alludes. While this approach to defining culture acknowledges the shortcomings associated with traditional perspectives, it nonetheless creates confusion for researchers, primarily because it may be unclear how to actually differentiate cultural groups (Collier and Thomas 1998). Following on from his aforementioned comments regarding the blurring of cultural boundaries, Stone (2006: 340) remarks: "The question then arises: When is someone considered to be from a 'different' culture?". This echoes Smith and Bond's (1998: 39) question: "How much difference must there be between two cultural groups before we say they are different?". Wiseman (2002) suggests there are three approaches to address this issue, each of which will now be discussed.

2.4.1 Separating the 'Person' from the 'Group'

In the first instance, Wiseman (ibid.) states that researchers may decide to explore culture and cultural difference by examining the salience of group characteristics as opposed to personal characteristics in informing individual's values, beliefs and behaviours. This approach is therefore prioritising the idea of culture as a group phenomenon. In situations where personal characteristics dominate, it can be argued that personal identity is to the fore. Alternatively, the dominance of group characteristics implies that group, or cultural identity, is prioritised:

> If there is a greater preponderance of individual characteristics, the communication is considered more interpersonal, whereas if group characteristics predominate, the communication is intergroup. (ibid.: 208)

The argument, therefore, is that cultural boundaries may be identified and, consequently, cultural differences examined by comparing behaviours deemed to be associated with group, rather than personal, identity[2]. An example of this would be differentiating an individual's behaviour based upon their membership of a given group – such as an Irish citizen patriotically supporting the Irish national team in some sporting event – rather than based upon their personal identity – such as having a personal interest in that particular sport.

There are three immediate challenges associated with this approach. Firstly, the question arises as to who determines what behaviour should be classified as interpersonal or intergroup, and whether can there be universal consensus on this? Secondly, separating the two may be extremely problematic, given that either may be dominant at any instant in a given encounter due to changes in self-concept function which causes individuals to 'switch' between personal identity and social identity (Brown 2000). Thirdly, as discussed in section 2.2, there is the argument that culture, although a fundamentally collective phenomenon, also applies at an interpersonal level. Guirdham (1999), for example, argues that intergroup relations encompass both an intergroup *and* interpersonal element, which implies that a study of intergroup relations is also a study of interpersonal relations to some extent. As Chen (2002: 253) comments: "An intercultural relationship is by nature both interpersonal and intercultural". Indeed, Brown (2000) states that Allport, a major figure in the field of intergroup relations whose 'contact hypothesis' is discussed in Chapter 9**,** argued that there could be no group identity without the individuals who compose the group. He therefore prioritised the individual even within the context of intergroup relations, which he conceptualised as an extension of interpersonal relations. Brown (ibid.: 9) himself is vociferous in arguing that the boundaries between intergroup and interpersonal relations are not clearly definable, positing that "the interpersonal-group distinction is based on a continuous dimension and is not an either/or dichotomy"[3]. He goes on to comment:

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[2] This links with Markus and Kitayama's (1991) thesis that individuals use two types of self-construal – independent and interdependent – the latter of which is based on group membership and is context-specific.

[3] Bochner (1982) suggests that understanding the relationship between intergroup and interpersonal may be facilitated by adopting an open systems theory (Berrien 1968) perspective.

> It is possible to conceive of all social behaviour as lying on a continuum from interpersonal settings to group settings … Underlying this continuum is a transition of psychological functioning from personal to social-identity processes. (ibid.: 20)

Combined, these arguments imply that conducting research into intercultural contact by focusing on group-based characteristics alone is problematic.

2.4.2 Cultural Dimensions

The second approach discussed by Wiseman (2002) relates to 'cultural dimensions', which researchers use to differentiate and compare cultures, as well as explain behaviours of individuals from certain cultures (Stephan and Stephan 2003). According to Hofstede (1994: 14), "A dimension is an aspect of a culture that can be measured relative to other cultures". In the dimensional approach, "culture x and culture y serve to operationally define a characteristic *a*, which the two cultures exhibit to different degrees" (Foschi and Hales 1979: 246; quoted in Gudykunst and Lee 2002: 26). Cultural dimensions are premised on the ideas of early 20th century anthropologists such as Ruth Benedict (1887-1948) and Margaret Mead (1901-1978), who popularised the thesis that every society faces common problems, but differentiates itself from others according to how it addresses these problems (Hofstede 1994). This idea underpins the definition of culture proffered by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (2002: 6): "culture is the way in which a group of people solves problems and reconciles dilemmas". Accepting this approach, the challenge, therefore, is to identify the nature of these universal problems, conceptualise them as cultural dimensions, and develop instruments to 'score' cultures along each dimension so that comparisons may be made.

In terms of identifying cultural dimensions, those proposed by Hofstede (1980, 1994) are perhaps the most well known. These value-based dimensions are shown in Table 2.1, along with the cultural 'value-types' proposed by Schwartz (1994) and the dimensions proposed by Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner (1997)[4]. Table 2.1 also provides details of the ‘universal problems’ which Inkeles and Levinson (1954) and Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck (1961) suggested all societies face, which, along with the aforementioned work of Benedict, Mead and E.T. Hall (1966), underpinned the development of contemporary, value-based dimensional models. Within the field of cross-cultural and intercultural research, the use of cultural dimensions has proven very popular. In particular, the dimension relating to Individualism/Collectivism has received great attention (Basabe and Ros 2005; Kim 2005; Fitzgerald 2003). Indeed, numerous theories which were not developed in the field of intercultural studies have been ‘interculturalised’ by the incorporation of cultural variability based upon these dimensions. Such theories include Ting-Toomey’s (1988) face negotiation theory, Gudykunst’s (1995) anxiety/uncertainty management theory, communication accommodation theory (Gallois et al. 1995), and expectancy violations theory (Burgoon 1992).

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[4] While the dimensions proposed by Hofstede and Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner are broadly similar, those proposed by Schwartz are very different. Initially, he identified 56 values relating to basic human needs, and developed an instrument which 'mapped' these into the ten 'value-types'. This was then analysed at a culture-level, which resulted in the seven value-types listed in Table 2.1.

Although cultural dimensions are now firmly embedded in much cross-cultural and intercultural research and theory development, there are two issues associated with their use. The first issue is inherent to the dimensional model; by conceptualising culture according to a small number of predetermined value-based dimensions, the researcher is imposing cultural constructs upon the research environment and privileging these constructs ahead of potential alternatives. This reflects an ‘etic’ (Kim 2005; Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1996), ‘objectivist’ (Gudykunst 2002), or ‘positivist’ (Kim 1998) approach to studying culture. Indeed, this approach is dominant in the field of intercultural studies, with the majority of related theories reflecting this perspective (Gudykunst 2002; Kim 1996). In practice, however, it is feasible that these constructs may not be the most salient within or across cultures[5]. Secondly, while these value-based dimensions theoretically provide an alternative to exploring culture according to nationality, in reality researchers primarily apply them based on nationality. As Leung et al. (2002: 287) comment: “The value-based approaches to culture described above have all been pitched at the national level”. As

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However, Smith and Bond (1998) point out that polarities emerging within a number of these value-types (e.g. conservatism versus autonomy) are very similar to some of the dimensions proposed by Hofstede.

[5] Gudykunst and Lee (2003: 21) point out that Hofstede’s dimensions reflect a Western bias due to the data collection methods employed, while Smith and Bond (1998: 49) also refer to the fact that his sample was not representative and his data is several decades old. For a further critique of Hofstede’s dimensions see Drogendijk and Slangen (2006: 363).

such, the issues associated with operationalising culture according to nationality discussed in section 2.3 resurface again.

Table 2.1 The Development of Cultural Dimensions

Nature of Universal Problems		Proposed Cultural Dimensions		
Inkeles & Levinson (1954)	**Kluckhohn & Strodtbeck (1961)**	**Hofstede (1980)**	**Schwartz (1994)**	**Trompenaars (1997)**
- Relation to authority - Relationship between individual and society - Individuals' concept of masculinity and femininity - Approaches to conflict	- Relationship between individual and others - Orientation to time - Activity orientation - Humans relationship with nature - Human nature orientation	- Individualism / Collectivism - Power distance (small to large) - Uncertainty avoidance (weak to strong) - Masculinity / Femininity - Time orientation[6] (long-term to short-term)	- Mastery - Hierarchy - Conservatism - Harmony - Egalitarianism - Intellectual autonomy - Affective harmony	Relations with Others: - Universalism / Particularism - Communitarianism / Individualism - Neutral / Emotional - Specific / Diffuse - Achievement / Ascription Attitude towards time: - Sequential / Synchronic Attitude toward the Environment: - Inner-directed / Outer-directed

2.4.3 Constructed Culture

Moving on from cultural dimensions, Wiseman (2002: 209) discusses a final approach to researching culture and cultural difference, which is of particular relevance to the current study:

> Finally, a third solution involves the symbolic interactionist principle of self-referencing; namely, the operationalization of culture is based on one's own self-identity (Collier & Thomas, 1998).

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[6] The dimension relating to Time Orientation was not introduced until 1991.

The idea of symbolic interactionism, which is further discussed in section 4.4.1, "assumes that people construct selves, society, and reality through interaction" (Charmaz 2006: 189). Therefore, interaction is a dynamic process of self-creation and meaning-making. This in turn implies that culture is based upon individual perceptions of what may constitute cultural differences, the boundaries of which may be context specific. As Collier and Thomas (1998: 112) remark:

> [P]ersons' cultural and other group identities are complex, multivariate, and dynamic. Identities are formed, negotiated, modified, confirmed, and challenged through communication and contact with others.

This approach contrasts with the use of cultural dimensions, as individuals and groups are not ranked along predetermined dimensions, but rather are encouraged to identify subjective markers of cultural difference. As such, it reflects an 'emic' approach which focuses on studying culture from the inside (Gudykunst and Ting-Toomey 1996).

A recent example of this approach, which also relates to the current study, is the research conducted by Halualani (2008). In her study, which Halualani (ibid.: 1) herself describes as "a departure from past intercultural contact research", students' perceptions, definitions and experiences of intercultural interaction on campus were explored. As Halualani (ibid.: 1) argues:

> The 'what', 'how', and 'why' of intercultural interaction at the multicultural university can never be fully known without asking the students how they define, experience, and interpret such interactions in their own words and in context of their lives.

Adopting this approach to exploring culture implies that the individuals themselves are given the opportunity to articulate their own perceptions of culture and cultural difference. This in turn enables the researcher to identify specific characteristics, values, attitudes and behaviours which, according to the individuals, underpin their cultural identity, and therefore mark the boundaries between them and those they perceive to be culturally different. While this approach avoids imposing cultural dimensions upon individuals, it implies that the findings are not generalisable, given that constructions of culture are subjective. Furthermore, if a researcher wishes to explore relations *between* cultural groups – as is often the case in cross-cultural and intercultural research – in order to identify groups in the first instance some definition of culture must be imposed, otherwise the research cannot be conducted. Once again, as discussed by Levine et al. (2007), the trade-off between advantages and drawbacks associated with discrete approaches to operationalising culture is evident in this approach.

At this juncture a brief recap of the discussion is appropriate. Thus far, it has been explained that traditional approaches to defining and studying culture using nationality as an *a priori* proxy offer advantages but also significant shortcomings, particularly in the context of greater human mobility across national borders. Meanwhile, alternative approaches to culture which conceptualise it as learned and shared by a group of people, significantly extend the scope of those groups which may be said to constitute 'cultures'. However, the resultant ambiguity associated with defining culture has prompted discrete responses from the academic community. Among these, the use of cultural dimensions to explore and compare cultures has proven very popular. Nonetheless, such an approach does not represent a panacea to the aforementioned challenges of studying culture and intercultural contact. Conversely, some academics espouse a more interpretive approach, whereby individuals construct their own meaning of culture and cultural difference. This approach, like the others, also offers certain advantages and drawbacks. As such, the researcher must make "active, reasoned, and defensible decisions" regarding their approach to researching culture (Levine et al. 2007: 208).

2.5 Implications for the Current Study

What are the implications of this discussion for the current study? As has been stated, this study explores intercultural contact from the perspective of 'host culture' students. This presupposes the existence of such a group of students. In the field of intercultural studies, which has traditionally used nationality to demarcate cultures, the idea of a host culture is typically understood from the perspective of a sojourner as the culture into which a sojourner enters. This in turn implies that a 'host' is a citizen of the nation into which the sojourner enters, and a member of a dominant cultural group referred to as the 'host culture'. Within the context of the current study, espousing this approach implies that students from different nationalities are culturally different, and therefore when contact occurs between students of different nationalities, this contact constitutes ‘intercultural’ contact. Furthermore, it implies that Irish students constitute ‘host culture’ students.

However, the preceding discussion has highlighted a number of issues with this approach, particularly in a context where student populations are becoming increasingly diverse, as will be shown to be the case in Ireland (section 3.2). This prompts a dilemma; although recognising the drawbacks of using nationality, the concept of ‘host culture’ must be defined in such a way that allows the researcher to identify students in order to engage with them. Therefore, while recognising the problematic nature of the approach, for the current study the decision was taken to operationalise ‘host culture’ based on nationality – in this case Irish. This is in keeping with the approach used by Levine et al. (2007: 208), who equate culture with national culture “because the heuristic value gained outweighs the conceptual costs for the current purposes”. Furthermore, this approach mirrors the decision taken by Gareis (1995: 4), who also defined culture based on nationality yet acknowledged the imperfection of such a strategy by quoting Hull (1978: 56): “No one would argue too seriously that political boundaries are really representative of cultural groups, per se”.

Crucially, however, it was decided that although ‘host culture’ would be operationalised according to nationality, during the research process students would be encouraged to articulate their own perceptions of culture and cultural diversity within the student body. Regardless of how these students define culture and cultural difference, their contact with students perceived to be culturally different represents an intercultural encounter. This reflects the perspective of Collier and Thomas (1998: 102):

> We believe that participants, however, experience intercultural contact primarily through definitions of personhood. Communication is therefore intercultural when participants identify themselves and their interlocutors as representing different culture groups.

This approach meant that there was no *a priori* assumption that Irish students necessarily perceive ‘international students’ to be culturally different, nor was there an assumption that they would perceive all Irish students to be culturally homogeneous.

This decision was taken for three primary reasons:

(i) The growth of ethnic minority communities in Ireland and the rapid changes in the demographics of student populations and broader society resulting from unprecedented high levels of immigration since the mid 1990s, implies that Irish students may not necessarily perceive culture according to nationality. Therefore, by encouraging students to articulate their own perceptions of culture within the student body, they would be afforded an opportunity to introduce other perceptions of culture – such as domestic cultural diversity – which may be central to their experiences of intercultural contact.

(ii) Given that the research was taking place in an educational environment, I was specifically interested in exploring individuals' perspectives on, and experiences of, intercultural contact *in their capacity as students*. Allowing students to articulate their personal perceptions of culture facilitated this.

(iii) It was felt that the decision to allow – or even oblige – students to articulate their personal perceptions of cultural difference on campus would encourage them to reflect and engage more deeply in the discussion, and facilitate the identification of core differences which may not have been foreseen or necessarily encouraged by the imposition of cultural dimensions. Such differences may be of central importance to host students' intercultural relations on campus.

In addition to these reasons, it should also be noted that there is precedent for such an approach. Kudo and Simkin (2003: 111), for example, used students' nationality to operationalise culture, yet their methodology was also "based on personal constructions of meaning relating to culture and to friendship". Furthermore, as has been stated, Halualani (2008) has espoused a similar approach, while Brunner (2006) also focused on students' subjective perceptions of 'diversity' on campus. In adopting this perspective, this study accepts the idea that perceptions play a fundamental role in human experience. This is supported by Singer (1998: 32, original italics):

> *It is not the stimulus itself that produces specific human reactions and/or actions but rather how the stimulus is perceived by the individual that matters most for human behaviour. It is perhaps the most basic law of human behaviour that people act or react on the basis of the way in which they perceive the external world …* Perceptions are the ways in which a person experiences the world. They also determine the ways in which we behave toward it.

This approach brings challenges. Encouraging students to articulate their own perceptions of culture forces the researcher to be open-minded, flexible and engage with ambiguity. However, as will be highlighted in Chapter 5, the approach produced valuable, unexpected insights which are central to the overall research findings, and which may be central to promoting improved intercultural contact on campus.

2.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has sought to highlight the challenges and diverging approaches to studying culture. It has recognised that each approach reflects specific perspectives and has implications for the overall research project. Furthermore, it has highlighted that each approach to operationalising culture has certain drawbacks which must be acknowledged. In the current study the decision was taken to operationalise ‘host culture’ based on nationality. This is in keeping with the majority of studies on intercultural relations in higher education. However, in recognition of the shortcomings of this approach, students were encouraged to personally articulate their own perceptions of culture within the education environment. This approach gives priority to the students’ perceptions and also encourages them to engage in the study at a more personal level.

Chapter 3: REVIEW OF EXISTING EMPIRICAL STUDIES

3.1 Introduction

This chapter highlights recent changes in student populations in Irish higher education, discusses the opportunities associated with a culturally diverse student body, explores existing empirical research on intercultural relations between students in higher education, and highlights the relative lack of focus on host culture students in extant studies. This contextualisation facilitates the formulation of specific research questions which guide this study.

3.2 Student Diversity within Irish Higher Education

In recent years the demographic composition of student bodies in Ireland's higher education institutions (HEIs) has changed markedly due primarily to significant increases in the number of students from overseas undertaking higher education in Ireland (Devine et al. 2008). These students are referred to as 'international students'. Although this term is subject to multiple definitions, for the purposes of the current discussion, an international student is defined as "a student who undertakes part or all of their higher education experience in Ireland, if Ireland is not their home country" (International Education Board Ireland (IEBI) 2004: 8)[7].

Ireland does not have a strong tradition of hosting large numbers of international students. Cox (1997: 95) has argued that this can be explained by Ireland's "highly selective entry, high tuition fees and the lack of former colonial ties". According to Lynch (2001), between 1985 and 1995, international students represented only four per cent of students undertaking higher education in Ireland. However, as can be seen in Table 3.1, the number of international students in Irish HEIs has increased substantially in recent years, with average levels of 'structural diversity'[8] within Irish universities between 8-12% (European Intercultural Workplace 2008: 130).

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[7] This definition is in keeping with the definition used by the Global Atlas Project, which is led by the Institute of International Education (IEBI 2006). Collectively, international students may be defined as "a group in transition for the purpose of achieving an educational goal" (Lacina 2002: 21).

[8] 'Structural diversity' refers to the level of diversity within the student body as determined by the definition of diversity applied within the specific context.

Table 3.1 International Students in Higher Education in Ireland (2003-2007)

Number of International Students in Higher Education in Ireland (2003-2007)				
Academic Year	2003/2004	2004/2005	2005/2006	2006/2007
Number of Students	18,608	22,947	25,319	27,275
% Increase on previous year	19	23.3	10.3	7.7

(Source: Compiled from IEBI 2004, 2005, 2006, and Education Ireland 2008)

This increase reflects the global phenomenon of the ‘internationalisation’ of higher education. While internationalisation itself is subject to multiple definitions, and driven by several rationales, it is most obviously manifested in the increasing mobility of students across national boundaries, which results in increasingly diversified student bodies (Jiang 2005; van Damme 2001)[9]. According to the Irish Department of Education and Science (DES) (2004), in 2004 there were an estimated two million students pursuing higher education outside their home country, a figure which is predicted to increase to 6 million by 2020 (ibid.), and 7.2 million by 2025 (Böhm et al. 2002)[10]. In terms of student flows, Ward et al. (2001) explain that international students tend to study in industrialised countries, with English-speaking countries like the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and New Zealand, particularly popular destinations due to the current dominance of English as the *lingua franca* for international business and communications (Altbach and Knight 2007; Hatakenaka 2004).

In the Irish context, European Union (EU) educational initiatives, such as *Erasmus*, *Lingua* and *Socrates*, have been a major factor underpinning the significant increase in international students on Irish campuses (Boucher 1998). This is evidenced by the fact that students from the EU currently represent 40% of all international students in Irish HEIs (Education Ireland 2008). Coupled with this, however, the strategic recruitment of international students for economic reasons is another key factor. This economic rationale is argued to be the most recent, yet dominant, rationale for the internationalisation of higher education (Jiang 2005; Hatakenaka 2004; Habu 2000). At one level, it can reflect a commercially driven, marketisation ideology, which "sees international higher education as a commodity to be traded freely and as a private good, not a public responsibility" (Altbach and Knight 2006: 28). Indeed, Smith and Rae (2006: 27) make the point that 'export education', as it is termed, "is considered to be a 'green' product". At another level, however, the prioritisation of an economic rationale may be symptomatic of financial pressures stemming from insufficient government funding, which forces HEIs who may be ideologically uneasy with the idea of treating education as a tradable service to generate revenue through the recruitment of international students who pay substantial tuition fees (Daglish and Chan 2005; Hatakenaka 2004; de Vita and Case 2003).

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[9] For more detailed discussions on the internationalisation of higher education see Healy (2008), Elkin et al (2005), Deardorff (2004a, 2004b), Qiang (2003), Callan (2000) and OECD (1999).

[10] Some predictions are more ambitious. For example, Altbach and Knight (2007) refer to predictions that there will be 15 million international students by 2025.

In the Irish context, these financial pressures are evident. Despite the introduction of free higher education for Irish students in 1995 – which deprived HEIs of a major revenue source – Bruce (2006: 143) remarks that "direct state support per student in the university sector fell by €1,240 between 1995-2001". Furthermore, she (ibid.) refers to a further reduction of 14% in funding between 2002-2003. Excluding the injection of financial resources from government, O'Hare (2005) identifies four alternative income sources for Irish HEIs: (i) cost savings within the universities, (ii) fees from domestic students, (iii) philanthropic funding, and (iv) fees from international, fee-paying, students. From these options, Bruce (2006) argues that Irish HEIs have been actively encouraged to espouse the last strategy and generate revenue via the recruitment of fee-paying international students. Notably, it is non-EU international students who are most sought by Irish HEIs, given that these students are required to pay much higher fees than EU students[11]. As remarked by John Lynch, Chief Executive of the IEBI:

> The universities have come under severe pressures over the past year or two, which could pressurise them into more active recruitment of larger numbers of full fee-paying international students for financial reasons (quoted in Downes 2005: 5)

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[11] In the 2006/2007 academic year, almost €164 million in tuition fees was generated from international students in Irish HEIs, with an additional €208 million generated from accommodation and other living expenses (Education Ireland 2008).

Regardless of the rationales, the central point is that the influx of international students is creating student bodies which are increasingly culturally diverse, and it is within this context that the current study is located.

In addition to the increasing number of students coming to Ireland for educational purposes, it is also important to note that the very high levels of immigration into Ireland during the past fifteen years and the establishment of sizeable ethnic minority communities have created unprecedented levels of diversity in the Irish primary and secondary school systems, which is gradually transferring into the higher education system. To date, however, data relating to the participation of minority ethnic groups at primary, secondary and third level education is sparse and complicated by the use of varying classifications.

A 2004 report by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia indicated that in 2000 some 2.74% of students in the Irish secondary education system were of foreign citizenship. Meanwhile, in its report on the 'Internationalisation of Higher Education Services', the DES (2004) estimated that there were over 11,000 foreign students registered in the Irish post-primary education system, representing some 3.3% of the total student population in this sector. At present, figures are not available for the number of students from minority ethnic groups entering the Irish third-level system, although a 2002 report by the Higher Education Equality Unit (HEEU) drew attention to the very low participation rates in higher education among ethnic minority groups in Ireland. Furthermore, a report by Plobal (2006) also highlighted barriers faced by non-EU nationals resident in Ireland who wish to enter higher education. Nonetheless, given the very high immigration levels Ireland has witnessed since the mid 1990s and the increasing initiatives aimed at improving access to higher education among minority groups (European Intercultural Workplace 2008), it can be argued that growing numbers of these students will enter the third level system in the coming years.

This combination of growing numbers of international students undertaking their higher education in Ireland and the increasing domestic diversity resulting from immigration into Ireland is transforming student demographics on Irish campuses. This in turn raises questions about the implications of culturally diverse student bodies, including what challenges they may bring for academic and administrative staff, as well as for students themselves. Furthermore, it raises questions about the potential opportunities which student diversity might offer, an idea which will now be examined in greater detail.

3.3 The Potential of Student Diversity as an Educational Resource

> *“By bringing a more diverse group of students to campus, we are in the position to educate all students in an environment where they will be challenged to see new possibilities for themselves and their new world because of the mix of voices and perspectives at the table.”*
>
> (Cantor 2004: 12)

In highlighting changes in student populations in Irish higher education, cultural diversity has been discussed by reference to increasing numbers of international students and, to a lesser degree, by reference to students from minority ethnic groups within Ireland. This highlights a certain stance on what constitutes cultural diversity within student bodies. Other researchers may choose to define diversity according to age, physical ability, sexual orientation, or other characteristics. Indeed, Cross (2004: 390) argues that “there can be no single universalising model or conception of diversity that can work effectively in all contexts”. This is evident within existing literature on cultural diversity in higher education, which tends to define student diversity according to students’ nationality or race, often without clearly justifying such decisions. As Bennett and Bennett (1994: 145) suggest, “It is not an accident that most of the literature on cultural differences on campuses glosses over precise definitions of its subject”. Importantly, in many contexts the ‘source’ of diversity – international or domestic – heavily informs how it is discussed and researched. Studies which define student diversity based on nationality generally focus on the experiences of international students, particularly on their experiences of adaptation in the host culture. Research of this nature is very common in the field of intercultural studies and is of particular relevance to the current study given the increasing numbers of international students undertaking higher education in Ireland. Accordingly, it is explored in detail in section 3.4.

Separate from this, studies which define student diversity based on race tend to be more politically driven and domestically focused. They often explore issues around access to education for minority groups, relations between racially different domestic students and the outcomes associated with attending a racially diverse educational institution. Moses and Chang (2006) argue that the use of race as a proxy for diverse perspectives, values and behaviours – each of which are components of culture according to Singer's (1998) definition in section 2.2 – is supported by empirical evidence. However, although the concept of 'culture' is often referenced in such research, these studies have not traditionally been published in the field of intercultural studies, but rather are more common in educational publications. In the United States this focus on racial diversity is particularly strong[12]. Asmar (2005b: 134-135), for example, refers to "the US inclination to equate cultural diversity with race".

While these conceptualisations reflect different perspectives and agendas relating to student diversity, they nonetheless overlap in their argument that a diverse student body may constitute an added educational resource for learning institutions. This argument is premised on two ideas. Firstly, students from different cultures – international or domestic – are 'culture carriers' who bring diverse ideas, values, experiences and behaviours to the learning environment (Segall et al. 1990; cited in Simon and Davies 1995)[13]. As Lackland Sam (2001: 315) comments:

> One rationale behind the increasing number of international students is the assumption that students can serve both as cultural carriers and resources (Klineberg, 1970; Mestenhauser, 1983; Paige, 1990) and as links between cultures (Eide, 1970).

This links with the idea that all students bring their own 'cultural capital' to campus (Zepke and Leach 2005; Ridley 2004)[14]. Secondly, interaction with culturally diverse peers can enhance the overall educational experience of the student population and foster positive learning outcomes. This thesis is based on the idea that contact with students with diverse perspectives stimulates engagement and learning[15]. As Conklin (2004: 38) posits: “We learn when shaken by new facts, beliefs, experiences and viewpoints”. This is echoed by Bollinger’s (2003: 433) argument that “Encountering differences rather than one’s mirror image is an essential part of a good education”. Indeed, Nussbaum (1997: 8; quoted in Moses and Chang 2006: 9) posits that including diverse perspectives to solve problems is an imperative in the modern world:

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[12] Research relating to racial diversity in higher education is also common in South Africa and India, where studies are concerned primarily with the level of interracial tension on campuses and segregation between student groups due to the charged political environments and history of inequality between groups (Badsha 2000; Indiresan 2000).

[13] Stoetzel (1964) also refers to students as 'cultural carriers'.

[14] Ridley (2004) attributes the idea of 'cultural capital' to Bourdieu (1984).

> Many of our most pressing problems require for their intelligent, cooperative solution a dialogue that brings together people from many different national and cultural and religious backgrounds.

This in turn highlights the importance of peer learning in the broader educational process. As Gurin (1999: 49) concedes:

> Much to our chagrin as educators, we are compelled to understand that students' hearts and minds may be impacted most by what they learn from peers.

As regards the internationalisation of higher education, the fact that it produces culturally diverse student populations can therefore be used as a further rationale. Indeed, referring to the growth in the numbers of international students coming to Ireland, the IEBI (2004: 37) states that “the economic, social, education and cultural advantages of developing this sector are *incalculable*” (author’s emphasis). Ridley (2004: 91), meanwhile, argues that “there is great potential for all members of a learning and teaching community to learn from the rich mix of cultures which internationalization brings”, while Bruch and Barty (1998: 21) remark:

> [T]he presence of international students and academics is also seen to widen the cultural horizons of home students and staff, as well as the wider community, promoting international understanding and, it is hoped, cross-cultural sensitivity.

This argument is echoed by Brunner (2006), Gacela-Ávila (2004), McBurnie (2000) and Volet (2004: 4), who comments:

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[15] The idea is based on the work of established development theorists such as Newcomb (1943), Piaget (1971), Janis (1972), Langer (1978), and Nehmeth et al. (1973), and is discussed in greater detail by Chang et al. (2004) and Gurin et al. (2002).

> Diverse university student populations provide unique social forums to foster intercultural development (Volet, 1999), reciprocal tolerance (Horne, 2003) and the development of multicultural individuals (Adler, 1974).

Indeed, Dunstan (2003: 74), in arguing for the potential of learning through intercultural contact, remarks that “relationships between international and local students are not merely mutually beneficial: They are critical.”

In addition to this, Altbach and Knight (2006: 29) point out that nations such as China and Malaysia are strategically seeking to attract international students in order to “improve the quality and cultural composition of the student body”. This strategy has also been adopted in Japan (Hatakenaka 2004; Umakoshi 1997) and Finland (Dobson and Hölttä 2001). Such policies reflect a belief and tangible investment in the value of culturally diverse student bodies. According to Asmar (2005a: 293), however, the current dominance of the economic rationale for internationalisation, which can result in students being viewed as ‘customers’, detracts from the perceived educational value of student diversity:

> [I]t is one of the ironies of globalisation that the educational advantages of cross-cultural contact between all students are reduced if students feel they are seen merely as a source of revenue.

Turning attention to studies which define student diversity based on domestic, racial diversity, further support for the potential value of student diversity can also be found. While the background to these US studies is rooted in the politics of Affirmative Action initiatives and resulting legal cases, their core concern is to research the ‘compelling interest’ of student diversity by examining its relationship with student experiences and outcomes[16]. Importantly, many researchers argue that diversity within the student body can foster educational benefits among students (Chang et al. 2006; Chang 2005; Gurin et al. 2004; Ramirez 2003; Whitla et al. 2003;

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[16] The term ‘compelling interest’ was used by Justice Lewis Powell in the landmark 1978 *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke* case. In this case the complainant was a white student whose application to medical school was twice rejected, while students from minority groups with lower academic results gained admission through the university’s preferential admissions programme. Although Justice Powell ruled in favour of the complainant on the grounds that quota systems were unlawful, in his ruling he spoke of the ‘compelling interest’ of a diverse student body, thereby raising the idea of student diversity being pursued as an educational rationale. See Chang (2005) and Chang et al. (2004) for further discussion.

Marin 2002, Rudenstine 2001; Terenzini et al. 2001; Smith and Schonfeld 2000; Antonio 2001, 1999; Hurtado 1999, Smith 1997)[17]. Indeed, some colleges with a largely homogenous student body – in terms of race and nationality – have been so convinced of the merits of student diversity that they organised 'International Immersion Trips' for their students in an attempt to expose them to diversity which is not present on campus (Bowen 2005). In terms of the specific findings from these studies, Milem (2003) categorises the potential benefits under three discrete headings: (i) Individual Benefits, (ii) Institutional Benefits, and (iii) Societal Benefits. Some of these are listed in Table 3.2 overleaf.

Overall, conflating findings from US studies based on racial diversity with literature relating to the internationalisation of higher education, a compelling argument for the potential benefit of student diversity in higher education emerges. However, it is vital to recognise that simply engineering a culturally diverse student body – be it based on race or nationality, or indeed some other basis – will not ensure intercultural contact actually takes place between students. As Dunstan (2003: 66) remarks, "the bringing together of students and staff from numerous cultural backgrounds is not an end in itself". Furthermore, Bennett and Salonen (2007: 46) remark that, "We have long known that simply bringing different racial and cultural groups into contact may generate more heat than light". Indeed, recalling the second premise discussed at the outset of this section, it is positive interaction between students which constitutes the catalyst for realising the potential benefits of student diversity, not the mere presence of students from different cultures (Volet 2004; Ward 2001). According to Ujitani (2006: 6), "students studying on multicultural campuses cannot experience these benefits unless meaningful interactions between international and local students are facilitated" (p6). Furthermore, Grañeras et al. (2006: 486-487) remark:

> Promoting intercultural education implies taking a stance on how to deal with cultural diversity … The key word should be interaction; different cultures should 'intertwine on a level playing field' as a process of enrichment for everyone.

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[17] For a concise report on US research relating to the educational benefits of student diversity, see Shaw (2005).

Table 3.2 **Benefits associated with Student Diversity in Higher Education based on US Studies**

Educational Benefits Associated with Diversity at Third Level Education		
Individual Benefits	**Institutional Benefits**	**Societal Benefits**
➢ Improved cognitive abilities *(Chang et al. 2006; Antonio et al. 2004; Gurin et al. 2002; Hurtado 2001)* ➢ Enhanced critical thinking and problem-solving abilities *(MacPhee, Kreutzer and Fritz 1994)* ➢ *Improved self-confidence (Chang et al. 2006)* ➢ Improved cross-cultural competency *(Smith 1997; Milem 1994, 1992)* ➢ Greater satisfaction with college experience *(Umbach and Kuh 2006; Astin 1993)* ➢ More positive academic and social self-concept *(Gurin et al. 2002; Chang 1999)* ➢ Greater openness to diverse perspectives *(Chang et al. 2006; Harvey Gudeman 2000)* ➢ Improved leadership qualities *(Antonio 2001, Milem 1994, Astin 1993)* ➢ Improved ability to work in teams *(Chang 1999)*	➢ Higher levels of creativity and innovation *(Reskin 1998; Cox 1993)* ➢ More diverse curricular offerings and more diverse research activities *(Milem 2001)* ➢ Increased opportunity to achieve educational mission *(Astin 1993)* ➢ Attraction of best available talent *(Bowen and Bok 1998)* ➢ Higher Minority Student Retention *(Bowen and Bok 1998; Chang 1999)*	➢ Graduates with more developed civic and democratic values *(Gurin et al. 2004; Hurtado 2001, Milen 1994)* ➢ A more educated citizenry *(Gurin et al. 2002; Orfield and Whitla 1999)* ➢ Greater commitment to promoting racial understanding in society *(Tanaka 1996; Astin 1993)* ➢ Greater commitment to social justice *(Antonio 1999; Astin 1993)* ➢ Graduate physicians from minority groups help address health disparities in underserved communities *(Whitla et al. 2003; Cohen et al. 2002; DeVille 1999; Kington et al. 2001)*

Promoting interaction is important not simply because it can foster positive outcomes. There is also evidence indicating that in culturally diverse student bodies where interaction is low, not only are the potential benefits not realised, but negative outcomes, such as increased stereotyping, a hardening of prejudicial attitudes towards other groups, and intergroup hostility may result (Asmar 2003a; Rothman et al. 2003; Wood and Sherman 2001; Lerner and Nagai 2001; Henderson-King and Kaleta 2000). This point stresses the need to avoid the assumption that diversity within the student body automatically delivers educational benefits. As Otten (2003: 13) argues, the opportunities offered by a diverse educational context are not self-evident and self-fulfilling in terms of the expected educational outcomes of intercultural competence". Furthermore, the requirement for positive intercultural interaction to take place in order to realise the benefits of student diversity places an onus on learning institutions to create environments where such interaction is facilitated. As Dunstan (2003: 66) comments:

> In recognising the potential benefits of international education for all students in our institutions, we must think deeply about our approach, our management of change, and the productive possibilities of diversity. This creates challenges for those who are responsible for students, their successful interactions, and the understanding of difference in their identity development.

In summarising the discussion on the opportunities afforded by cultural diversity within the student body, it can be argued that this diversity offers institutions the potential to improve students' educational experience and assist in the achievement of the overall institutional mission. As Chang et al. (2006: 431) contend: "the vitality, stimulation, and educational potential of an institution are directly related to the composition of its student body". However, the mere presence of students from diverse cultures on campus – domestic or international – is insufficient to ensure these opportunities are realised. Instead, positive intercultural contact must take place. As Milem et al. (2005: 27) remark, "The key finding across all the research on diversity is that student-student interaction is essential for realizing the education benefits of diversity". Therefore, in the next section, studies exploring the level of intercultural contact among students in higher education are examined.

3.4 Studies on Intercultural Relations in Higher Education

In the field of intercultural studies, the vast majority of studies relating to intercultural contact among students in higher education use students' nationality as the criterion for differentiating 'host' students from 'non-host' students, who are typically termed 'international students'. Such studies include Galchenko and van de Vijver (2007), Kashima and Loh (2006), Ujitani (2006), Bird and Holmes (2005), Hills and Thom (2005), Mehdizadeh and Scott (2005), Pritchard and Skinner (2002), Gareis (2000, 1995), and Volet and Ang (1998). Hammer (1992) suggests that the literature on international students addresses four main areas: the problems of sojourners; the psychological reactions of sojourners to new a culture; the influence of social interaction and communication on sojourners' adaptation; and the culture learning process. Within the context of the current study, research relating to these students' social interaction is particularly germane, as is more recent research exploring international students' expectations in the host environment.

In terms of international students' expectations, studies indicate that these students wish and expect to have contact and develop friendships with host students (Grey 2002; Ward et al. 2001; Smart, Volet and Ang 2000). As Ramburuth (2001: 5) remarks, "international students expect to engage in intercultural interactions with local students whilst studying abroad". It should also be noted, however, that Kudo (2000) and Zhao et al. (2005) have found that while international students do express a desire to integrate with local students, they also wish to have contact with co-nationals or other international students. This mirrors the functional model of friendship, developed by Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977), which proposes that international students tend to be members of three distinct social networks: (i) co-national students, (ii) other international students, and (iii) host students, each of which serves a particular function. As regards the specific function of contact with the host students, the model posits that contact is "largely instrumental, to facilitate the academic and professional aims of the students" (Ward et al. 2001: 148).

Coupled with this, studies exploring international students' contact with host students suggest that such contact may benefit their overall cultural adaptation, as well as their academic performance (Sawir et al. 2008; Kashima and Loh 2006; Trice 2004;

Ward et al. 2001; Gareis 2000, 1995; Kudo 2000). These findings form part of the broader discussion on the relationship between individuals’ cross-cultural adaptation and their interaction with the host culture. Traditionally, research in the area of intercultural studies has not given significant attention to the role of the host culture in sojourners’ adaptation. However, in recent years this has been given increasing attention. Sheridan (2005: 97), for example, suggests, “the most interesting development has been the move to considering both society of origin and the host society influencing the process of adaptation”, while Navas et al. (2007) refer to recent acculturation models which incorporate a host perspective, such as the ‘interactive acculturation model’ (Bourhis et al. 1997) and the ‘relative acculturation extended model’ (Navas et al. 2004). Indeed, Church (1982: 551; cited in Ward and Rana-Deuba 2000: 293) has suggested:

> [T]he number, variety and depth of social encounters with host nationals may be the most important yet complex variable related to sojourner adjustment.

Li and Gasser (2005: 564) conclude that contact with host students helps international students “gain cultural knowledge, establish a local support network, and increase their language proficiency”. Indeed, Pica (2002) and Storch (2002) have also linked improved language proficiency to contact with host students. Krahé et al. (2005) have argued that contact with host students is associated with lower levels of perceived discrimination among international students, while Abe et al. (1998) and Zimmermann (1995) concluded that contact with host students was the most important factor in international students’ communication competency and their social adjustment. Furthermore, Furnham and Albhai (1985) refer back to the work of Sellitz and Cook (1962), which posited that international students who had established friendships with host culture friends had fewer problems.

Not all research, however, unanimously argues that contact with host students benefits international students. In studying the satisfaction levels of international students, Lackland Sam (2001: 331) concludes:

> Contrary to expectation, having host national friends did not appear to enhance one’s life satisfaction, a finding which is not consistent with previous research.

Also, research by Leong and Ward (2000) indicated that increasing contact with hosts was actually associated with greater identity conflict and perceived discrimination among students. These contradictory findings highlight the possibility of negative outcomes from contact with host students and warn against assuming that contact between groups automatically ensures positive outcomes. Overall, however, the majority of studies strongly suggests that contact with host students is beneficial to international students' sociocultural and psychological adjustment and should therefore be encouraged (Mehdizadeh and Scott 2005).

3.4.1 Evidence of Contact between International and Host students

Thus far, reference to existing studies has indicated that international students desire, and tend to benefit from, contact with host students. With this in mind, it is necessary to examine research on the frequency and quality of contact between international and host students.

Despite the expectations of international students and the identified benefits of contact with host students, many studies indicate infrequent contact between international and host students (Mak and Neil 2006; Snow Andrade 2006; Tan and Goh 2006; UKCOSA 2006; Volet and Karabenick 2006; Katsara 2004; Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005; Pandit and Alderman 2004; Sánchez 2004; Dunstan and Drew 2001; Smart et al. 2000; Abe et al. 1998). As Wright and Lander (2003: 240) remark:

> [A] range of studies over the years has found strong evidence of separation between overseas and local students on campuses (Volet, 2001; Smart, Volet & Ang 2000; Volet & Ang, 1998; Hawthorne, 1997; Qunitrell and Westwood, 1994; Nesdale & Todd, 1993). It appears that university students rarely initiate interaction with members of different cultures.

Furthermore, existing research indicates that international students experience significant difficulties developing friendships with host students. According to Kudo and Simkin (2003: 92):

> One of the major themes in the study of international students is just how difficult is it to develop any kind of close relationship with host nationals.

Acknowledging the abundance of research in this area, Ramburuth (2001: 5) comments that “students experience great difficulty in attempting the often impossible task of ‘bridging the local/international student divide’”. Coupled with this, Robertson et al. (2000) found that difficulties in making contact with other students and financial pressures were the two principal problems facing international students, while Bruch and Barty (1998), Choi (1997) and Tompson and Tompson (1996) each highlight the difficulties of international students’ making contact with host students. Furthermore, a report by UKCOSA (2004: 71) also identified problems with interaction between host and international students and concluded that “the most significant issue for institutions to tackle is that of helping international students to integrate”. Ward et al. (2001: 166), meanwhile, comment:

> Research on intercultural interactions indicates that although overseas students would like contact with host nationals and that they benefit socially and psychologically from these encounters, the extent of host-sojourner interactions is limited.

Given the diversity of contexts within which these studies have been conducted – Europe, Asia, Australasia and the United States – low levels of intercultural contact between students appears to be a common issue on campuses internationally. Furthermore, it is unsurprising that parallel studies indicate that the expectations of international students are often not met. For example, Campbell and Li (2007), Lee et al. (2006), and Hellstén (2002) have all found that international students were unhappy with the opportunities to mix with host students. Based on these findings, Lackland Sam’s (2001: 320) argument appears to be a compelling one:

> In spite of the importance of host national friends to international students’ adaptation, this is the one category of friendship international students report having most difficulties establishing.

These findings have implications for the sociocultural and psychological adjustment and overall satisfaction of international students. Sawir et al. (2008) highlight the issue of loneliness and isolation among international students, Trice (2004: 671) refers to existing studies suggesting that “limited social contact with host nationals is related to feelings of anxiety, depression, and alienation”, while Gareis (2000: 70) posits that isolation from host students can create a vicious circle which perpetually complicates intercultural relations between students:

> This social alienation from the host country can have different effects. It can lead to physical isolation and a retreat into the private world; it can cause an immersion into work and studies; or it can foster a banding together with fellow nationals or students from other countries (Klein *et al*., 1986; Owie, 1982; Strom 1988; Winter, 1986).

In addition to this, Schmitt et al. (2003) suggest that as international students are rejected – or perceive themselves to be rejected – by host students, they increasingly identify with other international students. This, it is argued, is in accordance with the 'rejection-identification' model developed by Branscombe et al. (1999), whereby gravitating towards other international students is seen as a defensive manoeuvre aimed at counteracting the negative psychological effects of rejection by the host community. This is not to suggest that international students might not voluntarily stick together, particularly when the functional model proposed by Bochner, McLeod and Lin (1977) alludes to the importance of contact with other international students.

Mindful of the low level of interaction between international and host students indicated by many studies, Leask (2005: 5) points out that research exploring interactions between different cultural groups on campus "does not support the crude proximity → intercultural contact → intercultural learning/competence equation". Ward (2001: 13) also stresses this point, commenting, "close proximity does not necessarily lead to social interaction, and … Interaction does not necessarily lead to positive outcomes". This is a key point, as many institutions appear to be of the impression that mere proximity will activate the proffered benefits associated with student diversity (Todd and Nesdale 1997b). Indeed, de Vita (2004: paragraph 2) bemoans the assumption that internationalisation will automatically produce educational benefits for students and institutions:

> In short, the rhetoric of educational internationalisation hides the fact that intercultural interaction, in and outside the classroom, is not developing naturally and is at best limited among students from culturally diverse backgrounds.

3.4.2 Research on Students' Intercultural Contact in the Irish Context

Research relating to intercultural relations in higher education conducted in the Irish context has been limited to date. The most notable study is that conducted by Boucher (1998), which focused on international students' experiences of racism and discrimination in three Irish universities. While this study found that students experienced relatively low levels of racial discrimination, it also concluded that they had infrequent contact with host students. This was particularly true for Muslim students. These findings are therefore in keeping with those of many international studies.

Notwithstanding the value of Boucher's (ibid.) findings, they are now somewhat outdated. For example, Boucher (ibid.: 19) argued that the Irish situation was unusual in Europe on the grounds that there was a "fairly clear distinction between minority ethnic students and international students, which has become blurred elsewhere [in Europe]" (author's addition). Indeed, he referred to the very small number of minority ethnic students in Ireland. However, as discussed in section 3.2, the dramatic demographic changes in Irish society and on Irish campuses in the intervening period imply that, as in many parts of Europe, the lines between minority ethnic students and international students are indeed increasingly blurred.

In addition to Boucher's study, Flavin (2000) has explored international students' reasons for choosing Ireland as their destination country, their intercultural experiences in Ireland, and also sought to identify specific problems faced by international students in Ireland. The principal problems identified were difficulties interacting with host students, language difficulties and financial pressures. With regard to the issue of interacting with Irish students, international students referred to Irish students being superficial and reluctant to admit international students into their social circles. This study also identified several barriers to interaction between student groups, which will be discussed in section 3.5. A separate study by Pritchard and Skinner (2002) explored problems faced by international students in Northern Ireland, and found that once again these students aspired to meet host students but often expressed disappointment with the low level of actual contact.

In 2002 the now disbanded Higher Education Equality Unit (HEEU), based in University College Cork (UCC), published guidelines for creating an intercultural campus (HEEU 2002). This focused ostensibly on equality issues within HEIs and the need to integrate diverse student groups on campus. However, the report was not based on empirical research and did not discuss specific issues faced by either international or ethnic minority students. Although it did refer to the potential benefits of diverse student bodies, these benefits were neither clearly nor compellingly articulated, nor were they based on references to established research in the area.

Additional research on international students in Ireland has been conducted at postgraduate level, most notably by Schlepper (2003), who explored international students' experiences in Ireland and their contact with host students. Findings from this study largely mirrored those of Boucher (1998), insofar as international students did not report high levels of direct discrimination, but rather a more subtle form of isolation or 'othering'. Of international students, Schlepper (ibid.: 59) remarks:

> There is a feeling of being distanced and ignored, their wish for Irish students to initiate the encounter is met by a lack of interest on the part of Irish students. This is increased by language and cultural barriers, age, different ways of socialising and lack of time for socialising because of work.

Coupled with the limited research conducted to date, organisations such as the Irish Council for International Students (ICOS) and the National Consultative Committee on Racism and Interculturalism (NCCRI) have organised events relating to cultural diversity on campus. In March 2007 the NCCRI and the Irish Higher Education Authority (HEA) held a roundtable discussion on the development of intercultural campuses in the higher education sector, while in November 2007 ICOS held the inaugural International Students Forum, which sought to give a voice to international students studying in Ireland. Overall, however, there has been a paucity of in-depth research into both intercultural relations and international students' experiences in the Irish context.

3.5 Factors Influencing Intercultural Relations between Students

As well as indicating low levels of intercultural contact between host and international students, a number of studies have identified specific barriers to contact. Some of these barriers, including the studies in which they are referenced, are listed in Table 3.3.

Table 3.3 Barriers to Intercultural Contact identified in Existing Research

Identified Barriers to Intercultural Contact	Referenced in
Age gap between students	Flavin 2000, Swan 1983
Cultural Distance / Cultural Differences	Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005; Trice 2004; Alreshoud and Koeske 1997 (cited in Trice 2004); Redmond and Bunyi 1993; Yokota 1989 (cited in Takai 1991); Furnham and Albhai 1985; Bochner et al.1977 (cited in Ward et al. 2001);
Differences in Communication Styles	Ujitani 2006; Murakami 2005 (cited in Ujitani 2006);
Different interests / lifestyles	Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005; Ward 2005; Smart, Volet and Ang 2000;
Drinking culture / alcohol	UKCOSA 2004; Boucher 1998; Bruch and Barty 1998; Ti 1997 (cited in Ramburuth 2001);
Emphasis on independent learning within institution	Flavin 2000
Established friendship groups pre-college	Boucher 1998; Volet and Ang 1998;
Financial pressures on international students	Ujitani 2006

Heavy workload	Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005
Host students sticking together	Boucher 1998
Institutional factors inhibiting intercultural contact, in particular classroom dynamics	Dunstan and Drew 2001
International students’ excessive use of technology may hinder face-to-face contact with other students	Parr et al. 1992 (cited in Zhao 2005)
International students not making sufficient effort	Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005
International students’ obligation to scholarship	Boucher 1998
International students’ obligation to maintain formal gender relations	Boucher 1998
International students sticking together	Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005; Trice 2004; Boucher 1998;
Lack of interest among host students	Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005; Yokota 1989 (cited in Takai 1991);
Lack of opportunities to interact outside class	Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005
Lack of self-disclosure	Murakami 2005 (cited in Ujitani 2006
Lack of shared experiences and commonalities between students	Campbell and Li 2007
Lack of time spent on campus / including commuting distance	Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005; Trice 2004;
Language barriers (including accent, slang and speaking pace)	Tan and Goh 2006; Ujitani 2006; Murakami 2005 (cited in Ujitani 2006); Holmes 2005; Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005; Trice 2004; Ward et al. 2001; Yokota 1989 (cited in Takai 1991); Swan 1983;

Peer pressure to adhere to own cultural group	Boucher 1998
Perceived effort required to accommodate international students	Yokota 1989 (cited in Takai 1991)
Perception of threat among host students	Nesdale and Todd 2000;
Pressure from home government on international students	Boucher 1998
Rules governing campus residences	Ujitani 2006
Segregated living arrangements	Flavin 2000; Chalmers and Volet 1997;
Shyness of international students	Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005
Stereotypes of international students	Ujitani 2006; Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005; Smart, Volet and Ang 2000; Volet and Ang 1998;
Strength of identification with ingroup	Li and Gasser. 2005
Temporary nature of the sojourn / length of stay in host country	Murakami 2005 (cited in Ujitani 2006); Dunstan and Drew 2001; Dunstan 2003; Flavin 2000;

The large number of barriers identified in Table 3.3 highlights the complexity of this issue. Furthermore, it is apparent that many of these issues are not necessarily ‘cultural’ issues, even though they may hinder intercultural contact. Indeed, it appears that barriers to intercultural contact may stem from the specific context, the nature of the learning institution, individual personality traits, and external constraints on students.

3.5.1 Notable Studies on Intercultural Relations in Higher Education

Among the numerous studies exploring intercultural relations between students, several warrant particular attention on the basis of their contribution to the field and their relevance to the current study. These studies do not necessarily focus on barriers to intercultural contact, but rather seek to gain an understanding of the factors which may positively or negatively play a role in the phenomenon. Each of these studies will now be discussed in chronological order[18].

Takai (1991) Contact Hypothesis of Adjustment

Although primarily concerned with the cross-cultural adjustment of international students, Takai's (1991) work is very relevant to intercultural contact among students given that he takes a holistic perspective on students' adjustment, which incorporates environmental factors and emphasises the importance of contact with host students. As Takai (ibid.: 200) comments, "Each host interacted with can act as a model through which proper manners of behaviour can be learned". As can be seen from Table 3.4, the factors identified are classified as 'Internally Determined' – those attached to the individual – or 'Externally Determined' factors – those over which the individual has no control – with the former comprising both psychological resources and physical resources.

Among these internally and externally determined factors, several can be identified as factors which directly impact upon contact with host students; specifically, 'Attitude towards hosts', 'Motivation towards host contact', 'Relevance of host contact to main goal of the sojourn', 'Host language competence', 'Opportunity to meet hosts', 'Proximity to hosts', 'Presence of host willing to be friends', and 'Attitude of Hosts'. Indeed, the fact that the attitudes of host students are recognised as an important factor highlights the reciprocal nature of intercultural contact.

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[18] Leask (2003) also lists factors identified as influencing interaction between host and international students which are classified under 'environmental factors', 'resources available to students', 'skills and attitudes', and 'motivation and reward'. However, it appears these have been compiled from other studies rather than identified in her own empirical research.

Table 3.4 Factors Identified by Takai (1991)

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Internally Determined Factors</th></tr>
<tr><th>Psychological Resources</th><th>Physical Resources</th></tr>
<tr><td>- Personality
- Intelligence
- Attitude towards hosts
- Motivation towards host contact
- Relevance of host contact to main goal of the sojourn
- Host language competence
- Universal social skills
- Perceptive skills
- Past experiences</td><td>- Opportunity to meet hosts
- Proximity to hosts
- Presence of host willing to be friends
- Time
- Money</td></tr>
<tr><th colspan="2">Externally Determined Factors</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">- Legal and social restriction on host-sojourner interaction
- Attitude of hosts
- Nature of living environment
- Structure and function of primary group
- Political factors</td></tr>
</table>

Gareis (1995, 2000) Intercultural Friendship Formation

Gareis (1995), who qualitatively explored students' intercultural friendship formation, proposed twelve factors which, from the perspective of international students, impact upon their intercultural contact and friendship development with host students. These are listed in the left column of Table 3.5.

Gareis (2000) later distilled these twelve factors into six factors which are listed in the right column of Table 3.5. Among these, the idea of 'Homophily' is of particular interest. Gareis (ibid.: 72) argues that homophily, which she defines as "similarity between friends", is the primary function of friendship. That is, friendships are underpinned by similarities as opposed to differences. Therefore, given that intercultural encounters are commonly characterised by cultural *dissimilarity*, students' homophilic tendencies may direct them away from such contact and towards students they perceive to be similar to themselves:

> Considering the existence in cultural dissimilarity in intercultural encounters, homophily is therefore an important factor influencing intercultural friendship formation (ibid.: 72).

Table 3.5 Factors Influencing Intercultural Friendship Formation Identified by Gareis (1995, 2000)

Factors Influencing Intercultural Friendship Formation identified by Gareis (1995)	Factors Influencing Intercultural Friendship Formation identified by Gareis (2000)
1. Culture (including cultural distance) 2. Personality 3. Self-esteem 4. Friendship Elements 5. Expectations 6. Adjustment Stage 7. Cultural Knowledge 8. Communicative Competence 9. External Variables 10. Proximity 11. Host Culture Elements 12. Chemistry	1. Culture 2. Personality 3. Homophily 4. Adjustment stage (including intercultural sensitivity & culture shock) 5. Communicative Competence 6. Proximity

Gareis (ibid.) also suggests that cultural differences are particularly problematic at the initial stages of intercultural contact, but tend to have a lesser impact as the friendship develops. However, it can be argued that the initial barriers may prevent such development from occurring in the first instance.

In terms of ‘Communicative Competence’, she posits that this plays a “superlative role in the establishment of intercultural relationships” (ibid.: 73), and that proficiency in communicative skills, including language, constitutes a major predictor of successful interaction. As regards the idea of ‘Proximity’, she draws upon existing research by Strom (1988), Klein et al. (1986), and Paige (1983), which supports the idea that “proximity to host nationals and contact frequency betters the probabilities of positive, intercultural relationships” (Gareis 2000: 73). In particular, she proffers living proximity, ideally shared lodging, as a facilitator on intercultural contact and friendship development.

Ang and Volet (1998) Intercultural Group Formation

Another important study is that of Volet and Ang (1998), which explored host and international students' perceptions of the factors affecting the formation of culturally diverse groups for the completion of academic assignments. This study identified four principal factors underpinning students' preferences for doing group work with members of their own culture; (i) cultural-emotional connectedness, (ii) language, (iii) pragmatism, and (iv) negative stereotypes.

In terms of 'cultural-emotional connectedness', which they identify as a major obstacle to intercultural group formation, this refers to:

> [S]tudents' perceptions of feeling more comfortable, thinking along the same wavelength, and sharing a similar communication style and sense of humour when interacting with peers from the same cultural background. (ibid.: 10)

Importantly, they suggest that in the absence of immediate cultural peers, "cultural-emotional connectedness is naturally extended to the next closest culture" (ibid.: 11). Furthermore, they found that language was an issue in terms of international students' aural comprehension and oral expression, which in turns impacts upon their confidence to speak and approach host students. The idea of 'Pragmatism' related to international students' beliefs that the excessive commitments of host students in terms of working and family meant that they could not fully commit to the group work. Importantly, this point highlights the fact that situational rather than cultural factors may heavily inform intercultural contact among students. Finally, they emphasised the impact which negative stereotypes can have from both sides, which again draws attention to the reciprocal nature of intercultural contact.

Kudo and Simkin (2003) Intercultural Friendship Formation

The research of Kudo and Simkin (2003) built upon that of Gareis (1995, 2000). As well as identifying factors in the development of intercultural friendship from the perspective of international students, they also proposed a model for the process of intercultural friendship formation based on three elements: (i) contextual opportunities, (ii) sojourner communication skills, and (iii) host attitudes and behaviours. The factors identified as impacting upon intercultural friendship formation are shown in table 3.6.

Table 3.6 Factors Impacting upon Intercultural Friendship Formation Identified by Kudo and Simkin (2003)

Factors	As determined by
Frequency of Contact	(i) Propinquity (ii) Shared networks
Similarity	(iii) Personal characteristics (iv) Age
Self-disclosure	(i) Oral competence in host language (ii) Openness of communication
Receptivity on other nationals	(i) Cross-cultural orientation (ii) Empathy

In terms of ‘Propinquity’, which was identified as an important facilitator of intercultural contact, this was primarily realised through shared living arrangements and classrooms. Linking with the importance of homophily proposed by Gareis (2000), Kudo and Simkin (2003: 109) argue that “propinquity functions to provide opportunities to recognise and cultivate homophily – in activities, needs, interests, values, attitudes, and personality”. This links with the concepts of ‘induced homophily’ which will be discussed in Chapter 9. However, although important, propinquity was not independently sufficient to ensure intercultural contact took place, a point which echoes the argument that cultural diversity does not ensure intercultural interaction (see section 3.3). Coupled with this, similarities in terms of values, interests, attitudes and age were all proffered as important factors impacting intercultural contact, while a perceived lack of commonalities was argued to inhibit interaction. In terms of self-disclosure, this was found to be heavily influenced by students’ competency in the host language: “Another theme pertinent to self-disclosure was an impact of spoken English skills on the quality of message exchange” (ibid.: 103). For students anxious about their linguistic competency, this often led to passivity and a lack of engagement with host students, while increased competence resulted in students gaining more rewards from intercultural interaction (ibid.).

The final suggested factor, host receptivity, indicated that host students with an interest in other cultures were more receptive to international students, which in turn facilitated friendship formation. Furthermore, the host students' empathy was manifested primarily in their "cultural and linguistic bridging" (ibid.: 108), which involved adapting their speech style – including reducing speed and minimising the use of slang and colloquialisms – and showing patience with students struggling with the host language. As Kudo and Simkin (ibid.: 106) remark:

> Our research makes it clear that communication accommodation by native speakers of a language dominant in a host society is very important in making possible the satisfactory development of intercultural relationships.

Once again, given the role attributed to host students in both the identification of factors and their resulting model for intercultural friendship formation, Kudo and Simkin (ibid.: 110) recognise that intercultural contact is a phenomenon shaped by both sides: "difficulty in intercultural interactions can be strongly influenced by host nationals' goodwill toward international students".

Trice (2004) Variables Influencing International Students' Interactions with Hosts

Led by a theoretical framework based on 'social capital theory'[19] (Stanton-Salazar 1997), Trice (2004) conducted research to identify variables influencing international students' contacts with host students. Following her data analysis, her revised theoretical framework proposed three categories of variables informing interactions with host students. These are shown in Table 3.7. It was hypothesised that each variable would influence intercultural interaction to some degree. For example, it was predicted that married international students would have less contact with host students, that students from cultures very different to the host culture would have relatively less interaction than those from similar cultures, and that international students who befriended other international students and who attended cultural events on campus would have greater social contact with host students.

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[19] Based on studies which indicated that international students benefit from contact with host students, Trice (2004: 672) hypothesised that these benefits were derived from international students' access to 'social capital', which she defined as "relationships with individuals who are able and willing to provide, or negotiate the provision of, institutional resources and opportunities". In this case, she argued that host students held such social capital and therefore contact with them could provide international students with access this social capital, which would in turn facilitate their cultural adaptation and increase their satisfaction.

Table 3.7 Variables Informing Contact with Host Students Proposed by Trice (2004)

Social Status	Cultural Competency	Campus Engagement
- Gender - Marital Status of international students	- Region of origin (cultural distance) - Fluency in host language - Length of time in host culture - Concerns about interacting with hosts	- Interactions with other international students - Attendance at cultural events

Although all of these variables relate specifically to international students, Trice (ibid.) does refer to the role which host students can play in facilitating interactions with students from other cultures on campus. In particular she refers to the need for host students to have patience and learn about cultural differences that can potentially complicate intercultural friendships, which links with Kudo and Simkin's (2003) idea of host receptivity. Furthermore, in her discussion on cultural distance, she suggests that discrimination from the host community towards international students from cultures perceived to be culturally distant may impact upon the latter's interactions with host students. This again indicates the importance of host students in intercultural contact. In addition to this, she also puts the onus on university staff to foster intercultural contact between students on campus.

Lee (2006) Factors Influencing Relational Identity in Intercultural Friendship

Prompted by the paucity of research on intercultural friendship development, Lee (2006: 8) explored the "communicative activities, behaviours, or influences that contribute to (or shape) the construction of relational identity in intercultural friendship". Having engaged with students from established intercultural friendship dyads, Lee (ibid.) identified seven main themes that contributed to building intercultural relational identity; (i) positivities/providing assistance, (ii) rituals, activities, rules, and roles, (iii) self-disclosure, (iv) networking, (v) exploring cultures and languages, (vi) emphasising similarities and exploring differences, and (vii) conflict management.

The idea of 'positivitives' refers to "the positive characteristics that intercultural friends demonstrated in their friendships" (ibid.: 12), such as doing favours, providing help and advising. Like 'self-disclosure' and the shared activities encompassed in 'rituals, activities, rules, and roles', 'positivities' is common to other forms of friendship, not simply intercultural friendship. However, the exploration of culture is more specific to intercultural friendships, and fosters relational development by deepening knowledge and showing respect for the other culture. Also, by emphasising similarities, such as values and interests, "participants believed that they were close to their intercultural friends because their intercultural friends could understand them in that particular area" (ibid.: 16). Where cultural differences invariably arose, Lee (ibid.) found that these did not impact negatively upon the friendship, but encouraged students to compare perspectives on a given issue.

Finally, as regards the theme of 'conflict management', friendships where members did not have the appropriate skills to manage the conflict 'backwarded', a term used by Knapp and Vangelisti (2000: 17). However, conflicts that were managed well actually helped the friendship and provided each member with a deeper understanding of the other.

Ujitani (2006) Intercultural Relational Development between Host & International Students

This longitudinal study explored both host and international students' perspectives on intercultural relational development. In contextualising her study, Ujitani (ibid.: 80) concludes that analysis of extant literature suggests that the four major factors influencing intercultural relational development are:

> [C]ommunication competence (language/cultural knowledge, empathy, international students' accommodation to local cultural norms), similarity (individual and cultural similarity), proximity (amount of interactions, shared networks), and self-disclosure.

Reporting her findings, she identifies specific strategies, as well as factors, influencing intercultural relational development among students from both sides. The identified strategies, each of which were used at different stages of the relational development process, were conceptualised as; (i) meeting through mutual friends, (ii) presenting oneself as a pleasant person, (iii) greetings, (iv) 'small talk' (v) spending time together, (vi) 'big talk' (self-disclosure), and (vii) supportiveness. Interestingly, gender emerged as a factor in terms of self-disclosure; while female students reported self-disclosing through discussing concerns, male self-disclosure involved broaching more taboo or controversial topics, as well as dislikes.

With regard to the factors identified as influencing intercultural relational development, Ujitani classified these as facilitating factors (18) and inhibiting factors (8). They are listed in Table 3.8.

Table 3.8 Factors Influencing Intercultural Relational Development Proposed by Ujitani (2006)

Possible *Facilitating* Factors identified by Ujitani (2006)	**Possible *Inhibiting* Factors identified by Ujitani (2006)**
1. Having common interests 2. Having interest in other cultures 3. Drinking (alcohol) 4. Having sufficient money to participate in social activities 5. Singing at karaoke 6. Helping with homework 7. Meeting people can assist finding a new circle of friends 8. Having an outgoing personality 9. Jointly organising events 10. Knowing where social activities are taking place 11. Smiling when meeting students from the international residence 12. Having good language skills 13. Living in an residence where students can mix regularly 14. Greetings other students from the international residence 15. Having similar characteristics 16. Needing to improve language skills 17. Going to the English (speaking) lounge 18. Doing projects with students from other cultures	1. Dormitory rules 2. Not having sufficient money to go out and socialise together 3. Language barriers 4. Having stereotypes about people from other cultures 5. Expressing feelings openly 6. Showing interest only on surface aspects of culture 7. Being a foreigner 8. Japanese (host culture) visitors breaking dormitory rules

The diversity of factors identified in this study again highlights the complexity of intercultural contact and relational development between students in higher education. Furthermore, as in other studies, situational and environmental factors which do not necessarily relate to 'cultural' difference are once again shown to be of importance.

In the same study, Ujitani also identifies different types of social and emotional challenges in students' intercultural relational development. Those common to both host and international students were (i) sense of humour, (ii) communication style, (iii) instrumental relationships, (iv) non-verbal behaviours, (v) language, (vi) unacceptable behaviours, and (vii) ingroups and outgroups. However, the fact that an additional seven identified challenges were unique to either the host or international students indicates that students on each side may face discrete issues relating to intercultural contact and relational development, and so strategies aiming to promote contact may not be equally successful for all students. Furthermore, it supports the decision to focus on the host student population. This point is further emphasised by the fact that where factors were common to both host and international students, the priority given to them was not.

3.5.2 Lack of Engagement with Host Students in Existing Research

The findings from the studies discussed in the previous section highlight the complexity of intercultural contact between students in higher education, and the multiplicity of factors – cultural, situational, individual and institutional – which conflate to inform intercultural contact. Among these, it is important to note that although the reciprocal nature of intercultural contact is acknowledged, and the stance adopted by host culture students is consistently identified as influencing intercultural contact, there is a conspicuous scarcity of research focusing specifically on this group. This reflects a general lack of attention given to the host culture community in studies on intercultural contact[20]. As a result, there is a lack of understanding of the dynamics of intercultural contact from the perspective of host culture students, including their desire and ability to interact with students from other cultures, as well as their actual experiences of intercultural contact. However, as the dominant group on campus, it is axiomatic that these students are central to the nature of intercultural relations among students, and therefore should be consulted.

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[20] For example, Ady's (1995) review of studies on the outcomes of intercultural contact identified six categories into which such studies fit; (i) sojourners' satisfaction with the new lives, (ii) changes in sojourners' emotional adjustment over time, (iii) sojourners' level of interaction with the host culture based on studies of their social networks, (iv) the adverse psychological consequences of failing to adapt to a new culture, (v) the ability of the sojourner to manage the cross-cultural transition, and (vi) sojourners' level of cultural competence. What is noticeable from this is that none of these six categories give sufficient attention to the host culture.

While Harris (1995) points out that research into international students' experiences of intercultural contact dates back to the 1960s, only in the last decade has this lacuna in research relating to host culture students been highlighted. Volet and Ang (1998: 20) point out that within existing research, "the impact of local students' attitudes and behaviours on inter-cultural contact has been largely neglected", while Ward (2001: 12), calling for more attention on host students, argues "there are hardly any studies that describe intercultural interactions from the perspective of local students". This concern is echoed by Ujitani (2006), Asmar (2005a), Ward (2005), Kudo and Simkin (2003), Otten (2000) and Smart et al. (2000). As Ujitani (2006: 8) remarks:

> To better understand the development of intercultural relational development, it is therefore imperative to also include the perceptions and experiences of local students … because intercultural relational development is by nature a reciprocal psychosocial phenomenon.

These calls for the inclusion of host culture students' perspectives have prompted greater engagement with these students. As has been shown, some of the more recent studies in the area – such as Ujitani (ibid.), Lee (2006) – have included the perspectives of the host culture students. Furthermore, a small number of studies have focused exclusively on the host student population. Barron (2006), for example, conducted research into host students' perceptions of the advantages and disadvantages associated with sharing educational experience with international students. This study again found that host and international students tended not to mix and that host students were unlikely to work with international students, particularly for group projects. Bird and Holmes (2005) focused specifically on host students' perceptions of, and interactions with, international students within the classroom environment. Their study found that undergraduates had less positive perceptions than postgraduates, and perceived less value to sharing the educational environment with students from other cultures. Among the issues identified were language barriers, different levels of participation in group work, and distinct approaches to learning. Sánchez (2004) also focused specifically on host students perceptions of international students and found very low levels of contact, with host students assigning blame for this to international students. Furthermore, he (ibid.) found that host students experienced anxiety when interacting with international students and expected the university to show leadership in promoting intergroup relations. Indeed, in the Irish context, Schlepper (2003: 70) recognises the importance of the host student cohort to the development of intercultural relations on campus, and argues; “Future research should include an investigation into Irish students' attitudes towards international students.”

3.6 Implications of Literature Review & Formulation of Research Questions

Conflating the findings from existing literature raises a number of important implications, which ultimately inform the research questions. Firstly, research from many countries indicates that although student bodies within HEIs are becoming increasingly culturally diverse, this diversity does not necessarily lead to greater intercultural contact. This in turn implies that although structural diversity is a prerequisite for intercultural contact, it is not sufficient to ensure contact actually occurs. Secondly, in the specific case of international students, who can benefit socially, academically and psychologically from contact with host students, this lack of interaction reveals a worrying discrepancy between their desired and lived experiences. This in turn impacts upon their satisfaction in the host environment, which has implications for HEIs who are actively trying to attract greater numbers of international students. Thirdly, the lack of intercultural contact implies that the potential of cultural diversity to constitute an educational resource and contribute to the overall mission of higher education, as outlined in section 3.3, may remain unrealised. As de Vita (2004: paragraph 3) argues:

> [T]he ideal of transforming a culturally diverse student population into a valued resource for activating processes of international connectivity, social cohesion and intercultural learning, is still very much that: an ideal.

This does not simply constitute a wasted opportunity. Research also suggests that unhealthy intercultural relations between students may precipitate negative outcomes and hostility among students, which implies that institutions have an obligation to actively manage and promote intercultural relations on campus. Lastly, studies on intercultural contact have traditionally not engaged with host culture students, despite the fact that many researchers acknowledge the central role of host students in intercultural relations. This is unfortunate, given that engagement with host students is necessary in order to understand the factors which impact upon intercultural contact from their perspective and ultimately develop strategies to foster improved contact. Indeed, advocating researchers' engagement with all students, Ujitani (2006: 290) stresses that "intercultural relational development is a reciprocal phenomenon and future research should keep that premise paramount."

With all this in mind, further research into the factors impacting intercultural interaction is needed. Such research is necessary not simply to understand the dynamics of intercultural contact, but to help inform policies to promote improved intercultural contact on campus. Given the significant increase in cultural diversity on Irish campuses in recent years and the relative lack of formal research on this topic in Ireland, the need for such research in the Irish context is perhaps even more urgent. Furthermore, it is apparent that there must be engagement with host culture students in order to understand their perspectives and experiences of intercultural contact.

Consideration of these implications, coupled with a strong personal interest in the topic and my involvement in higher education, have led to the formulation of three specific research questions guiding the current study. These questions are articulated as follows:

(i) What are host students' perceptions of cultural difference among students within a specific institute of higher education?

(ii) What factors impact upon – facilitate or hinder – intercultural contact from the perspective of these host students?

(iii) What are host students' experiences of intercultural contact on campus?

In addressing each of these questions it is hoped that this study will make an innovative and valuable contribution to knowledge specifically in the Irish context, but also add to the growing body of international research relating to intercultural contact between students in higher education, as well as the overall field of intercultural studies.

3.7 Chapter Summary

This chapter has contextualised the current study and engaged extensively with existing empirical research on intercultural contact among students in higher education. In doing so, it unites rationales associated with the internationalisation of higher education with research from studies relating to domestic diversity within student bodies. By conflating these fields it has argued that a culturally diverse student body offers potential benefits to the educational institutions, while emphasising the need for positive intercultural interaction to act as a catalyst to foster these benefits and avoid negative outcomes. With this in mind, a wide range of studies on intercultural contact in higher education have been reviewed. Collectively, these studies suggest that intercultural contact among students is often problematic and infrequent, implying that the opportunities of a diverse student body often remain unrealised. Coupled with the increase in cultural diversity within Irish HEIs, and the lack of focus on host culture students to date, this issue of infrequent contact between students has led to the formulation of concrete research questions which direct the current study. With this in mind, attention now turns to the methodological approach used for the current study.

Chapter 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter details the overall methodological approach of the study. It comprises seven sections, each focusing on a distinct methodological concern. In section 4.2, the research questions formulated in Chapter 3 are briefly reiterated to situate the methodological discussion. In section 4.3 the choice of a qualitative research framework is explained, and different possible strategies of qualitative inquiry discussed. Section 4.4 focuses on the specific strategy of inquiry chosen, 'grounded theory'. Section 4.5 outlines the research procedure in terms of the choice of research environment, the operationalisation of key concepts, the sampling strategy, and participant recruitment. Section 4.6 details the data collection process, including the choice of a data collection instrument. Section 4.7 reviews the process of data analysis. This facilitates the reader's understanding of the subsequent chapters of research findings. Lastly, section 4.8 discusses a number of methodological issues related to the overall process.

4.2 Research Questions

As stated in section 3.6, the primary research questions driving the current study are:

(i) What are host students' perceptions of cultural difference among students within a specific institute of higher education?

(ii) What factors impact upon – facilitate or hinder – intercultural contact from the perspective of these host students?

(iii) What are host students' experiences of intercultural contact on campus?

4.3 Research Framework

The method for answering these research questions is encompassed within the overall research framework. For the current study a qualitative research framework has been preferred. Creswell (1998: 15) defines this as:

> [A]n inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The research builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting.

Researchers must have a compelling rationale for choosing a qualitative research framework (Creswell 1998). In this study, (i) the nature of the research questions, (ii) the level of research done on the topic to date, and (iii) the aims of the research, support the use of a qualitative research framework.

(i) *Nature of the Research Questions*

The research questions driving the current study are exploratory and open-ended. They focus on gaining an insight into students' lived experiences of a given phenomenon. Questions with these characteristics lend themselves to a qualitative research approach (Holliday 2002; Soafer 1999). Avis (2005: 4) remarks, "the research questions that drive qualitative research concern the need to provide an understanding of social behaviour by exploring people's accounts of social life", which is precisely the focus of the current research questions. Furthermore, Cook et al. (2001: 469) state that qualitative research questions "tend to inquire less about 'whether' or 'how much', but more about 'what', 'how', and 'why'". Once again, this matches the current research questions.

(ii) *Level of Existing Research*

Qualitative research is particularly useful for exploring phenomena about which relatively little is known (Kane and O'Reilly de Brún 2001; Creswell 1998). According to Phillips Morrow et al. (2000: 590):

> [Q]ualitative research has begun to gain the reputation of being an excellent method for examining phenomena about which little is known, especially when the research focus is on cultural and ethnic minority issues.

As has been highlighted in Chapter 3, host students' experiences of intercultural contact have been given little attention to date, particularly in the Irish context. As such, a qualitative approach is an appropriate choice.

(iii) Aims of Research

The aim of the current study is to gain a deep understanding of a specific phenomenon, in this case intercultural contact among students from the perspective of host students. This fits the aims of qualitative research, which are "to gain an understanding of the nature and form of phenomena, to unpack meanings, to develop explanations or to generate ideas, concepts and theories" (Ritchie et al. 2003: 82). Ashworth (2003; quoted in Ridley 2004: 93) states that qualitative research aims "to elucidate the meaning of a situation or entity in terms of how it is perceived by the individual person". This again matches the aims of the current research.

4.3.1 Strategies of Inquiry

Having decided to adopt a qualitative research approach, a suitable qualitative strategy of inquiry must be selected. This is heavily informed by the research questions and goals (Punch 2005). Qualitative research offers numerous strategies of inquiry, yet there is little consensus as to how to classify these. Wolcott (2001), for example, identifies 19 qualitative research strategies, while Tesch (1990) suggests 26. Creswell (1998), meanwhile, proposes only five approaches: Biography, Phenomenology, Grounded Theory, Ethnography and Case studies.

Despite these differing perspectives, Miles and Huberman (1994: 6-7) posit that qualitative research strategies share common features: they allow for multiple interpretations of the data, they engage with a given 'field' or 'life situation' with the aim of achieving a holistic overview of the context, they seek "to capture data on the perceptions of the local actors 'from the inside'", and they elucidate "the ways in which people in particular settings come to understand, account for, take action, and otherwise manage their day-to-day situations". Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 5) concur with this, suggesting there are 'recurrent preoccupations' across the multiple qualitative strategies of inquiry. Furthermore, regardless of the strategy adopted, Punch (2005: 194) emphasises that "it is important that the method of analysis is integrated from the start with other parts of the research, rather than being an afterthought".

Having examined numerous strategies of inquiry it was decided that a 'grounded theory' methodology (Glaser and Strauss 1967) would be most appropriate. This methodology is explored in detail in the following section.

4.4 Grounded Theory as a Research Methodology

Grounded theory was first proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967: 1), who defined it as a research methodology facilitating "the discovery of theory from data". In grounded theory a new 'theory' is developed from empirical data; that is, the researcher does not enter the research environment with predetermined hypotheses or a specific theoretical framework (Cutcliffe 2000). As such, grounded theory privileges the data rather than extant theoretical concepts. Before examining the procedures of grounded theory, it is useful to recognise the context within which it was developed.

4.4.1 Origins of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is anchored in the idea of symbolic interactionism, which was briefly discussed in section 2.4.3, and which originated from the work of George Mead (1934) (Jeon 2004). Informed by interpretivism, symbolic interactionism "assumes human beings construct and reconstruct the meaning of reality in a constant interaction with the self and others" (Lomborg and Kirkevold 2003: 196). Symbolic interactionism is based on three premises: (i) individuals act towards things based on the meanings things have for them, (ii) meanings are derived from the social interaction between people, and (iii) meanings are modified through interaction with people (ibid.). According to Annells (1996: 380), "Symbolic interactionism is both a theory about human behaviour and an approach to inquiring about human conduct and group behaviour".

Grounded theory was developed as a response to two principal factors. Firstly, it represented a revolt against the dominance of a quantitative ideology pervading social science research during the 1960s (Charmaz 2006; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Seale 2004). This "winter of positivism", as McCracken (1988: 14) terms it, meant that qualitative research was often derided as "impressionistic, anecdotal, unsystematic and biased", therefore occupying a subordinate status within social science research (Charmaz 2006: 5). The development of grounded theory was a response to this criticism; an attempt "to make 'scientific' that which had commonly been accused of being 'mere journalism' or even 'fiction'" (Johnson et al. 2001: 245).

Secondly, researchers who in principle espoused qualitative inquiry nonetheless recognised a lack of systematic guidelines, which would both improve the quality of research and also counter the criticisms of quantitative thinkers. Glaser and Strauss' frustration with the generation of theories from *a priori* assumptions constituted a catalyst for the development of a method that could instead generate theory from data obtained in the 'real' world. By combining "the depth and richness of qualitative interpretive traditions with the logic, rigor and systematic analysis inherent in quantitative survey research", grounded theory constituted an innovative research approach (Walker and Myrick 2006: 548). It was an attempt to "liberate theory from the seductive comforts of the armchair and empirical research from the uninspiring and restrictive confines of analysing variables or verifying hypotheses" (Dey 2004: 82). According to Glaser and Strauss (1967: vii), it represented an attempt to fill "the embarrassing gap between theory and empirical research" by providing practical guidelines that would enable the rigorous construction of theories relating to social processes from raw data.

4.4.2 Choice of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory was chosen as the methodology for this study based on the research questions and aims, the viability of using such a methodology within the specific research context, and the specific guidelines for data analysis which it offers. As has been stated, the current research questions are flexible and open-ended, which are characteristic of grounded theory research questions (Smith and Biley 1997). Furthermore, McCann and Clark (2003a) refer specifically to its usefulness in studies concerned with interaction and under-explored topics. Coyne and Cowley (2006: 501) state that the goal of grounded theory research is to "to develop theory that will explain the dominant process in the social area being investigated", while McCallin (2003a: 203) suggests it aims to "generate knowledge about the behavioural patterns of a group". These goals match those of the current research.

Grounded theory research is used in many fields, ranging from software development (Coleman and O'Connor 2007) to studies on beer consumption (Pettigrew 2002). Benoliel (1996) and May (1996) refer to its popularity in healthcare research, particularly nursing. It has been used by Ridley (2004) to explore the academic issues faced by international students, by Lee (2006) to explore relational identity in intercultural friendship, and by Bird and Holmes (2005) to explore local students' perceptions of and interactions with international students in a classroom environment. Such applications further support its selection for this study.

4.4.3 Versions of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is the subject of multiple definitions and interpretations (Cutcliffe, 2000; Miller and Fredericks 1999). Although at its nascent stage Glaser and Strauss "invited their readers to use grounded theory strategies flexibly in their own way" (Charmaz 2006: 9), since the 1990s Glaser in particular has become uneasy with diverse interpretations of the methodology. Indeed, Glaser and Strauss themselves split during the 1990s due to their disagreement over the methodology[21]. More recently, Glaser and Holton (2004) outlined the differences between grounded theory and qualitative data analysis from their perspective, arguing that those who do not recognise these differences are compromising grounded theory as it was originally developed.

Morse (2006), however, argues that the introduction of any research methodology into the public domain leaves it open to being adapted and employed differently to how the originator(s) envisaged. Strauss and Corbin (1994: 283) themselves make this point, remarking that "a child once launched is very much subject to a combination of its origins and the evolving contingencies of life. Can it be otherwise with a methodology?"[22]. Woods (2003) argues that this debate over the nature of grounded theory is natural, given that it is a relatively new research methodology. Furthermore, Johnson et al. (2001) argue that merging distinct approaches, including grounded theory, does not necessarily compromise methodological ‘purity’, but can actually enhance rigour.

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[21] Glaser argued that the version of grounded theory proposed by Strauss and Corbin (1990), specifically the analytical stage referred to as 'axial coding', forced the data into preconceived categories, which went against the fundamental idea of the methodology (Walker and Myrick 2006; Charmaz 2006). As a result, he refused to recognise it as grounded theory, but instead termed it "full conceptual description" (Glaser 1992: 122). For a detailed analysis of the differences between Glaser's perspective on grounded theory and that of Strauss, see Walker and Myrick (2006), McCann and Clark (2003b).

[22] Melia (1996: 369) raises a similar question: "When does a method change its name? (When the jet was developed, was it still a plane?)".

As a result of this ongoing jousting, Dey (2004: 80) explains “there is no such thing as ‘grounded theory’ if we mean by that a single, unified methodology, tightly defined and clearly specified”. Therefore, researchers who employ this methodology should identify which version they are using. For this study, the approach proposed by Charmaz, (2006) has been adopted[23]. From Charmaz’s (ibid.: 2) perspective:

> [G]rounded theory methods consist of systematic, yet flexible guidelines for collecting and analyzing qualitative data to construct theories ‘grounded’ in the data themselves. The guidelines offer a set of general principles and heuristic devices rather than formulaic rules.

Charmaz is keen to emphasise the flexible nature of the methodology, viewing it as “a set of principles and practices, not as prescriptions or packages” (ibid.: 9). This provides the researcher with a degree of autonomy when following her guidelines.

4.4.4 Nature of Grounded Theory

Despite the diverging approaches to grounded theory, a review of the literature indicates that there is consensus regarding certain features of the methodology, even though disagreement may still arise regarding how these are actually executed. These features have been identified as the following:

- Theoretical sampling
- Constant comparative analysis
- Coding and categorisation of data
- Memoing
- Theoretical Development

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[23] Glaser’s version was not chosen due to his perspective on the use of existing literature and data collection methods, while Strauss and Corbin’s version was not chosen as I felt this approach imposes overly strict structures on the data analysis. As Melia (1996: 376) remarks of Strauss and Corbin’s approach, “the technical tail is beginning to wag the theoretical dog”.

Theoretical Sampling

Glaser and Strauss (1967: 45) define theoretical sampling as:

> [T]he process of data collection for generating theory, whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyzes his [her] data and then decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his [her] theory as it emerges. (author's addition)

Theoretical sampling directs the researcher to build upon concepts and tentative hypotheses which are emerging from the data, and becomes increasingly important as analysis progresses (Charmaz 2006; Jeon 2004). This means that purposive sampling techniques are used in grounded theory, as the sampling strategy is directed by emerging ideas.

Constant Comparative Analysis

Constant comparative analysis involves constantly examining the data for commonalities, contrasts and variations throughout the research process (Emerson 2004). In practical terms, this means that in grounded theory the process of data collection and analysis is not linear (Coyne and Cowley 2006; Dick 2005). Instead, in order to compare the data and further develop and test the emerging ideas, data collection and analysis is conducted in a cyclical fashion, with both collection and analysis "interwoven in a seamless dialectic" (Dey 2004: 84). Constant comparative analysis therefore demands that the researcher analyse data *as it is collected*, and should not wait until the end of data collection to commence analysis. Creswell (1998: 57) describes this as a "'zigzag' process – out to the field to gather information, analyze the data, back to the field to gather more information, analyze the data, and so forth".

Constant comparative analysis continues throughout the research process and, like theoretical sampling, concludes "when your data is 'saturated'" (Charmaz 2006: 113). According to Charmaz (ibid.: 113) "categories are 'saturated' when gathering fresh data no longer sparks new theoretical insights". However, she cautions against confusing saturation with the simple repetition of described events, actions, and statements. Dey (1999: 257), however, considers the term 'saturation' to be "another unfortunate metaphor", which confuses researchers. Instead he suggests the term ‘theoretical sufficiency’, which he believes fits better with the nature of grounded theory (ibid.).

Coding and Categorising Data

Coding is the cornerstone of data analysis in grounded theory. It is the process of “attach[ing] labels to segments of data that depict what each segment is about. Coding distils data, sorts them, and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data” (Charmaz 2006: 3; author’s addition). These labels are called ‘codes’, and can be attached to words, phrases, sentences or entire paragraphs (Miles and Huberman 1994).

Eisenhardt (2002: 17) comments that “a huge chasm often separates data from conclusions”. By linking raw data with theory development, coding represents the ‘analytic scaffolding’ bridging the data and conclusions (Charmaz 2005: 517). In practical terms, coding allows the researcher to condense large quantities of raw data, such as interview transcripts, into manageable units to facilitate further analysis. In this sense, coding is a mechanism for ‘data reduction’, which "aids the organization, retrieval, and interpretation of data" (Coffey and Atkinson 1996: 27). However, Coffey and Atkinson (ibid.: 30) also suggest that coding is a process of ‘data complication’, insofar as it involves “going beyond the data, thinking creatively with the data, asking the data questions, and generating theories and frameworks”.

Taking interview transcripts as the primary source of data, whereby each code represents a label for participants’ comments, the coding process can contribute to the rigour of the analysis by constituting an audit trail linking the raw data with the emerging categories and theory, albeit based on the researcher’s interpretation. A detailed example of this is provided in section 4.7.1.

While proponents of grounded theory proffer different coding stages and strategies, Charmaz (2006) states that coding consists of three phases; (i) Initial Coding, (ii) Focused Coding and (iii) Theoretical Coding. **Initial coding** – also referred to as ‘open coding’ – is the first phase, during which the researcher engages intimately with the raw data, assigning labels – codes – to segments of the data. During this phase Charmaz (2006: 50) advises the researcher to keep codes “short, simple, active and analytic". She also recommends that the researcher code swiftly and with spontaneity, and importantly, "code data *as* actions" (ibid.: 48). Initial coding is crucial, as it represents the researcher's first interpretation of the data. The labels assigned to initial codes are provisional and may be reworded as analysis progresses (Charmaz 2006).

As part of initial coding, *in vivo* codes may be generated. These are "codes of participants' special terms", and are particularly useful because they preserve participants' views and actions in the coding itself[24] (ibid.: 55). *In vivo* codes may be general terms familiar to most people, an innovative term which concisely encapsulates meanings or experiences, or 'insider' terms specific to a certain group (ibid.). Unpacking these codes can reveal hidden assumptions and direct data collection and analysis.

Focused coding is more conceptual than initial coding, and "requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorise your data incisively and completely" (ibid.: 57). During this phase, comparing and contrasting the data is vital, as it enables the creation of analytic categories, which facilitate theoretical development. Focused coding therefore generates analytic categories, which are essentially abstract 'umbrella concepts' encompassing multiple initial codes. In practical terms, focused coding requires the researcher to analyse lists of initial codes and identify higher categories into which these may comfortably fit.

Theoretical coding moves the analysis towards a more abstract, theoretical level. At this stage of coding the focus is not simply on categorising data, but on exploring relationships between categories which have emerged during focused coding. This again informs data collection, as the researcher may identify gaps in the emerging theory and return to the field for further exploration. This highlights the circular nature of data collection and analysis in grounded theory. Theoretical coding should lead to the emergence of one or more 'core categories', which are categories which are central to explicating the nature of the phenomenon from the researcher's perspective. This stage is therefore central to the process of theory building.

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[24] Examples of *in vivo* codes from the current data analysis are 'Being in the same boat', or 'Dumbing down'. They are constructed directly from students' comments.

Combined, these three stages of coding move the analysis from the ‘ground’ to a higher, abstract theoretical level, in a systematic, albeit non-linear, fashion. As such, grounded theory offers a link between the raw data and the developed theory.

Memoing

Memos are “informal analytical notes” which the researcher produces during the research process (Charmaz 2006: 72). “When you write memos, you stop and analyse your ideas about the codes in any – and every – way that occurs to you during the moment” (ibid.: 72). In this sense, memos “reflect the researcher’s internal dialogue with the data at a point in time” (McCann and Clark 2003a: 15). Memoing is extremely valuable. Beck (1996: 11) argues that memos:

> [H]elp to (a) raise data to a conceptual level, (b) develop the properties of each category, and (c) generate hypotheses about connection between categories.

Furthermore, they can help the researcher unblock and flesh out ideas which may occur, and document the genesis of a concept (Orona 2002), reflect on the phenomenon under exploration (Lofland and Lofland 1984), improve their personal writing voice, spark new ideas, identify gaps in the analysis (Charmaz 2006), and act as an audit trail for the researcher’s thinking and decision making over the process (Smith and Biley 1997).

Charmaz (2006) differentiates between early and advanced memos, and in particular talks about how systematic memoing can help raise focused codes to abstract categories by helping the researcher to define categories, explicate their properties, specify conditions, describe consequences, and reveal relationships within the data. Memos need not be exclusively textual, and can take the form of diagrams.

Theoretical Development

As stated, grounded theory aims to discover or construct, depending on the researcher’s epistemological perspectives, a theory based in empirical data relating to a specific phenomenon. Dey (1993: 51) defines a theory as “simply an idea about how other ideas can be related”. This ‘theory’ can take various forms in terms of what it describes or explains, and how it is presented.

McCann and Clark (2003a) point out that grounded theory studies typically produce substantive rather than formal theories. According to Kearney (1998: 181) a substantive theory seeks to uncover “the basic social-psychological or social-structural processes that are used by persons or social groups in response to specific social problems”, while a formal theory “is a broader based and more generalized process that occurs in a variety of distinct, yet theoretically similar, social situations”. Given that grounded theory studies are typically focused on a phenomenon as experienced by a specific group of people, it is logical that grounded theories would be classified as substantive rather than formal.

Theories may also be differentiated in terms of what they seek to achieve. Positivist theories typically aim to predict and indicate sequential causation, while interpretive theories, such as those produced in grounded theory research, prioritise gaining an understanding on a phenomenon rather than predicting future outcomes. Indeed, Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 144) posit that “the guiding principle of theorizing is not causal explanation but the identification of patterns and associations”. Lofland and Lofland (1984) argue that qualitative research cannot provide answers to causal questions given that the research design does not meet the strict criteria for proving causation. However, Miles and Huberman (1994: 147) take a different stance:

> We consider qualitative analysis to be a very powerful method for assessing causality…Qualitative analysis, with its close-up look, can identify *mechanisms*, going beyond sheer association. It is unrelentingly *local*, and deals well with the complex network of events and processes in a situation. It can sort out the *temporal* dimension, showing clearly what preceded what, through direct observation or *retrospection*. It is well equipped to cycle back and forth between *variables* and *processes* – showing that ‘stories’ are not capricious, but include underlying variables, and that variables are not disembodied, but have connections over time. (original italics)

Jeon (2004: 250) also supports the idea that a grounded theory may identify causal factors, arguing that it “offers explanations as to causes, conditions, contexts and consequences of the processes occurring”. The overall implication, therefore, is that grounded theories are substantive theories which may both describe a phenomenon and explain processes underpinning it.

Given the diverse nature of grounded theories, it is not surprising that the method for presenting them may also vary greatly. According to Smith and Biley (1997: 24):

> The end product of a grounded theory analysis usually takes the form of a set of completely saturated fundamental core categories, in addition to a list of definitions, large quantities of theoretical memos, possible linkage suggestions and a model (or number of models) that describe and explain the data.

Creswell (1998: 56), meanwhile, states that a grounded theory "is articulated toward the end of a study and can assume the form of a narrative statement (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), a visual picture (Morrow & Smith, 1995), or a series of hypotheses or propositions (Creswell & Brown, 1992)". In terms of the use of diagrams and models, McCann and Clark (2003a: 14) acclaims their ability to "visually represent the conceptual relationship that develops among categories". This point is also made by Charmaz (2006) and Coyne and Cowley (2006). Indeed, Orona (2002: 377) argues: "If the researcher is unable to graphically depict 'what all is going on here,' he or she is probably not genuinely clear of the process yet". With this in mind, diagrams have been employed in the presentation of the current research findings.

4.4.5 The Relationship between Grounded Theory and Existing Literature

The use of existing literature represents perhaps the most polemical issue in grounded theory research. While engagement with existing literature *prior* to primary research is characteristic of most strategies of inquiry, Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued against this. As grounded theory has become increasingly popular as a research methodology, this idea has been the subject of vigorous debate. Specifically, the crux is not whether a literature review *should* be conducted – there is consensus that it should – but rather *when* it should be conducted and how extensive is should be (Cutcliffe 2000).

The argument *against* engaging with existing literature from the outset is based on the premise that such engagement may 'contaminate' the data collection. Because the methodology privileges empirical data, Glaser (1992) argues that grounded theorists must 'Learn not to know', which includes avoiding engagement with existing literature prior to entering the field. As McCallin (2003b: 63) puts it, the fundamental concern is that "the researcher may be sidetracked by received knowledge and interpretations that support taken-for-granted assumptions, which are not relevant in the new area of study". Furthermore, Glaser (1998: 62) argues that a literature review may lead to external "rhetorical jargon" impinging upon the research. Indeed, Charmaz (2006: 165) suggests that delaying the literature review can help "to avoid importing preconceived ideas and imposing them on your work. Delaying the review encourages you to articulate *your* ideas". Nathaniel's (2006: 6) remarks are a cogent summary of these concerns:

> [T]he grounded theorist should avoid a thorough literature review before beginning the GT process in order to avoid contamination from mediated beliefs, preconceptions, distorted values, and false premises.

Many researchers, however, are uneasy with this idea, and proffer numerous arguments advocating early engagement with the literature. In the first instance, a review of extant literature can provide a rationale for the study, including a justification for a specific research approach (Coyne and Cowley 2006; McMenamin 2006; Creswell 1998). Secondly, it can ensure the study has not already been done (Chiovitti and Piran 2003), while highlighting pertinent lacunae in existing knowledge (Creswell 1998; Hutchinson 1993). Thirdly, it can help contextualise the study (McCann and Clark 2003a), and reveal how the phenomenon has been studied to date (McMenamin 2006; Denzin 2002). Fourthly, it can help the researcher develop 'sensitising concepts' (McCann and Clark 2003a; Coffey and Atkinson 1996), gain theoretical sensitivity (McCann and Clark 2003c; Strauss and Corbin 1998), and become aware of possible unhelpful preconceptions (Maijala et al. 2003). Fifthly, it may promote "clarity in thinking about concepts and possible theory development" (Henwood and Pidgeon 2006: 350). Lastly, Dick (2005) makes the point that not informing oneself about germane literature in advance can leave the researcher open to criticism. As Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 157) remark:

> The open-mindedness of the researcher should not be mistaken for the empty mindedness of the researcher who is not adequately steeped in the research traditions of a discipline. It is after all, not very clever to rediscover the wheel, and the student or researcher who is ignorant of the relevant literature is always in danger of doing the equivalent.

Collectively, these arguments in favour of commencing a literature review *before* undertaking primary research are compelling. Furthermore, in terms of the argument that engaging with literature may contaminate the research by imposing assumptions and preconceptions, the idea that any researcher undertakes a study without some level of prior knowledge or ideas is unrealistic (Ni 2006). Cutcliffe (2000: 1480) posits that “no potential researcher is an empty vessel, a person with no history or background”, while Eisenhardt (2002: 12) remarks, “it is impossible to achieve this idea of a clean theoretical slate”. Indeed, Kools et al. (1996: 315) argue that “rarely do researchers totally abandon prior substantive or methodological knowledge in the pursuit of understanding a complex social phenomenon”. Charmaz (2006) points out that Dey (1999) and Layder (1998) suggest it is naïve to view any researcher as a ‘tabula rusa’, while Clarke (2005: 13; paraphrasing Elkins 2003) argues: “There is actually ‘something ludicrous about pretending to be a theoretical virgin’”. Nathaniel (2006), meanwhile, recognises that for PhD candidates in particular, the idea of not engaging with extant literature at an early stage may be unviable.

Given the contrasting perspectives, the researcher must make an informed decision regarding how and when extant literature will be employed in a grounded theory study. In the current study, I took discrete approaches to engaging with existing empirical research and existing theoretical concepts. Prior to commencing data collection I engaged extensively with existing empirical studies relating to intercultural relations and student diversity in higher education, as well as literature on the internationalisation of higher education, in order to identify what work had been done, which issues were central to these fields, and what knowledge gaps existed. This review of existing research, which formed the basis for Chapter 3, facilitated a familiarity with the overall “geography of the subject”, and was central to the formulation and justification of the research questions (McMenamin 2006: 2). This approach reflects the arguments for conducting a prior literature review outlined above.

In terms of engaging with existing theoretical concepts, while I came to the research environment with existing theoretical knowledge[25], I deliberately avoided imposing a specific theoretical framework on the study at the outset. This approach to extant theories is what Henwood and Pidgeon (2006: 350) term ‘theoretical agnosticism’, which they argue “is a better watchword than theoretical ignorance to sum up the ways of using the literature at the early stages of the flow of work in grounded theory”. This approach does not advocate that the researcher ignore existing theories, but rather avoid the imposition of specific theoretical frameworks, as this may cause the researcher to analyse the data through a specific theoretical lens.

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[25] I had completed an MA in Intercultural Studies prior to commencing my PhD research.

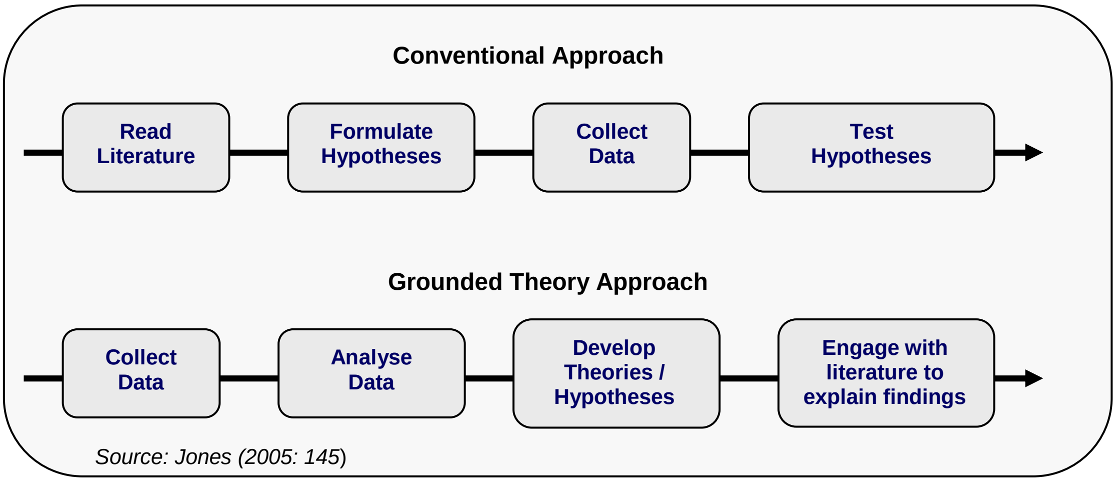
Accordingly, engagement with existing theories was directed by the concepts and ideas which emerged during the process of data collection and analysis. The purpose of this was to “link[s] extant research and theory with concepts, constructs, and properties of the new theory” (Hutchinson 1993: 205). This is in keeping with grounded theory research, given that grounded theorists “do not use theories for deducing specific hypotheses before data-gathering” (Charmaz 2006: 169). As Locke (2001: 122) explains, in grounded theory “researchers integrate existing literature on the substantive topic into their thinking *as the theoretical categories and framework stabilize*” (author’s italics). This point is reiterated by Charmaz (2006: 164), who directs the researcher to “Draft your literature review and theoretical framework *in relation to your grounded theory*” (original italics). In this regard, grounded theorists adopt a respectful yet critical stance towards extant theories, and require “extant concepts to earn their way into your narrative” (ibid.: 126). As such, in grounded theory the theoretical literature review is fundamentally informed by the data analysis and research findings. In the current study, therefore, existing theoretical concepts from different fields were identified and accessed as and when it was deemed necessary in order to progress the overall study, revealing a pragmatic relationship with the existing literature.

As mentioned briefly in Chapter 1, a grounded theory methodology has significant implications for the overall study, including the manner in which existing theoretical concepts are introduced, presented and discussed. At a practical level, the implications of the preceding discussion are that a theoretical literature review does not take place prior to data analysis in grounded theory. Indeed, the resulting theory may direct the researcher towards areas of research and theoretical concepts which were not anticipated prior to the commencement of the analysis, and therefore theories discussed prior to the analysis may prove redundant in relation to the research findings (Jones 2005). As Locke (ibid.: 124) states:

> It is also the case that the theoretical conversation to which the composed grounded theory makes a contribution may not be established until after the theoretical frame is developed. Glaser (1978) points out that researchers may not know which literature is relevant until analysis is well advanced.

In presenting grounded theory research, therefore, theories identified as relevant to the findings should then be introduced either during, or following, the presentation of research findings, but not prior to analysis. As Locke (2001: 123) explains, "authors may choose to reserve their integration of existing theory and research with their framework for a discussion section following the results". As a result, grounded theory studies may be presented in a somewhat unconventional fashion, although this is in keeping with the specific methodological guidelines. This is illustrated in Figure 4.1, which contrasts the conventional research approach with that of grounded theory.

Figure 4.1 Comparison of conventional and grounded theory approach to research


Conventional Approach
Read Literature
Formulate Hypotheses
Collect Data
Test Hypotheses
Grounded Theory Approach
Collect Data
Analyse Data
Develop Theories / Hypotheses
Engage with literature to explain findings

Source: Jones (2005: 145)

In the current study, therefore, engagement with existing theoretical concepts which relate specifically to the research findings does not take place until Chapter 9, following the presentation of these research findings.

4.4.6 Challenges of Using Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a demanding research methodology. The researcher must try to set aside extant theoretical preconceptions and may have difficulty knowing when the data is saturated (Creswell 1998). Backman and Kyngäs (1999) refer to the challenge of appropriately using literature, the circular nature of the constant comparative process, the demanding nature of data analysis, and the task of actually presenting a grounded theory to be the primary difficulties associated with the methodology. Glaser (1978) himself referred to the arduous process of grounded theory data analysis as a ‘drugless trip’, and later (1998, 1999) argued that certain researchers are not suited to using the methodology. Barnes (1996) emphasises the problem of using grounded theory when the researcher and participants are from different cultures, while Charmaz (2006) highlights the difficulty of collecting sufficient data. Coupled with the confusion resulting from the multiple perspectives on grounded theory which were discussed in section 4.4.3, and the debate on the use of extant literature, the application of grounded theory can therefore prove challenging.

Given these challenges, Glaser (1999) suggests that the researcher must have the ability to conceptualise data and tolerate confusion, while McCallin (2003a) lists numerous skills under the headings of ‘thinking skills’, ‘communication skills’, ‘organizational skills’ and ‘creative ability’ which she believes are necessary to successfully use grounded theory as a methodology.

4.4.7 Evaluating Grounded Theory Studies

In terms of evaluating grounded theory research, be it the process or outcome, there are many voices but no agreed set of criteria. This is not surprising given the diversity of approaches which have been highlighted. Smith and Biley (1997) posit that traditional scientific methods of evaluation are inappropriate for grounded theory, while Jeon (2004), Lomborg and Kirkevold (2003), and Strauss and Corbin (1999) each discuss the issue of rigour and quality in grounded theory, both in terms of the process and the outcomes. Charmaz (2006: 182-183), whose approach to grounded theory was chosen for this study, proffers four criteria for evaluating grounded theory studies: Credibility, Originality, Resonance and Usefulness. The specific questions which she attributes to each of these criteria are listed in Table 4.1. In Chapter 10 these questions will be revisited.

Table 4.1 Criteria for Evaluating Grounded Theory Research (Charmaz 2006)

Criteria	Questions
Credibility	- Have you reached intimate familiarity with the setting or topic? - Do your data sufficiently support your claims? - Have you made systematic comparisons between categories? - Is there a strong logical argument linking data, argument and analysis?
Originality	- Are your categories fresh? - Do you offer new insights? - What is the social and theoretical significance of your work? - How does it challenge current ideas and concepts?
Resonance	- Do the categories portray the fullness of the studied experience? - Do the findings make sense to those people central to the phenomenon? - Do the findings offer those people deeper insights about their lives and worlds?
Usefulness	- How can your analysis be applied in every day settings? - Does it suggest any generic processes? - Can the analysis spark further research? - How does it contribute to knowledge?

4.4.8 Summary of Grounded Theory

Although a valuable methodology, the disagreements enshrouding grounded theory can make it difficult for the researcher to get a clear understanding of what the process actually entails. Detailed and critical engagement with literature on the methodology is therefore necessary in order to reach a stance with which the individual researcher is comfortable. Furthermore, although the methodology affords a degree of flexibility insofar as it offers "tools to use rather than recipes to follow" (Charmaz 2006: 10), this forces the researcher to engage with ambiguity at various points throughout the research process – something with which certain researchers may not be comfortable.

Employing a grounded theory approach has major implications for planning, managing and executing the entire study. In particular, the concurrent nature of data collection and analysis means this process takes a long time. In practical terms this demands ongoing access to participants central to the phenomenon, which may not always be possible. Therefore, I had to set myself a concrete timeframe within which to collect and analyse the data, taking into account the unavailability of students at certain times of the year. Overall, however, by demanding that the researcher engage intimately with the research environment, the methodology can produce rich, innovative research findings which might not result from the imposition of a preconceived theoretical framework.

4.5 Research Procedure

This section outlines the procedure for setting up the research, including the selection of a research site, the operationalisation of key concepts, preliminary data collection, the sampling technique employed, and the process of participant recruitment.

4.5.1 Selection of a Data Site

Having established the research questions and methodological approach, a suitable research environment, or 'data site' (Lofland and Lofland 1984), had to be identified and accessed. It was decided to conduct the research in Dublin City University (DCU). Given that I was based in DCU and was very familiar with the overall environment, it was felt that gaining access to students would be easier. Furthermore, figures sourced from DCU Registry indicated that DCU had relatively high levels of student diversity, taking nationality as the criterion for diversity. Data are collected annually and presented according to an 'Irish'/'Non-Irish' classification. Based on this classification, in the 2005/2006 academic year 18.1% of the total student population in DCU was classified as 'Non-Irish'. This implies that structural diversity for the 2005/2006 academic year was 18.1% in DCU[26]. Given this level of student diversity, it was felt that DCU represented a good research environment.

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[26] Breaking down structural diversity according to undergraduate and postgraduate students showed that it was significantly higher at postgraduate level (33.3%) than undergraduate level (14.2%).

Approval to conduct the research in DCU was granted by the school research committee and the DCU ethics committee[27].

4.5.2 Operationalising 'Host Culture Students'

In addition to identifying and gaining access to an appropriate data site, the research questions had to be operationalised so that the research could be conducted. Central to this was the definition of the term 'host culture' student. As discussed in detail in section 2.5, the decision was taken to operationalise 'host culture' based on nationality, yet encourage students to articulate for themselves their personal perceptions of culture and cultural difference.

4.5.3 Preliminary Data Collection

Prior to commencing formal data collection, preliminary research was conducted with several 'key informants', as recommended by Kane and O'Reilly-De Brún (2001). This involved interviewing administrative and academic staff from around the university, including the Dean of the DCU International Office, the DCU Student Support Facilitator, the DCU Sport and Recreation Officer, the DCU Student Activities Officer, the head of DCU Counselling Services, two representatives from the university's Interfaith Centre, and several lecturing staff from different faculties.

The purpose of this process was to orient myself within the research environment and get the perspectives of staff from across the college on the interaction between students both inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, meetings were held with two individuals from outside DCU – a representative of ICOS and a lecturer from the Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT) – who were knowledgeable about international students in Ireland and had themselves conducted research in the area. Three telephone interviews were also conducted with academics from the United States, Dr. Daryl Smith, twice, and Dr. Patricia Marin. A meeting was also held with Prof. Mitchell Chang from the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA). Each of these academics has conducted research in the area of student diversity in higher education, and provided useful advice. I also exchanged emails with numerous academics in the UK, Australia, New Zealand and Japan who have experience in this area.

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[27] It was originally planned to conduct the research in the Royal College of Surgeons of Ireland (RCSI) given that institution's very high levels of student diversity. However, the School research committee advised against this.

4.5.4 Sampling Strategy

A purposive sampling strategy was used to identify students to participate in the study. Purposive sampling involves "selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions" (Mason 1996: 93-94). In the specific case of grounded theory, purposive sampling can also be termed 'theoretical sampling', insofar as the sampling process seeks to identify informants "based on their ability to contribute to an evolving theory" (Creswell 1998: 118).

The use of purposive sampling in grounded theory research is logical as the participants "need to be individuals who have taken an action or [are] participating in a process that is central to the grounded theory study" (ibid.: 114). That is, the researcher must identify and engage with individuals who "are gatekeepers to local knowledge" (Bong 2002: 4), or "information-rich cases … those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research" (Patton 1990: 169; quoted in Coyne 1997: 627). According to Taylor and Bogdan (1984: 83), "in theoretical sampling the actual number of 'cases' studied is relatively unimportant; what is important is the potential of each 'case' to aid the researcher in developing theoretical insights into the area of life being studied". This means that in grounded theory studies the number of participants is typically quite small.

Gobo (2004) and Creswell (1998) emphasise that the quality of the purposive sampling procedure is vital. Sampling should be underpinned by clear criteria and rationales for these criteria. In the current study, the purposive sampling procedure was based on three criteria:

(i) Structural Diversity at course level

Students had to be registered in courses which had a minimum of 15% structural diversity, whereby diversity was defined based on nationality. Given that levels of student diversity in DCU have been increasing annually it was decided to focus on host students registered in courses with relatively high levels of structural diversity. Furthermore, students in these courses theoretically have the opportunity to interact with culturally different students in the formal learning environment, so their experiences of intercultural contact may be more regular.

(ii) Number of students registered in the course

Students had to be registered in courses which had a minimum of 25 full-time registered students as I was conscious there needed to be a sufficient potential number of students to sample.

(iii) Year of Study

Students had to be registered in second year of a full-time undergraduate course in DCU. Undergraduate students were preferred to postgraduate students as they tend to be at a more formative stage of their personal development. It was felt that securing the participation of 4th year undergraduate students would be too difficult given their workload in the final year. 3rd year students were not appropriate as many courses require students to either complete a year or semester-long off-campus work placement during 3rd year, or spend an academic year overseas. This would therefore complicate accessibility. It was decided not to engage with 1st year students as it was felt that first year in college is a period of significant change and adaptation for many students, and so their perceptions, experiences and behavioural patterns would be more established in second year and they would be in a better position to reflect on their experiences.

Analysing the statistics obtained from the DCU Registry for the 2005/06 academic year in accordance with these criteria, three courses were identified as potential sampling sites. Details of these courses are shown in Table 4.2 overleaf. Having identified these three courses, the coordinator of each programme was contacted. I explained the nature of the research to each coordinator and received their approval. Prior to approaching host students to request their participation, informal interviews were held with three international students from the identified courses. These also represented ‘key informants’ similar to those interviewed prior to identifying specific courses. The objective of these interviews was to further orient myself and get an insight into the nature of intercultural relations within these courses from the perspective of these students.

Table 4.2 Courses Satisfying Imposed Sampling Criteria

Course	School	Irish students	Non-Irish students	Total students	Structural Diversity (%)
B.A. in European Business (Year 2)	School of Business Studies	37	23	60	38.3
B.Sc. in Psychiatric Nursing (Year 2)	School of Nursing	50	11	61	18
B.Sc. in Chemical & Pharmaceutical Sciences (Year 2)	School of Chemical Sciences	19	6	25	24
Total		**106**	**40**	**146**	**24.9**

4.5.5 Recruiting Participants

Following consultation with course coordinators it was agreed that requests to participate in the research would be made via personalised emails. In the email I introduced myself, gave a brief overview of the study and requested the student's participation. I also assured them that their course coordinator and the university ethics committee had approved the study, that participation was voluntary, and that every effort would be made to ensure confidentiality. Students were asked to respond either positively of negatively to the request by return email. Where no response was received within five days, a follow-up email was sent. In cases where no response was received to this second email no further contact was made as it was felt this could be perceived to be obtrusive.

In total 92 students were contacted directly by email between October 2006 and May 2007. Of these, 37 students replied to either the first or second email, with 21 students agreeing to participate in the study. In the run-up to summer exams it proved increasingly difficult to recruit participants. Given that the ratio of refusals/non-responses was increasing notably, I decided to use ‘snowball sampling’ (Creswell 1998), whereby additional participants were recruited with the aid of students who had already participated in the research by means of a referral system. Three students were recruited in this way. Furthermore, after completing twenty interviews, it was decided to offer students an incentive to participate, in the form of a voucher for the campus bookstore to the value of €15. This was agreed with my supervisors.

In total, 24 students were recruited; nine from the B.Sc. in Chemical and Pharmaceutical Sciences (AC)[28], eight from the B.A. in European Business (EB), and seven from the B.Sc. in Nursing (Psychiatric) (BNPY). Table 4.3 overleaf provides details of the students who participated in the study, including their pseudonym, course, sex, and age. Students are listed in the order in which they were interviewed.

4.5.6 Efforts to Protect Confidentiality and Anonymity

In an effort to maintain the anonymity and confidentiality of participants, each student was assigned a pseudonym (McCann and Clark 2003c). In accordance with the stipulations of the university ethics committee, a ‘Plain Language Statement’ and an ‘Informed Consent Form’ were also given to participants. Copies of both forms are included in Appendix A and B respectively.

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[28] AC is used as the abbreviation for this course as it was previously called Analytical Chemistry (AC) and many of the students still refer to it as that.

Table 4.3 Profiles of Research Participants

Name	Course	Gender	Age
Noelle	EB	F	18
Ivan	EB	M	20
Frank	AC	M	22
Sally	EB	F	19
Laura	EB	F	>30
Eve	AC	F	19
Yvette	EB	F	21
Orla	BNPY	F	>30
Amy	BNPY	F	21
Owen	BNPY	M	20
Carol	EB	F	20
Kimberly	EB	F	20
Cara	AC	F	18
David	AC	M	18
Sorcha	EB	F	20
Samantha	AC	F	20
Claudine	BNPY	F	19
Jane	BNPY	F	20
Daragh	AC	M	19
Emer	AC	F	20
Clodagh	AC	F	20
Jack	AC	M	20
Etain	BNPY	F	21
Elaine	BNPY	F	20

4.6 Data Collection

This section outlines the chosen method of data collection. It explains the decision to use interviewing as the primary method of data collection and issues related to this.

4.6.1 Choice of Interviewing as Method of Data Collection

For the current study it was decided to use face-to-face qualitative interviews as the primary method of data collection. Kvale (1983: 174; quoted in Opdenakker 2006: 1) defines a qualitative interview as "an interview, whose purpose is to gather descriptions of the life-world of the interviewee with respect to interpretation of the meaning of the described phenomena". Interviews in grounded theory studies are relatively ‘unstructured’ (Lofland and Lofland 1984), although it can be argued that they become increasingly structured as the researcher seeks to explicate emerging concepts in accordance with theoretical sampling. Even in unstructured interviews, however, Rapley (2004: 26) emphasises that “Interviewing is never just ‘a conversation’, it may be conversational, but you as the interviewer have some level of control”.

Interviews are widely used in qualitative research (Holstein and Gubrium 2002; Bong 2002). Indeed, Rapley (2004: 15, original italics), paraphrasing Silverman (1993: 19) argues that we are part of an ‘interview society’ in which interviewing:

> …pervades and produces our contemporary cultural experiences and knowledges of authentic personal, private selves … interviewing is the central resource through which contemporary social science engages with issues that concern it.

Furthermore, interviewing is suggested as the most appropriate and commonly used method of data collection in grounded theory research (Charmaz 2006; Goulding 2002; Backman and Kyngäs 1999).

4.6.2 Strengths, Weaknesses and Challenges of Interviewing

The rationale for qualitative interviewing is based on the idea that “people are experts on their own experience and so best able to report how they experienced a particular event or phenomenon” (Darlington and Scott 2002: 48). Furthermore, “[a]

basic assumption in in-depth interviewing research is that the meaning people make of their experience affects the way they carry out that experience" (Seidman 1998: 4). This is in keeping with the idea of symbolic interactionism discussed in section 4.4.1. Smith and Biley (1997: 21) argue that "interviews are especially useful for uncovering the subjective domain, the world of feelings, perceptions, values, morals and experiences", which is precisely the aim of the current research. Darlington and Scott (2002) point out that interviewing affords flexibility to the data collection process, assists the researcher in understanding the thoughts and feelings of the interviewee, and actively engages both parties in the process, while Marshall and Rossman (1999) advocate interviewing based on the ability to collect large amounts of data quickly and immediately follow up or seek clarification. Interviewing can also be extremely useful for exploring phenomena which cannot be easily observed (Lee 2006). In the case of the current study, where students are encouraged to articulate their subjective perceptions of culture, observation would have been extremely problematic.

In terms of the weaknesses of interviewing, Darlington and Scott (2002) suggest that these are best conceptualised as issues about which the researcher should be mindful, rather than inherent weaknesses. They point out that interviews may tell us what people say they do, but cannot reveal what actually happens. This point is echoed by Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 19), who comment that interviews "do not give us access to how people actually perform a wide variety of daily activities". Interviewing also presents numerous challenges to the interviewer. Trust and rapport must be established to facilitate self-disclosure (Charmaz 2006). To do this, McCracken (1988: 38) recommends the interviewer present herself or himself as "a benign, accepting, curious (but not inquisitive) individual who is prepared and eager to listen to virtually any testimony with interest". Accordingly, during the interviews, I made a conscious effort make the students to feel at ease. I commenced the interview with general questions, and although I offered my opinion when asked for it, I avoided comments which I felt could be perceived as judgemental.

Getting interviewees to engage in the topic, articulate their opinions, or elaborate on ideas may also be challenging. To overcome this, 'probing' strategies are recommended (Fielding and Thomas 2001). Such strategies can involve using ‘floating prompts’ (McCracken 1998: 34) – which can be as subtle as raising an eyebrow and nodding to express interest and encourage continuation, or more definite, like asking interviewees to clarify a term – or ‘planned prompts’, which “give respondents something to ‘push off against’” (ibid.: 35). Fielding and Thomas (2001: 129), however, argue that “Probing needs skill because it can easily lead to bias”.

This issue of interviewer bias is contentious. McCracken (1988: 21) prioritises the “law of nondirection”, arguing that the interviewer must be conscious of not leading the interviewee. Rapley (2004), on the other hand, argues that the interview data is simply a *product of the interaction* between interviewer and interviewee, and so by definition cannot be biased given that concerns about bias are based on the assumption of an external truth held by the interviewee. Quoting Gubrium and Holstein (2002: 15), he suggests that interviewers “cannot very well taint knowledge if that knowledge is not conceived as existing in some pure form apart from the circumstances of its production” (Rapley 2004: 16).

While both arguments are valid insofar as they reflect discrete epistemological perspectives, the point can be made that the specific aim of the interview is to explore the perceptions, thoughts, feelings and experiences *of the interviewee* relating to a given phenomenon, and this must be borne in mind by the interviewer during the co-creation of the interview data. Therefore, although recognising Rapley’s stance that the interviewer cannot be biased insofar as the interview constitutes a process of mutual knowledge creation, the imposition of assumptions, suggestions, or rigid direction by the interviewer may compromise the quality of this co-created data in terms of the depth of insights achieved and their usefulness in answering the central research concern.

Returning to the idea of encouraging interviewees to speak and engage, in the current study I came to realise that even though most students appeared to be relaxed and willing to talk, they often had difficulty articulating opinions and reasons for their reported behaviours. In particular, despite reporting very little contact with students perceived to be culturally different, several students were initially unable to offer reasons for this, which complicated my objective of identifying factors that impact upon their intercultural contact[29]. This is an interesting point, given that in grounded theory research participants are purposively selected based on their knowledge of, or participation in, the phenomenon under investigation (Smith and Biley 1997). Morse (1991: 129), for example, remarks that “informants must be knowledgeable about the topic and experts by virtue of their involvement in specific life events and/or associations”. However, although the students in this study were undoubtedly central to this phenomenon – the main aim was to understand *their* perceptions and experiences – they were not necessarily ‘knowledgeable’ about it insofar as they were not used to reflecting on it and discussing it. Kendall (1999) reports a very similar issue in her study of what ‘Doing Well’ meant to people with Attention-deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD). Although her interviewees, who had ADHD, were again central to the phenomenon, she explains, “it quickly became apparent, however, that the participants were not used to talking about doing well” (ibid.: 750). A degree of explanation for this can perhaps by found by reference to Denzin (2002: 364), who, citing Dilthey (1976) suggests:

> In a certain sense, interpretive researchers hope to understand their subjects better than the subjects understand themselves, to see effects and power where subjects see only emotion and personal meaning.

In the current study, a variety of probing strategies were therefore used to encourage students to reflect and articulate their opinions, thoughts and experiences of intercultural contact.

4.6.3 Development of Interview Guide

An interview guide was prepared prior to commencing formal interviews. The initial interview guide was informed by engagement with existing empirical research, my personal perspectives, and by the preliminary research conducted with the aforementioned ‘key informants’ – university staff, external academics, course coordinators and international students. As Rapley (2004: 17, original italics) explains, a list of questions “is *initially* generated in negotiation with the relevant academic and non-academic literature, alongside your thoughts and hunches about what areas *might* be important to cover in the interview".

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[29] The code *‘Not knowing reasons for lack of mixing’* (10), which appears in Table 6.1 encapsulates this issue.

The use of an interview guide is commonly recommended (Creswell 1998). Specifically, this gave a degree of structure and direction to the interviews and helped me, as the interviewer, to relax and not worry about forgetting to ask certain questions. As recommended by Lofland and Lofland (1984: 57) the first page of the interview guide was a 'facesheet' for recording "gross factual data", in this case interviewees' names, course of study, age, and gender. The remainder of the interview guide was divided into nine 'interview themes' (Maijala et al. 2003), with room for note taking.

Having drafted the interview guide, three pilot interviews were conducted with 2nd year Irish students prior to commencing formal interviews with students from the three courses which fit the sampling criteria. The purpose of this was to develop my personal interviewing technique and to see how students responded to the questions. Following these interviews several changes were made to the interview guide.

4.6.4 Formal Interview Process

In total, 24 formal interviews were conducted, one with each of the 24 students who agreed to participate. Interviews took place over an eight month period, between November 2006 and June 2007. Although there are no strict guidelines recommending a specific number of interviews, Creswell (1998) suggests 20-30 qualitative interviews. All interviews were held on campus in informal locations, typically in a campus café. Rapley (2004) refers to the importance of location when conducting interviews, given that interviewees might not feel totally at ease in certain places.

Prior to formally commencing the interview I introduced myself, thanked the student for their participation, checked to see if they were happy with the location, offered to get them a non-alcoholic beverage, reassured them about confidentiality, requested their permission to record the interview, explained the overall purpose of the research, and requested that they ask for clarification if they found any questions unclear. I also encouraged them to critique any questions I asked if they felt the need to do so.

Interviews were recorded, with permission, on a small digital voice recorder. Digital recording is preferable for sound quality, data duplication and back-up. Rapley (2004) suggests that recording facilitates interaction as the interviewer is not so engrossed in note-taking. Lofland and Lofland (1984) also recommend recording, but caution over-dependence on recording and still encourage note-taking. While Thomas et al. (2005) recognise the potential for recording devices to promote nervousness among interviewees, they also say that they tend to overcome this in the course of the interview. In the case of the interviews conducted for this study, this did not appear to be an issue – possibly helped by the very small and silent nature of the recorder – and students did not tend to talk ‘off the record’ after recording had ceased.

Glaser and Holton (2004) argue against recording interviews, suggesting that taking notes is preferable. However, while I acknowledge that the quantity of data generated from recording can be very challenging to manage, I strongly disagree with their stance. Firstly, note-taking distracts the listener’s attention away from what the interviewee is saying and so may compromise the quality of data collected. Secondly, seeing the interviewer constantly taking notes may impact upon the openness of the interview; it may hinder the rapport and possibly cause interviewees to be more cautious in their comments. Thirdly, interview notes create distance between the interviewee’s comments and the data which is actually analysed. While acknowledging that the process of qualitative data analysis is subjective, to rely on interpretive notes as the sole source of raw data would sever the link between the raw data and the analysis and therefore, in my opinion, undermine the overall research quality. One important risk of recording, however, is equipment failure. On one occasion the batteries expired during an interview. Fortunately, this was noted after a short time – approximately three minutes – so we could revisit the topic which had been missed.

After the early interviews, changes were made to the interview guide and as the data collection process progressed I became less reliant on the guide, as I was used to the questions and was also exploring themes as they emerged. Coyne (1997) and Knight et al. (2003) advocate changing the interview questions in the course of the research as part of theoretical sampling. As Creswell (1998: 19) remarks, “Our questions change during the process of research to reflect an increased understanding of the problem”. Appendix C lists the questions which comprised the original interview guide and provides examples of how these questions changed over time.

Once the interview was finished, I thanked each student and we went through the Plain Language Statement and the Informed Consent Form. In the four cases where an incentive had been offered, vouchers were then presented. Finally, a follow-up email thanking each student for their input was sent. The length of interviews varied from between 30 and 190 minutes. Some students were more loquacious, articulate and engaged than others. Also, as the data collection proceeded, the length of interviews tended to get longer, as I was seeking to flesh out emerging concepts and was comparing and contrasting students’ comments with data analysed from previous interviews in accordance with constant comparative analysis.

Despite being very time-consuming, I personally transcribed all interviews. This ensured confidentiality – not just of the interviewees but for any people they had mentioned during the interview – and also allowed me to familiarise myself with the data at a very intimate level. As such, transcribing was itself part of the data analysis process. Personal transcription is not universally advocated. McCracken (1988: 41-42) argues against that it will “invite not only frustration but also a familiarity with the data that does not serve the latter process of analysis”. This stance is diametrically opposed to the advice of Darlington and Scott (2002) who argue that it is imperative to transcribe the interview yourself as it stimulates engagement with the phenomenon being researched. While acknowledging the laborious nature of personal transcription, I would strongly recommend it, and would disagree with McCracken’s thesis that such familiarity is not useful. Furthermore, a memo was written after each interview, noting my thoughts and impressions about the overall interview and possible emerging concepts.

4.7 Process of Data Analysis

> *"Analysis is the interplay between researchers and data. It is both science and art."*
> (Strauss and Corbin 1998: 1)

This section details the process of data analysis, including the coding process, and discusses the use of software to facilitate data analysis. According to Coyne and Cowley (2006: 503), "The process of generating theory is one of deconstruction and reconstruction of the data". This is precisely what takes place during data analysis. Given the non-linear nature of this process, chronicling it in linear form is problematic. Therefore, while the process of initial coding, focused coding and theoretical coding are discussed sequentially, it should be recognised that in reality these have been concurrent to varying degrees[30].

The process of data analysis was conducted in accordance with the guidelines proposed by Charmaz (2006), and the features of grounded theory outlined in section 4.4 were central to this process. In keeping with constant comparative analysis, interviews were transcribed and analysed individually *before* moving on to further data collection. This idea of analysing data as it is collected is not exclusive to grounded theory. Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 2) argue that "Letting data accumulate without preliminary analysis along the way is a recipe for unhappiness, if not total disaster".

4.7.1 The Coding Process

As stated in section 4.4.4, coding is an integral aspect of grounded theory. Appendix D and E provide two detailed examples of the coding process used in the study, showing a direct link between the raw data and final conceptual categories. It is advisable to refer to these examples at this point, as this may facilitate understanding the description of the coding process.

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[30] For example, having conducted a number of interviews which generated several hundred initial codes, I commenced focused coding, which involved identifying broader categories into which these initial codes might fit. However, initial coding of subsequent interviews still continued.

Initial Coding

Having transcribed an interview, the transcript was then carefully coded using line-by-line coding. As advised by Charmaz (2006: 49), initial coding was done using gerunds[31], as this allows the researcher to "detect processes and stick to the data". Examples of three coded interview transcripts are provided in Appendix F, G and H respectively. Initial coding was informed by Charmaz's (2006) guidelines, which recommend asking the following questions during the coding process:

- What is the data a study of?
- What does the data suggest?, and
- From whose point of view?

While coding is sometimes straightforward, it is often difficult to generate an appropriate code for a segment of data. Therefore, although Charmaz (ibid.) recommends coding swiftly and spontaneously, this was not always possible. On a few occasions I asked colleagues for their input about how a specific segment might be coded. Furthermore, having coded the first two interviews I also met with a local academic with years of experience using grounded theory to get feedback on the quality and consistency of the coding. I also attended a two-day workshop run by Kathy Charmaz herself, which gave me first-hand opportunity to interact and discuss issues with her. Examples of initial codes and the segments of data which each represents are shown in Table 4.4 overleaf.

The process of initial coding was challenging, due mainly to my lack of experience using grounded theory, my personal concerns about coding consistency, and the large number of seemingly unconnected codes generated. The process of initial coding all transcripts produced over 2,500 codes. Although I was aware that having a very large number of initial codes renders analysis more complicated, I was anxious not to 'force' the data into emerging categories at an early stage. Many of these codes contained just a single segment of data while others contained multiple segments. A list of all codes created during the initial coding process, including the number of references contained within each is listed in Appendix I.

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[31] Examples of such codes are, *'Being put off by romantic intensity of Germans'* and *'Feeling ignorant talking with Asian students'*.

In Chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8, where a code is mentioned in the text, it is written in *italics* and the number of references within that code is indicated by a number in parenthesis beside the code. For example, *'Anxiety leading to avoidance'* (14) is a code which contains fourteen references by students to feelings of anxiety leading to avoidance, while the code *'Perceiving intercultural contact as challenging'* (6), contains six references to students perceiving intercultural contact to be challenging. The greater the number of references within a single code, the greater the 'density' of that code. While the density of a code is not a necessarily an indication of its importance to the phenomenon, dense codes are noteworthy given that they indicate ideas, actions, or processes which are recurring relatively frequently within the overall data set.

Table 4.4 Example of Initial Coding Process

Original Text from Transcript	Initial Code
"If had a question I would hold it to the end and go up to them rather than interrupt the lecture" (Emer)	*'Irish students holding questions until the end of lecture'* (1)
"I think that's just their mentality, especially the Germans. They *really* like to get involved. 'Good for the CV' kinda stuff." (Ivan)	*'Germans being career focused'* (1)
Interviewer: *And in certain modules do you have to do group work together or group projects?* Carol: Yeah we do. Especially this term, cos it's all continuous assessment. But I'd say I'll probably just end up with Irish people. Yeah. Cos it's just easier to work with people you know well than people you don't know.	*'Finding it easier to do groupwork with people you know'* (1)
"even though their English is very good, there'd be things I say, turns of phrase and expressions that they just wouldn't have any understanding of and I nearly wouldn't be able to explain what it meant" (Owen)	*'Having difficulty explaining slang'* (1)
"even the ones who are our age, for some reason they just seem more mature, I don't know what it is! It's just…I suppose it is to do with college work, because they get the head down and we're a bit more like 'Ah there's plenty of time!'" (Sorcha)	*'Linking maturity with work ethic'* (1)

Focused Coding

The ongoing generation of such a significant number of initial codes leads to the challenge of classifying these under broader conceptual categories to facilitate theoretical development. This is the primary aim of focused coding. Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 48) state that "the establishment of order relationships between codes and concepts is a significant starting point for reflection and for theory building from qualitative data". During the process of initial coding and data collection, it became apparent that certain categories were identifiable within the data[32]. Therefore, as initial coding progressed, focused coding commenced. This generated a much smaller number of categories, under which the existing and emerging initial codes could be grouped.

Over the course of the data collection and analysis the definitions and parameters of these categories became increasingly clear, as each interview was used as an opportunity to explore emerging ideas. It should also be noted that during focused coding, certain codes which had been created during initial coding were grouped together or merged based on their close similarity to one another, as recommended by Maijala et al. (2003). A full list of these revised codes is provided in Appendix J.

The process of categorisation was demanding, as I was trying not to force the data while also trying to keep the number of categories relatively small. As Creswell (1998) points out, not all coded data will be used in the theoretical development. Certain codes will simply not fit into the emerging conceptual categories and will be removed from the analysis[33]. However, if a large number of codes, some of which your feel *are* important, are not comfortably fitting into the proposed categories, then you may need to reconsider your categorisation structure. Simply forcing these codes into existing categories will compromise the overall quality of the analysis.

In the current study this was initially an issue, as I was unable to categorise several codes I felt were important to the phenomenon. As a result, the categorisation process was reviewed three times. This involved returning to the initial codes and checking whether the categories I had assigned them were, on reflection, appropriate. Although this was very time consuming and intellectually challenging, it ultimately benefited the overall analysis. During this process several new categories were introduced, others eliminated, and others merged or renamed, so that all initial codes which I deemed relevant fit well. Furthermore, a significant number of codes were categorised under two discrete categories. For example, the code *'Socialising with students of similar age'* was incorporated into the category of 'Age' and also the category of 'Socialisation'.

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[32] For example, it was evident that students' course of study and their approach to friendship development were important to their intercultural contact. This led to the creation of the categories of 'Curriculum' and 'Friendship'.

[33] Creswell (ibid.) recommends distilling the data into 25-30 categories, which are then further distilled into 5 or 6 main categories.

Overall, the process of focused coding, which generated conceptual categories to encapsulate existing and emerging initial codes, produced 19 categories, several of which included smaller subcategories. These categories and subcategories are listed in Appendix K. The next challenge was to determine how these categories related to each other. This was done using theoretical coding.

Theoretical Coding

During the process of theoretical coding I was seeking to identify core categories which I felt where central to understanding the phenomenon of intercultural contact from host students' perspective. Combined, these core categories would encapsulate the categories generated during focused coding and expose links between them. According to Dey (1993: 47), this process of connecting categories is "the analytical equivalent of putting mortar between the building blocks".

Four core categories were generated. These create the structure for the four chapters of research findings which follow this chapter. These core categories, which are also listed in Appendix K, are:

- Construction of Difference
- Cultural Gravity
- Acquaintance Prospects
- Nature of Interaction

The primary challenge of theoretical coding was to create broad, solid concepts around which a thesis on the nature of the phenomenon could be constructed and presented. Theoretical coding also forced me to constantly revisit the data to seek evidence for the factors and associations which I felt were underpinning students' experiences of intercultural contact. As stated in section 4.4.4, theoretical coding should culminate with 'saturation', whereby gathering new data is not generating insights which add to the overall theoretical development. In practical terms, for this study data collection ceased when I had almost exhausted all potential participants[34], which coincided with the end of the college year. Given that I had estimated a timeframe for data collection and analysis, at this point I felt I had reached saturation, and that coherent, substantive ideas were clearly evident within the data. While data collection ceased at this point, analysis continued, particularly engagement with extant theoretical concepts.

4.7.2 Memoing

Despite the emphasis Charmaz (2006) attributes to memo-writing, only in the actual process of data analysis did I fully realise the importance of memoing to the overall process. Memo-writing represented my first attempt to articulate ideas and relationships which I identified during the data analysis. The process of initial coding produced many independent memos detailing my emerging thoughts on the nature of the phenomenon. While memo-writing was relatively unstructured during initial coding, it became increasingly structured and productive during focused coding and theoretical coding. In particular, the decision to write memos on a category-by-category basis forced me to define each category, explore relations between codes within the category, identify where the category fitted into the overall phenomenon, and also assisted in identifying gaps and apparent contradictions within the category. Writing memos in this fashion also was the crucial first step in producing draft chapters of data analysis. From my perspective, an enormous amount of conceptual analysis takes place during the memoing process; questions to pursue in future interviews emerge, as do hypotheses on linkages within the data, models are constructed, abstract concepts are fleshed out, and ideas on how to progress the study spring to mind.

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[34] As mentioned in section 4.5.5, 92 out of 106 potential participants had been asked to participate.

4.7.3 Use of Software to facilitate Data Analysis

To facilitate data analysis and project management, a Computer-Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis Software (CAQDAS) package, NVivo7, was used. Use of such software is increasingly common in qualitative research (Bringer et al. 2004).

Advantages of using CAQDAS

Creswell (1998) suggests that CAQDAS provides an effective system for storing, locating and accessing large amounts of data easily. Furthermore, Bringer et al. (2004: 251-252) argue that CAQDAS allows complex data searches, affords opportunities to improve data security, and "offer[s] the 'revolutionary' prospect of demonstrating methodological congruence because of a level of transparency that is so labour intensive that it is rarely, if ever, seen in manual methods". Furthermore, Coffey and Atkinson (1996: 172) recommend that "Anyone now embarking on a sustained piece of qualitative research should seriously consider the potential value of computer-aided storage and retrieval".

Darlington and Scott (2002) also advocate the use of CAQDAS, although caution that it can lead to sloppy coding if poorly managed. As a precaution, it is recommended to code early transcripts by hand, which I did – the transcript was printed out and highlighter pens used to highlight data, with codes written in the margin (Maijala et al. 2003). The use of CAQDAS also reduces manual tasks inherent in analysis. Bong (2002) says that software expedites the mechanical tasks associated with data analysis and also facilitates the conceptual exercise of building a theory. Kelle et al. (1995: 107), meanwhile, posit that CAQDAS is particularly useful for examining hypotheses within the data:

> It is in this area of qualitative hypothesis examination and refinement where researchers can draw the greatest benefits from computer aided methods for the coding and retrieval of textual data. If qualitative data were not organized and structured, the search for evidence or counter-evidence would be a practically insurmountable task; every time a researcher examined a certain hypothesis he or she would have to re-read several hundred, or several thousand transcript pages. This would make it very difficult to withstand the temptation to 'validate' theoretical concepts with some hastily gathered data. On the contrary, the use of storage-and-retrieval methods can go a long way towards helping to avoid those dangers that are always prevalent in qualitative analysis due to the ever-present data overload.

Challenges of CAQDAS

Despite the numerous proposed advantages, support for CAQDAS is not universal. Weitzman (2000; cited in Bringer et al. 2004), argues that CAQDAS neither enhances rigour, nor makes the research more systematic, while Roberts and Wilson (2002) suggest that the ease and flexibility of software-assisted coding encourages the creation of too many codes, which can complicate the study and draw attention away from the broader research context. Furthermore, learning how to effectively use CAQDAS involves a substantial time investment, and acquiring it can entail a significant financial cost. In my case, I attended two separate training courses as well as spending substantial amount of time self-training. CAQDAS programmes also tend to have their own terminology. In the case of NVivo7, ‘codes’ are called ‘nodes’, while ‘categories’, which contain multiple nodes grouped under a single concept, are called ‘tree nodes’.

Personally, I found Nvivo7 be to extremely beneficial. Without it, it would not have been possible to engage so deeply with such large quantities of data. It offers a high degree of flexibility in terms of adapting codes and categories, and so allows the analysis to be more responsive to emerging ideas. Furthermore, it facilitates data display – in terms of being able to simultaneously access transcripts, codes, memos and diagrams – which Miles and Huberman (1994) consider a vital part of the analytical process. That said, programmes such as NVivo7 can only *facilitate* the analysis, and should not be perceived as a substitute for the hefty intellectual investment required for in-depth data analysis.

Overall, CAQDAS offers opportunities for more thorough analysis to the researcher, but it will be dependent upon the skill of the researcher to use it (Bringer et al. 2004). As Lee and Fielding (1996 paragraph 4.5) remark, CAQDAS is neither “a panacea for analytic woes, nor a devil-tool of positivism and scientism”.

4.8 Methodological Issues

This section discusses some issues relating to the methodological approach, including limitations of the study and the need for researcher reflexivity.

4.8.1 Limitations of Methodological Approach

The methodological approach of the current study is subject to several limitations associated with qualitative inquiry. Firstly, given that the data was collected from a relatively small number of students, the findings are not generalisable to the broader student population. Furthermore, the use of purposive sampling also compromises the generalisability of findings (Bailey 1978; cited in Gobo 2004). Coffey and Atkinson (1996) and Bogdan and Bilken (1992), however, argue that qualitative research is not primarily concerned with producing scientifically generalisable findings. Furthermore, Gobo (2004) suggests there are two types of generalisations – (i) a generalisation about a certain population, which is based on statistical logic and (ii) a generalisation about the nature of a certain process, which is based on theoretical sampling. Indeed, Yin (1994: 122) argues that 'analytical generalization', defined as "the generalization of data to theory, not to a population", is a better indicator for qualitative research than statistical generalisation.

Another limitation is the use of interviews. Interviews rely on participants' self-reported behaviour, and are based on an assumption that interviewees report their thoughts, experiences and behaviours honestly. While I have no reason to believe students' in the current study were deliberately withholding information or lying, I cannot say with certainty that their actual behaviours mirror their self-reported ones. Furthermore, although the process of coding provides an audit trail linking the raw data with the research findings, the researcher must recognise that the coding process is subjective and interpretive. Another researcher may interpret the data differently and assign a different code to a particular segment of data. This implies that two researchers would analyse and draw conclusions for the same data set in different ways. However, as Miles and Huberman (1994) point out, this is the nature of interpretive inquiry.

In addition to the aforementioned limitations, despite the rigorous process of data collection and analysis, there are limitations regarding one’s ability to prove the resulting theory. With regard to this, Seale (2004: 413) quotes Cook and Campbell (1979: 22); “It is our inescapable predicament that we cannot prove a theory”. However, in response to this we can refer to Taylor and Bogdan (1984: 126), who state that “in grounded theory, researchers do not seek to prove their theories, but merely to demonstrate plausible support for them”. In the current study, this support is found in the voices of the individual students and the codes and categories developed during data analysis. Finally, although recognising the reciprocal nature of intercultural contact, the study has focused primarily on host students. In light of the relative lack of attention given to this group in existing research, however, such a decision is warranted.

4.8.2 Need for Reflexivity in Grounded Theory Research

Neill (2006) posits that since the central concern of grounded theory is often the nature of human interaction, it is axiomatic that the researcher should reflect on the actual researcher-participant relationship, which is itself an interactive experience. She argues that reflexivity can be “an important tool for researchers to be able to identify the effect of self in these relationships” (ibid.: 259). Finlay (2002: 532) defines this reflexivity as “thoughtful, conscious self-awareness”. Furthermore, Hall and Callery (2001) argue that reflexivity and relationality must be considered in order to improve the rigour in grounded theory research. They define reflexivity as “attending to the effects of researcher-participant interactions on the construction of data”, while relationality is defined as “power and trust relationships between researcher and participants” (ibid.: 257). They argue that both of these concepts have traditionally been given insufficient attention by grounded theorists. From their perspective an awareness of these issues is important for the quality of research. Reinharz and Chase (2002: 233) agree with this, suggesting that “It is crucial that the researcher take account of his or her own and the interviewee’s social locations and how they might affect the research relationship”.

Furthermore, reflexivity also requires that the researcher reflect on his/her own biases. Charmaz (2005: 510) encourages the researcher to recognise that “No analysis is neutral – despite research analysts' claims of neutrality". Referring to the experiences and ideas the researcher brings to any study, she points out that "We are not passive receptacles into which data are poured" (Charmaz 2006: 15). This point, echoed by Boufoy-Bastick (2004), is particularly germane to the analytic process, where subjective coding decisions are made. Indeed, Etherington (2006: 77) suggests that as researchers, "simply by being there we influence the research that is being carried out".

With this in mind, I attempted to apply reflexivity to the research in a number of ways. During interviews, despite having several years lecturing experience in DCU, I did not to draw attention to this, but rather presented myself primarily as a research student. I felt that if students perceived me as a member of staff it could complicate power relations and create difficulty in building rapport. As a result they might withhold information – for example they might avoid criticising staff or the overall institution – which would create a barrier to me gaining a deep understanding of their experiences. Furthermore, having been both a 'host' student and international student during my undergraduate career, I reflected on my own experiences of intercultural contact, which helped me generate ideas and construct initial questions. In addition to this, during the coding process I regularly challenged myself to justify my decision for coding a segment of data in a certain way. Also, through memo-writing, I was able to continuously reflect on the process. In section 10.4.1 the issue of reflexivity is further discussed in terms of its actual and potential impact upon the researcher and research participants.

4.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused in detail on the methodological approach used to answer the research questions driving this study. At each stage the decisions taken have been explained and justified by reference to existing literature. The decision to use grounded theory has had major implications for data collection and analysis, but also for the overall management of the study and presentation of the findings. Despite the difficulties associated with this methodology and the limitations, I believe the process has generated rich findings, which are presented in the following chapters.

PART II RESEARCH FINDINGS

Chapter 5: PERCEPTIONS OF CULTURAL DIFFERENCE ON CAMPUS

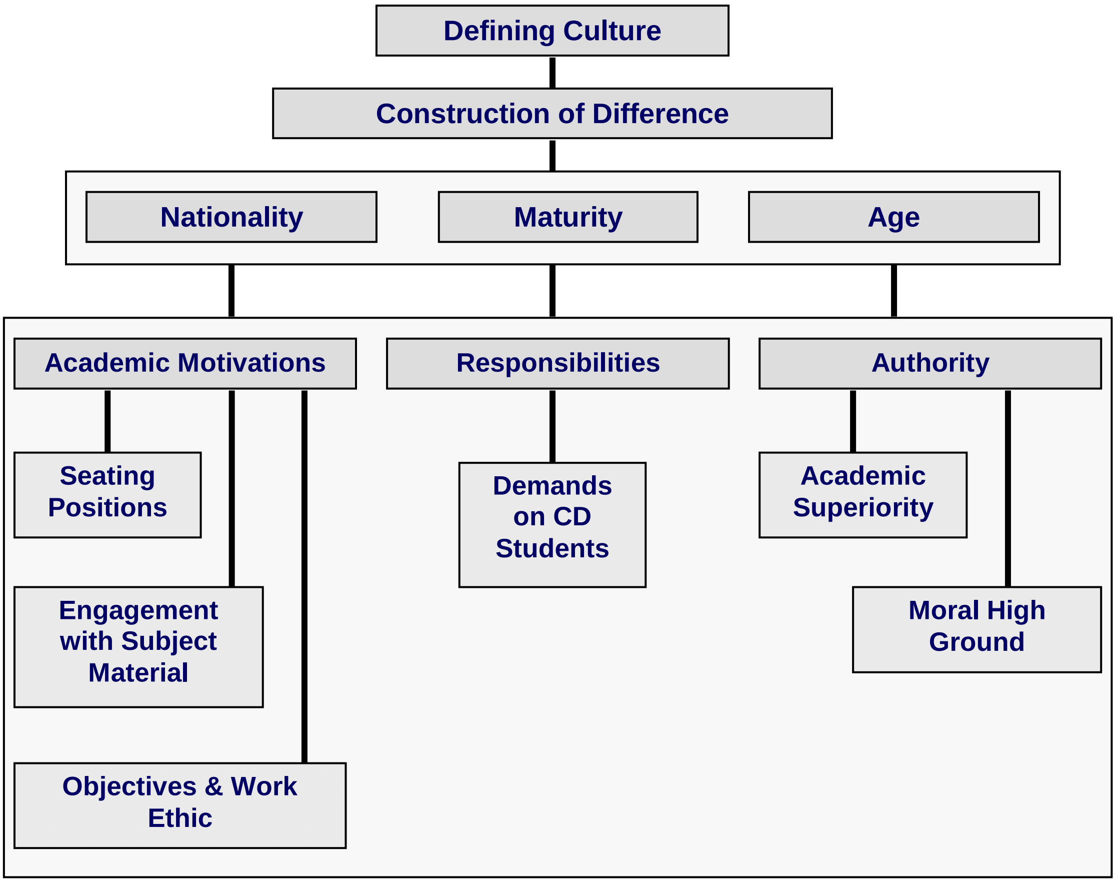
5.1 Introduction

This first chapter of research findings focuses specifically on host students' perceptions of culture and cultural difference within the student body. As explained in Chapter 2, encouraging host students to articulate their personal perceptions of culture allows them to reflect on cultural difference, which may in turn facilitate a more thorough, holistic examination of the phenomenon.

As well as exploring perceptions of cultural difference, host students' self-reported 'culture' within the educational environment is also examined. As will be highlighted, this contrasts sharply with the values and behaviours they ascribe to students perceived to be culturally different. Furthermore, the concept of 'Cultural Distance' is also discussed, as this emerges as a factor informing students' intercultural contact. Finally, the principal arguments and implications arising from the findings presented in this chapter are summarised.

Given the detailed interpretation of cultural difference emerging from the data analysis, it is useful to refer firstly to Figure 5.1, which constitutes a grounded theory model of host students' construction of cultural difference. It may be useful to regularly refer to this figure in the course of reading the chapter, as it may facilitate following the discussion as it moves from focusing on the principal markers of culture, 'Nationality' and 'Age', to the underlying components of cultural difference and their properties.

Figure 5.1: Host Culture Students' Construction of Cultural Difference


Defining Culture
Construction of Difference
Nationality
Maturity
Age
Academic Motivations
Responsibilities
Authority
Seating Positions
Demands on CD Students
Academic Superiority
Engagement with Subject Material
Moral High Ground
Objectives & Work Ethic

5.2 Defining Culture

During each interview students were asked about their personal perceptions of 'culture'. Although initially questions such as 'What culture would you say you are?' and 'What culture are you from?' were employed, having conducted a small number of interviews the question 'When I say the word 'culture', what do you understand by that word?' was instead used. This decision was taken as the latter approach promoted a deeper reflection on the constituents of culture rather simply identifying labels of culture. From this, two dominant constructions of culture were identified within the data. Before focusing on these, however, a list of other constructions which emerged is shown in Table 5.1 overleaf. This table includes the codes relating to each of these constructions.

Table 5.1 Examples of Host Students' Constructions of Culture	
Cultural Constructs suggested by Host Students	**Examples of Codes relating to Cultural Constructs**
Ancestry & History	Associating ancestry and language with culture (1) Defining culture as history and traditions (2) Defining culture based on history (1) Defining culture as tradition (1)
Upbringing & Background	Defining culture as background (1) Defining culture based on upbringing (3) Differentiating cultures based on background (1)
Region of Origin	Culture being geographical (1) Defining culture based on region of origin (1) Defining culture based on where one is from (2)
Physical appearance	Defining culture based on appearance and language (1) Identifying cultures based on appearance (1) Judging cultural identity based on appearance (1)
Language & Accent[35]	Defining culture as language and food (1) Defining culture as language and heritage (1) Defining culture as accent and appearance (1)
Education	Education as part of culture (1)
Behaviour & Traditions	Defining culture as your way of life (2) Defining culture as mannerisms (1) Defining culture based on behaviours (1) Defining culture based on social behaviours (1) Defining culture based on traditions and practices (1)
Sexual Orientation	Defining culture as sexual orientation (1)
Ethnicity	Linking culture with ethnicity (1)

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[35] Although the category of 'Language' emerges as a significant factor in intercultural relations, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 8, language was not proffered as a primary cultural construct beyond the codes listed in Table 5.1.

Cultural Artefacts (such as music, food, dress, art)	CD[36] students dressing differently (1) Dress being a marker of culture (1) Differentiating cultures based on the food they eat (2) Food as a cultural artefact (1)
Belief Systems & Religion	Defining culture as a belief system (1) Religion as a component of culture (1)

5.3 Key Cultural Constructs – Nationality and Age

While Table 5.1 lists numerous perspectives used by students to communicate their understanding of ‘culture’, two specific constructions of culture emerge very strongly from the data: (i) Defining culture based on ‘Nationality’, and (ii) Defining culture based on ‘Age’.

In terms of host students’ defining culture based on nationality, the density of the code *‘Defining Culture based on Nationality’* (29) provides very strong support for this. This may indicate that the concepts of culture and nationality are closely linked in students’ minds, or perhaps suggests that host students are more comfortable using nationality as a vehicle for discussing culture. Examples of students’ comments highlighting this link between nationality and culture include the following:

> There’s a lot of people from different cultures here. There are people in my class. There’s people from Ukraine, Nigeria, other parts of Africa, Saudi Arabia. (Daragh)

> In our class, even our class there’s loads of different cultures. People from nearly everywhere. From Africa, Iran, England, there’s loads. Different countries. A mixture. (Cara)

The fact that many host students default to using nationality as a way of differentiating cultures is not surprising, given that nationality is regularly proposed and employed as a proxy for culture, as discussed in Chapter 2. Host students’ use of nationality as a way of defining culture in turn underpins their regular use of the term ‘International Student(s)’ when referring to students who are culturally different.

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[36] The abbreviation ‘CD’ is used in many codes. ‘CD’ stands for ‘Culturally Different’, and was used as shorthand during coding.

Once again, the use of ‘International Student(s)’ is not surprising, given that this is the dominant term in discourse referring to students who undertake (higher) education outside their home country.

It may be argued that host students’ frequent use of ‘Nationality’ as a cultural differentiator negates the methodological decision to encourage students to articulate their own perceptions of culture. However, coupled with ‘Nationality’, ‘Age’ also emerges from the data as a compelling marker of cultural difference among host students. This was not anticipated at the outset. Indeed, by imposing strict definitions of culture upon students this might not have emerged. Table 5.2 provides a list of relevant codes supporting ‘Age’ as a marker of cultural difference within the data.

Table 5.2 Examples of Codes supporting ‘Age’ as a Cultural Construct

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Age as a barrier to mixing	9
Age as a barrier to communication	1
Age difference being a cause of conflict	1
Age influencing lifestyle	1
Age difference influencing relations	5
Non-Irish students being older than Irish students	5
Differentiating students based on age	3
Having little in common with mature students	2
Having more in common with people your own age	3
Mature students having different attitudes to younger students	9
Mature students having different interests to younger students	1
Perceiving mature students as a different culture	7
Perceiving mature students as strict parents	1
Younger Irish students not mixing with mature students	2
Younger non-Irish students mixing better with Irish	2
Younger students being wary of mature students	1
Younger students disliking mature students	3
Younger students uniting against mature students	1

It should be noted that in the course of pilot interviews conducted prior to formal data collection, ‘Age’ did not emerge as a significant marker of cultural difference. Among the possible explanations for this is the idea of researcher bias; given that extant research on intercultural relations in higher education typically uses nationality and/or race as a cultural differentiator, I may have been overly focused on references to nationality and/or race, thereby missing possible references to ‘Age’.

As these pilot interviews were not recorded, it has not been possible to check for this in detail. However, upon reviewing field notes from these interviews it was noted that one student did refer to international students having more contact with mature Irish students rather than younger Irish students.

Given that ‘Age’ did not emerge as a strong cultural differentiator during pilot interviews, age limitations were not imposed when operationalising ‘host culture’ students. It was not anticipated that having operationalised ‘host culture’ according to nationality, these students would themselves further operationalise the concept based upon ‘Age’. This meant that older Irish students were not precluded from the sampling. As a result, two mature students, Orla and Laura, are included in the sample of twenty-four students. From a strictly positivistic viewpoint, this would have compromised the sample group. However, in reality this unexpected outcome proved to be serendipitous, as these two students independently differentiate themselves from the younger Irish students in terms of attitudes, values and behaviours – all of which are suggested components of culture. Furthermore, both students speak about relating better with students of other nationalities as opposed to younger Irish students. As a result, having two ‘cultural outsiders’ within the sample group provides a degree of validation to the categorisation emerging from the data analysis and the identification of ‘Age’ as a meaningful cultural construct.

Whereas host culture students use ‘Nationality’ as one cultural differentiator and typically articulate this by use of the terms ‘International Student(s)’ or ‘Foreign Student(s)’, with regard to ‘Age’, the term ‘Mature student(s)’ is employed. Once again, this is not surprising, given the common use of this term[37]. While Table 5.2 provides support for ‘Age’ as a cultural differentiator, the comments of the one student, Emer, are perhaps more compelling:

> Like the real difference in our course this year is that there is a real mature student in it. Like she’s in her fifties, maybe older, and she’s real into asking questions and we’re there, ‘I don’t know anything!’ like. And that would be the difference…You don’t sit there and go, ‘She’s one of us’, if she’s old enough to be your granny. Well not granny, but Mammy!

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[37] Definitions of ‘Mature Student’ vary internationally. In Ireland “A mature student is defined as a person who is least 23 years of age on the 1st of January of the year of entry to third-level education in an approved institution.” (Lynch 1996: 12)

Although age is not discussed as a cultural differentiator in existing studies on intercultural contact between students, it should be noted that Flavin (2000), Kudo and Simkin (2003) and Schlepper (2003) have all identified age as a significant issue in intercultural relations between students on campus.

5.4 Maturity

As has been outlined, ‘Nationality’ and ‘Age’ emerge from the data as the two dominant markers of cultural identity within university from the perspective of the host students. That is, they perceive international students and mature students as culturally different to younger Irish students. This in turn forces the researcher to reflect on whether, from the host students’ perspective, these constitute two discrete ‘cultures’, or whether both are linked by a more abstract, ‘umbrella’ concept. Returning to the data, further analysis reveals an important connection between the categories of ‘Nationality’ and ‘Age’; namely, the concept of ‘Maturity’. Specifically, the data suggest that the younger host students perceive students who are older *and* students of other nationalities to be more ‘mature’ than they are. Table 5.3 below lists some of the codes which support the concept of ‘Maturity’ as one which connects ‘Nationality’ and ‘Age’.

Table 5.3 Examples of Codes supporting ‘Maturity’ as a link between ‘Age’ and ‘Nationality’ as Cultural Constructs

Title of Code	**Number of references within code**
African and mature students have common work ethic	1
German students being more mature	7
International and mature students having long term aims	1
International students and mature students being different to majority culture	1
International students and mature students being work focused	1
International students being more mature than Irish	2
International students being similar to mature students	1
Mature and International students seeing college as a job	1
Mature Irish students identifying with German students	1
Mature Irish students mixing better with international students	1
Mature students mixing more often with international students	1
Viewing international and mature students as similar	1

In terms of students' comments supporting the concept of 'Maturity' as a bond uniting international and mature students, Elaine suggests "the multicultural [students] are probably more like, the same idea as the mature students … they would be more focused on their academic work", while Owen remarks:

> If you want to divide it between the Irish and the African group, you could kind of divide the mature almost from the Irish and they integrate better with the African group. Admittedly, mostly because most of the Africans are mature students as well, but I think it's also because they have a shared interest in knuckling down and paying attention and doing well. You know, the younger ones take it a bit less seriously.

This comment gives the first indication that students' attitude to academic work is a significant factor in intercultural relations, an idea which will be explored in greater detail in section 5.5. Similarly, the thoughts of both Sorcha and Daragh further highlight the perception that mature Irish students and international students are linked by a common maturity:

> Even though I'm 20 and the other girls were 19, we're all about the same age now like, we're all 20 now, but we ourselves would feel that the German girls, I don't know what it is, but they're more mature than us for some reason. (Sorcha)

> They [the international students] would never ever get so drunk that they would not remember what they did or put themselves in a position where they could possibly end up getting hurt. And I think there is more maturity there, but I think that's more 'cultural maturity', because in Ireland we have a very loose attitude towards drinking. (Daragh)

Daragh's reference to a 'cultural maturity' is particularly apt, as it suggests maturity may represent a constituent of culture. Furthermore, as mentioned previously, the inclusion of two mature students of Irish nationality in the sample group provides unplanned support for this idea by facilitating contrast between students. In this instance, the tendency among younger Irish students to perceive mature students and international students not only as culturally different to themselves, but culturally similar to each other, finds support in the voice of one of the mature students, Laura, who talks about feeling more connected with international students than with her younger Irish classmates based on a common maturity:

> I have actually again been drawn a bit towards the Germans. I think it's because they're very…they're a little bit more mature than, I think, the Irish students.

5.5 Deconstructing Maturity

Thus far, analysis of the data has indicated that host students perceive mature students – including Irish mature students – and international students to be culturally different to themselves. Furthermore, a link between these two constructions of difference has been proffered through the category of 'Maturity'. This demands further analysis of 'Maturity' in order to understand how it constitutes a cultural differentiator ascribed to both groups of students, and also uncover its constituent properties. Specifically, one must ask, 'How is 'Maturity' understood from the perspective of the host students, and how is it manifested?'. Further engagement with the data suggests that host students' perception of 'Maturity' is underpinned by three primary constituents:

(i) Academic Motivations
(ii) Added Responsibilities
(iii) Authority

Each of these relates to students' values, motivations, and behaviours within the university environment. It is necessary to explore these constituents in order to further understand host students' perception of culture, and also to consider how it may influence their intercultural contact. Accordingly, each of these constituents will now be explored in detail.

5.5.1 Academic Motivations

> *"They prioritise on getting a really good degree and we prioritise on living and having fun and that kind of thing, at the moment."* (Sarah)

In the first instance, it is necessary to provide evidence which supports the category of 'Academic Motivations'. Data analysis suggests that from the perspective of host students 'Academic Motivations' are manifested in three primary ways: (i) Seating Position in Class, (ii) Engagement with Subject Matter, and (iii) Objectives and Work Ethic.

(i) *Seating Position in Class*

Data analysis indicates that 'seating segregation' between students from different cultures is common, particularly within large lectures where space facilitates such segregation. While the broad theme of segregation is discussed in detail in Chapter 6 under the category of 'Separation', at this point the focus is restricted specifically to the classroom environment. Within the data there are many detailed references to international and mature students sitting away from younger Irish students, specifically at the front of lectures. Evidence for this can be found in the codes *'International students sitting at the front'* (18), *'Host students sitting at the back of lectures'* (11), and *'Mature students sitting at the front'* (5). As Sorcha remarks:

> If we were in T101[38], that's such a massive…the Irish attitude is to sit near the back, whereas the foreign students and, as well, the mature students would sit near the front.

Similarly, Orla, a mature student, explains, "All the foreign students tend to sit together down the front, as do all the mature students, sit together down the front as well". Furthermore, the data indicate that, from the perspective of host students, seating position within lecture halls is indicative of students' overall 'Objectives and Work Ethic', as well as their 'Engagement with Subject Matter'. That is, students' seating position in class may reflect their values, including interests, priorities and motivations, within the academic context.

Coupled with the references to culturally different students sitting at the front of lectures, there are numerous references to younger Irish students sitting at the back of lectures. As Sorcha explains, "The mature Irish students, they take up the front, and all the Irish go as far back as possible". Similarly, Owen highlights the differing seating arrangements:

> They'd be down the front taking notes while to a certain extent we'd be up the back having a laugh. Well, not so much any more but that was very much the case in the beginning, which is of course when you kind of form your groups. So that's probably one of the reasons why, because also mature students, they would be all kind of integrated.

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[38] T101 is a very large lecture hall in DCU.

Indeed, Orla, a mature student, talks about why she chooses to sit at the front:

> Well, from my point of view anyway, it's just less distraction to sit down the front. It's the same with the [foreign] mature students because they are all paying for their course as well. An awful lot of them are paying the six grand a year or whatever, because they're not citizens, so they have to pay.

The implication, therefore, is that segregation within lectures is at some level indicative of diverging value systems between student groups. Furthermore, it appears that host students are aware of this phenomenon.

(ii) Engagement with Subject Matter

Within the context of this research, 'Engagement with Subject Matter' refers to the degree to which students participate in the academic environment, in the form of asking questions, making (un)solicited contributions in lectures, preparing or doing academic work, and their overall application to the academic aspect of college life. Once again, this subcategory emerges strongly as a cultural differentiator within the category of 'Maturity'. Data analysis indicates that host students perceive students from other cultures to be significantly more focused on academic life – as opposed to college life – than they are. Codes highlighting this idea are listed in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Codes relating to 'Engagement with Subject Matter'

Title of Code	Number of references within code
CD students asking more questions in class	8
CD students being academically focused	3
CD students being more into their studies than host students	7
CD students being 'on the ball' academically	1
CD students having different expectations of work	1
CD students paying close attention in lectures	1
CD students wanting to fully understand subject matter	2
Differentiating host and CD students based on how they ask questions in class	1
German students being well prepared for class	2
Germans being punctual for class	1
Mature students asking more questions in class	6
Mature students being more interested in course content	2
Students having different attitudes towards academic work	1

Host students’ perceptions relating to diverging levels of engagement with academic life are well articulated by Clodagh and Kimberly:

> They would always be at the front of lectures, whereas we might always be at the back, and they might never miss a lecture, whereas we might miss three a week, and yeah, they always seem more into their studies and more academic. (Clodagh)

> I don’t know why that is. They want to get more from the lecture than we do I think. So they go, they sit up the front because there is less distraction. Like less people are sitting up there near the lecturer, and they ask questions and they are a lot more in tune with it, a lot more into it than we are I have to say. (Kimberly)

Similarly, Eve’s comments give a particularly good insight into the perceived differences between students when it comes to the academic environment:

> I always think that they are just here to…that they will be more focused on learning and that’s why they ask more questions and stuff like that at the end [of class]. I always find that they ask questions if they don’t understand something, where we’ll just kind of sit there and go, well, later on, ‘Did you understand that? I didn’t understand that at all like’. I always find that way. And we’ll always say ‘Sure someone went up and asked at the end, we’ll go and find out from them later’…Yeah, it must be something in school or something that they are just brought up to ask…not to ask questions…but it’s just that it’s not an issue [for them] to ‘not get it’. Do you know that way? Whereas I…even in school, I would never ask a question. Do you know that way? You’d never like, I’d find that people…like ‘Has anyone any questions?’ and everyone just sits there and then later on it’s like, ‘We should have asked. No, we *should* have asked that’. But obviously they don’t do that in other countries. (Eve)

This theme of asking questions is further highlighted in the comments of Jane:

> And as well in Skills [module] like, we’d be doing Pressure, and ‘Why is that number there?’, ‘And why is it not the other way around?’, ‘And how do you measure that?’, ‘And what does this abbreviation mean?’. Like very interested, whereas, maybe, we'd just accept it; ‘Grand. There it is.’.

This greater engagement with subject matter which host students associate with culturally different students is also linked with greater academic ability and results.

Daragh remarks, “I think they are doing better because, well I’m almost positive they are all doing better than the average”, while Clodagh comments:

> It’s coming from my own experience. Say in past exams there was one module where about 80% of the class failed whereas the people who actually did pass, all of the international students passed. Just generally in class tests they would have scored very highly, so just evidence from their class scores and tests. And just how they actually talk about the subject.

Furthermore, there is also an implication that diverging levels of engagement with academic subjects can result in host students looking bad in front of lecturers or instructors. As Claudine suggests:

> Sometimes I think there can be a bit of a clash of cultures even in the nursing field. Because she might seem too eager to learn and then I might look like I’m not even trying.

Overall, the data provide compelling support for the idea that host students perceive ‘Engagement with Subject Matter’ to represent a key marker of ‘Academic Motivations’, which in turn constitutes a component of ‘Maturity’.

(iii) *Objectives and Work Ethic*

The third constituent of ‘Academic Motivations’ emerging from the data relates to students’ ‘Objectives and Work Ethic’. Host students speak at length about how diverging ‘Objectives and Work Ethic’ constitutes a differentiator between themselves and students perceived as culturally different. While host students appear to adopt a relatively unfocused, relaxed and short-term view of college – see section 5.6, ‘Host Approach’ – they perceive culturally different students to be more industrious, dedicated, and motivated by clear goals. Within the data, references to the ‘Objectives and Work Ethic’ of these students, and the degree to which they contrast with those of the host students, are abundant. As Noelle concisely puts it, “Their motivation is to get on in life. Well, that’s not a bad motivation, but, ya know!”. Cara provides an example of this, referring to the work ethic of an African student in her class:

> Like I see the people like really motivated. Like Azra in the Lab, she would spend hours and hours trying to make herself understand exactly what is going on. It wouldn't do for her if she just glanced over something, but maybe that's her culture as well, maybe her parents taught her to do your very, very best and anything lower than that isn't really good enough, so you have to keep getting A's and B's all the time. (Cara)

This idea is further supported by Kimberly, who compares students based on their preparation and level of application in the academic environment:

> Their work ethic. Well, because there's a whole thing of when you go to college in Ireland it's just like 'Oh you know, it's 4 years of doss!'[39]. There is that total stigma attached to it. It's a lie! As I found out doing exams. But we still go out and we don't pay attention to our work and then we all stress ourselves out in the last two weeks just cramming. But they seem to be a lot more focused. They go to every lecture and they have all their notes and stuff. And we're all turning up in rags and with a pencil hoping to take some notes down. And they're a lot more focused. They ask questions in lectures and they seem to put a lot of effort into assignments and stuff, ya know.

Coupled with this, Emer refers specifically to the work ethic and goals of mature students, regardless of nationality, when it comes to academic matters:

> They probably have a goal. Their goal is to get their education, whereas ours is have fun and get the education. Like, they probably had their fun whenever they took their time out. They want their degree and they want it now. (Emer)

Once again, having the voice of a mature student provides a valuable contrast to the opinions of younger host students, and also supports this category as it emerges from the data. As Laura remarks:

> I haven't probably been as sociable as I could be here because again, as I say, I'm motivated probably by different things…I suppose again it's what motivates. I know the Germans want to get things done well, so if they think you're good they will approach you, you know what I mean. So that's their motivating factor.

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[39] 'Doss' is a slang term for not working hard and passing time aimlessly.

This quote is of particular interest because it highlights how intercultural contact is directly influenced by students' motivations, which are underpinned by values and objectives. This idea is explored in greater detail in Chapter 7, within the category of 'Relative Motivations' (section 7.6).

Overall, in terms of the importance of 'Academic Motivations', analysis suggests that students' goals for college, underpinned by a value system which is reflected in their objectives and work ethic, their engagement with their academic field of study, and their choice of seating position in lectures, are an important marker of cultural difference from the perspective of host students. Furthermore, students' diverging goals for college result in diverging behaviours. The separate seating positions within lectures is a simple yet telling example of this. This in turn relates to the category of 'Proximity' which is an important factor in intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects', a core category which is examined in detail in the next chapter. At this point, however, attention turns to the next constituent of 'Maturity', the category of 'Added Responsibilities'.

5.5.2 Added Responsibilities

Coupled with diverging 'Academic Motivations', data analysis indicates that host students perceive culturally different students to be more mature on the basis that they often face 'Added Responsibilities' over and above those typically faced by host students. These responsibilities can be divided into three subcategories:

(i) Pressures to succeed academically
(ii) Financial concerns
(iii) Family responsibilities

Table 5.5 overleaf lists the codes that are linked to each of these themes, each of which will be examined individually.

Table 5.5 Codes relating to the 'Added Responsibilities' faced by students perceived to be culturally different from the perspective of host students

Codes relating to Pressures on CD students to succeed academically	Codes relating to financial pressures CD students face	Codes relating to family responsibilities of CD students
CD students feeling a greater need to succeed than Irish (1)	CD students facing financial pressures (1)	CD students not socialising due to family responsibilities (1)
CD students having more pressures than hosts (4)	CD students having to work to support themselves (1)	CD students working harder due to financial and family pressures (4)
CD students have to work harder than hosts (3)	Fee-paying students facing more pressures to do well (1)	Mature students having added family pressures (5)
CD students having to work harder to understand coursework (6)	Financial pressures facing CD students driving work focus (3)	Mature students having more responsibilities (2)
CD students needing to succeed in college more than Irish (1)	Financial pressures on CD students hindering contact with host students (1)	Non-academic responsibilities hindering socialising (1)
	Mature students having to pay fees (2)	Older CD students having lots of demands (1)
		Parental responsibilities hindering social life (4)

Note: General Codes referring to 'Added Responsibilities' include;
Differing responsibilities being reason for not mixing (1)
Irish students having an easier life than CD students (1)

(i) Pressures to succeed academically

From the perspective of many host students, international students in particular often face pressures to achieve academic success which are over and above those faced by host students. As Clodagh remarks:

> I think maybe they feel the need to succeed more, because maybe they have come from a background where they want to prove something to themselves or their family. Or their family came from a country where it was hard to make a life for themselves, so they came here and they are trying to make a better life for themselves and they are trying to do well in their course too.

Once again, this is the *perception* of some of the host students, and it is not clear if this is indeed the case, although Holmes (2004), MacDonald and Freewood (2002), Murphy-Shigematsu (2002), and Treloar et al. (2000) all refer specifically to family pressures to succeed reported by international students. Regardless of the possible reasons for these perceived pressures to succeed, the implication is that such pressures consequently impact upon the behaviour of these students and their relations with host students. In particular, their extracurricular ‘Participation in College Life’ (section 7.7) is perceived to be inhibited, which in turn impacts upon the core category of ‘Acquaintance Prospects’ (Chapter 7).

(ii) *Financial Concerns*

Host students also make reference to the added financial pressures which they believe international and mature students face. In the excerpt below, reflecting on the financial pressures facing international students in particular, Eve compares it to her personal situation, and considers the impact of financial pressures of intercultural contact:

> A lot of them are working. If they are over here by themselves obviously they’ll need to be working, so again that would cut down the social element of it, because you wouldn’t really see them that often outside of lectures. Like if they are having to buy food and clothes and everything … Like their Ma or their Da would probably pay for their accommodation over here but you still have to go out, buy clothes and buy food and everything like that, so obviously they are going to have to work. And that does cut down, that would cut down on getting to know them, because I’d say a lot of the work they are doing is probably bar work. If you’re in college during the day you can’t work in a shop! D’ya know that way? So if you want a part-time job you’ll probably have to do a Thursday night, and Thursday night is student night so you’re…D’ya know that way?…So, if you’re working in a shop it would be Saturday, Sunday maybe Friday night and maybe a Thursday night. So…your weekend is the days that everyone goes out so that would stop you from getting to know [them] as well I suppose…yeah.

Similarly, Cara reflects on the potential impact of financial pressures faced by international students:

> It depends on I think the people as well, because if they know that their parents are paying 13k a year for them to be here, they are obviously going to work really, really hard to try and do well, whereas when we come straight from the Leaving Cert, we don't have to pay anything, we don't have to pay fees … So there's not as much pressure on me as there would be on other people from the different countries coming here to learn.

While these are the perceptions of host students, in real terms it is true that many international students from outside the EU not only face very substantial tuition fees, but also face substantial living costs during their time in college in Ireland. Indeed, a number of the studies discussed in Chapter 3 identified financial concerns as a barrier to intercultural contact (Ujitani 2006; Flavin 2000; Robertson et al. 2000). Furthermore, studies by Barron et al. (2007), Bamford et al. (2006), Safahieh and Singh (2006), Lee et al. (2004), Treloar et al. (2000), Lin and Yi (1997) and Mullins et al. (1995) each refer to financial pressures faced by international students in various countries. In addition to this, separate studies by Gerrard and Roberts (2006), McGivney (2004) and Thomas (2002) have each found that mature students, regardless of nationality, often face significant financial pressures. As such, support for host students' perceptions can be found in existing empirical work.

(iii) *Family Responsibilities*

While it would be incorrect to suggest that all mature and international students have family responsibilities, and would be equally untrue to suggest that some younger host culture students do not face family responsibilities, the data suggest that host students associate family responsibilities much more with mature students regardless of nationality. As Claudine remarks, "the mature students, well they go home [after class] cos they've kids and, ya know, it's a different set-up to our student life". Once again, these responsibilities impact upon intercultural relations between students, as they can reduce opportunities for intercultural contact. When asked what might make people different with age, Carol remarks:

> Responsibilities. Like 19 year olds don't tend to have children. They don't tend to have children and husbands to go home to and you know, collecting children from school and going home to make the dinner and stuff like that…I'm not going home to make the kids dinner, ya know.

In the case of the two mature students included in the sample group, neither referred to personal family responsibilities, although both indicated that this is an issue for many mature students. As Orla explains:

> [A] lot of the mature students are married with kids as well. That's very tough. Yeah, I'd say it's a nightmare having kids. Just from a personal point of view like, I'd say it would be very hard and you're on placement as well like, so you're working in the hospital and all that for free. It's very hard to have a part time job or anything like that so financially it's a big strain on a lot of people.

As with financial pressures, existing research supports the idea that mature students, in particular females, often face family or domestic responsibilities which inform and influence their experiences of higher education (Gerrard and Roberts 2006; Leder and Forgasz 2004; Heenan 2002; Reay et al. 2002; Norton et al. 1998; Scott et al. 1996). McGivney (2004: 34) argues that mature students "are more likely to have a range of external constraints arising from their work, domestic and financial commitments", while Ozga and Sukhnandan (1997; cited in Thomas 2002) specifically identified family responsibilities as a major factor in mature students' non-completion of academic programmes.

Overall, this category of 'Added Responsibilities' is an important one. Not only does it constitute a dimension upon which host students differentiate themselves from students they perceive to be culturally different, but it also highlights the perceived demands on these students which can create a barrier to intercultural contact, given that opportunities for interaction are reduced as a result of these pressures.

5.5.3 Authority

The category of 'Authority', the third and final constituent of 'Maturity', is one which provides yet further insights into host students' perceptions of cultural difference and has implications for intercultural contact among students. Data analysis indicates that 'Authority' can be understood in terms of host students' perceptions that students perceived as culturally different, (i) are academically superior to them, and (ii) occupy a higher moral ground, similar to that of a parent or other senior figure of authority. As regards perceptions of the academic superiority of students from other cultures, Table 5.6 lists some of the codes highlighting this.

Table 5.6 Codes relating to the Academic Superiority of Students perceived to be Culturally Different

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Being intimidated by academically superior CD students	1
CD students being better academically than Irish	2
CD students being high academic achievers	3
CD students being really intelligent	1
CD students making Irish students look bad academically	1
Feeling inferior to CD students academically	3
Host students feeling academically intimidated by CD students	2
Looking up to CD students	1
Perceiving CD students as academically superior	1
Perceiving CD students to be academically knowledgeable	1
Trusting academic knowledge of CD students	2

Among the specific instances within the data which evince the perceived academic superiority of these students, the remarks of Clodagh and Cara are particularly insightful:

> I feel intimidated, because at the back of my mind, say if it's a Japanese student, at the back of my mind I suppose I might say to myself, academically they're better, because I suppose that I kind of think to myself that the international students academically are better, more focused. (Clodagh)
>
> That girl from Russia, she is really, really intelligent and some people feel intimidated in a way by her, because she is so clever. So maybe she finds it hard to interact with people here because people feel she is really clever. (Cara)

These comments highlight how perceptions of difference – in this case the perception of academic superiority of a Japanese or Russian student – have a direct impact on the nature of the intercultural contact. Specifically, the implication is that host students' perception of unequal academic ability provokes feelings of intimidation, which do little to foster healthy intercultural relations. This in turn relates to the category of 'Anxiety' which is explored in detail in section 8.2.1 and discussed from a theoretical perspective with reference to Anxiety Uncertainty Management theory (Gudykunst 1988; 1993; 1995) in section 9.4.6. Maintaining focus on the idea that host students perceive students from other cultures to be academically superior, Yvette's comments indicate a growing frustration with this:

> They're so much better! They are so much more efficient when it comes to our studies like. They *always* have their work done. They go to every lecture, especially the Germans. Especially the Germans. They're just too efficient. I can't handle their efficiency! They're just so efficient!

Furthermore, for Clodagh, the perceived academic authority of these students means that she has greater confidence in their advice:

> I'd stand back and let them explain it really well, whereas if it had been one of my friends explaining it I might have questioned them more about it. Like 'Why is it this? And why isn't it that?', whereas with these girls, I trusted their conclusion more for some reason.

In terms of whether mature and international students do actually achieve superior academic results, this is information was not accessible among the specific courses. However, discussions with course coordinators suggest that these students do tend to perform well compared with younger Irish students. This is particularly true in the case of German students in the EB course, and may be related to the fact that these students all come from a German university which has an extremely strong academic reputation. What is interesting, however, is that host students' perceptions appear to contrast directly with tendencies within literature on international education to discuss international students as academically deficient and a drain on resources. Aguado et al. (2006; cited in Grañeras et al. 2006), Hanassab (2006), Asmar (2005a), and Volet and Ang (1998), all point out that universities have a proclivity to stigmatise international students as requiring extra assistance, while Hellstén (2002: 4) refers to research by Biggs' (2000), which provides "an extensive review of research examining beliefs about international students' learning difficulties". In addition to this, Lackland Sam (2001: 320) argues:

> International students tend to be viewed as handicapped in several areas including inadequate language ability, poor academic preparation, and general inferiority to domestic students.

Conversely, in support for the perceptions of host students in the current study, Snow Andrade (2006) refers to the academic success and motivation of international students, while Barron (2006: 3) refers to studies indicating that international students have a greater likelihood of completing the academic programme and often outperform their local counterparts. Coupled with this, Chalmers and Volet (1997) refer to international students performing at least as well as, if not better than, host students. Furthermore, Trice (2003) found that academic staff perceived international students to be academically superior to host students. Indeed, the point should also be made that neither international students nor mature students should be viewed as a homogenous group. As Harris (1995: 87) argues, to refer to international students as homogenous constitutes “a misleading piece of shorthand”, as all students enter the learning environment with differing levels of knowledge, competencies, and abilities.

Coupled with host students’ perceptions of academic inferiority, their perceptions that international and mature students to some extent represent figures of parental authority within the college environment is also one which emerges strongly from the data and which appears to sit uneasily with host students. Referring to a mature student in her lecture, Emer recalls an incident where the student, from Emer’s perspective, attempted to admonish the younger students for talk during a lecture:

> You feel like you have a Mammy in the class. And I don’t want to be given out to when I’m in college! That’s the point of college. It’s not school. They don’t be giving out to you…She turns around and gives you dirty looks! And you’re like ‘I was only…!’ I was literally, I remember asking something about a question to Evelyn and she turned around and gave me a dirty look and I was like, ‘Ah, I’m only asking about the actual course’. And I remember being in a tutorial and I asked the person next to me again and she got up out of her seat and came up to me to explain something. I looked at her, ‘No. Don’t do that!’. I felt like she was a teacher rather than just being a student. That’s the age difference with her. I’m sure she feels very different as well like, with all these young ones and thinks we are ‘silly little girls’.

Such references to culturally different students, in particular mature students, being perceived as ‘parents’ who may frown upon the behaviour of younger students are peppered throughout the data. As Jane and Elaine respectively remark:

> Maybe it’s because that they are older than us as well. Sure that’s like going out with your Mam! Ya know, yeah, well a lot of them might be even older. (Jane)
>
> Cos it’s like there are people the same age as your Mam like in the course like! It probably puts a barrier there that you wouldn’t…I dunno like…just puts a barrier there to go over and talk to them. (Elaine)

Students' concerns about being the subject of scrutiny and being disesteemed by students are not confined exclusively to the academic context. An important theme emerging from the data is that of host students feeling judged regarding their social activities, in particular alcohol consumption – *'Feeling judged by CD students'* (11). As Kimberly remarks:

> I think they think we are just a bit lackadaisical, you know, I think they think we are too relaxed about it all and just want to have fun. And I mean, we went away in 1st year with the EB[40] society for one weekend and it was again predominantly French and German that went and us few sparse Irish people, and you know, I think we probably drank more than they did and one of my friends, God bless her, she got a bit too tipsy and they were by no means impressed. There was definite disgust there, yeah, and one of the French guys – who she hasn't liked since – gave out stink to her and was calling her names in French. And then the room she was sleeping in, they locked her out!

On the subject of getting drunk, Samantha talks about how she would deliberately withhold certain information about a night out from an international student in her class to avoid possible judgement and disapproval, while Noelle also expresses concerns about discussing her social life with students from other cultures to avoid potential criticism:

> I understand that everyone is different, but I just won't talk about that to her anymore, so I'll bring up different topics. Because you don't want to be frowned upon! No one does! (Samantha)
>
> I dunno, they might be a bit like 'Jesus, you were out again last night!'. (Noelle)

Once again, the link between construction of cultural difference and the dynamics of intercultural contact is evident. In this case, a perceived authority results in host students' self-censoring to avoid the disapproval of students they perceive as culturally different. This in turn relates to the category of 'Compromising Identity', which will be discussed in section 8.2.4. Finally, in certain instances, host students perceive a judgemental attitude among students from other cultures, but are unable to articulate what the crux of the matter is. This is exemplified by quotes from Elaine and David:

---

[40] 'EB' Society refers to the 'European Business' Society.

> When you go up to talk to them like, you'd feel…not that they'd look down on you but, you'd just be afraid like, how they might talk to you. (Elaine)

> [T]he Nigerian students, one or two of them you'd get the feeling perhaps that you're not quite on the same page as them. You get on fine with them but I don't think that, I don't know, maybe it's a bit strange, but I think one or two of them might be slightly dismissive or something. I don't know. As if they don't approve. I don't know. I just get this feeling. I don't know what it is. (David)

Overall, whether it relates to academic work, (anti)social behaviour, or other contexts, the category of 'Authority' has implications for intercultural contact and raises the question of equal status in such encounters. This will be further discussed in Chapter 9 with reference to Allport's (1954) 'contact hypothesis' and social identity theory (Tajfel 1978). Furthermore, as several of the comments indicate, students' perception of being judged can prompt feelings of intimidation, which relate specifically to the category of 'Anxiety' (section 8.2.1), and have implications for the likelihood of subsequent intercultural contact and relational development.

5.6 Host Approach

In the process of discussing cultural difference within the student body, host students invariably reflect on their own 'cultural identity', in particular their cultural identity as a student in higher education. In doing so, their own academic motivations contrast sharply with those they associate with students perceived to be culturally different. Analysis of the data indicates that host students' self-reported approach to academic work is generally less focused and lacking in clear goals. Furthermore, there is an indication that, in relative terms, host students tend to prioritise the social aspect of higher education and appear to be less engaged in the academic process than students identified as culturally different. Table 5.7 overleaf provides a list of codes which relate to host culture students' approach to college life.

Table 5.7 Examples of Codes relating to the Host Culture Students' Approach to College Life

Title of Code	Number of references within code
College being an opportunity to have fun	1
Host students being interested in more than academic element	1
Host students not participating in class	1
Host students wanting to do well and socialise in college	1
Irish students arriving late for lectures	2
Irish students being apathetic to academic work	1
Irish students being laid back	9
Irish students being less dedicated to studies	1
Irish students being motivated by enjoyment	1
Irish students defining themselves as 'dossers'	1
Irish students 'flowing along'	1
Irish students having differing priorities for college	1
Irish students not aspiring to high grades	2
Irish students lacking clear goals	1
Irish students leaving work until last minute	2
Irish students not working as hard as CD students	2
Irish students perceiving no need to attend lectures	1
Irish students prioritising fun in college	2
Irish students prioritising social life in college	1
Irish students seeing college as a social event	1
Younger Irish students having short term focus	1
Younger Irish students prioritising having fun above education	2

The image of host students which emerges from the analysis of their own self-reported behaviour and attitudes is in stark contrast with their perceptions of other students. In particular, their prioritisation of the social aspect of college life and relative de-prioritisation of academic life clashes with their perception of culturally different students. As Yvette remarks, "They're here for their degree. They want their degree. Where the younger students are, ya know, we want to make friends, socialise, all that kind of stuff". This point is further exemplified by the comments of Emer and Jane:

> Whereas we do definitely want to learn, we do want to have fun as well. That's what college is about. Not that I don't like people who don't go out, but I feel they should do something different as well as learning because they are just going to look back on their college life and say, 'What did I do? Get my degree!?'. (Emer)

> Like I just don’t see the point in doing something that you don’t like, so why not try and put the most fun spin on something? At the end of the day if you pass your exams, great! That’s what it is all about, cos you’re not going to be here otherwise. But I don’t need anyway to be killing myself over it. (Jane)

Coupled with these diverging priorities, data analysis also suggests that host students are lacking in self-esteem, which can impact upon intercultural relations. This idea is further examined in section 8.2.1. On a separate note, the data relating to ‘Host Approach’ presents what could be seen as a somewhat damning indictment of host culture students in terms of their level of engagement in the academic aspect of college life. However, the purpose of this research is not to make judgements on students’ attitudes, knowledge or behaviour, but simply to understand how these may inform the nature of their intercultural contact. Furthermore, the data collected in this research is not generalisable beyond the immediate group of participants, and indeed, their self-reported behaviour may not be fully reflective of their actual behaviour.

5.7 Cultural Distance

Thus far the data analysis has suggested that while ‘Nationality’ and ‘Age’ are used to label students as being ‘culturally different’, host students’ personal perception of cultural difference is heavily context-specific and based primarily on value systems reflected in students’ attitudes and behaviours within the university environment.

In articulating this idea, however, the intention is not to suggest the existence of a fully homogeneous ‘host’ culture and a homogeneous ‘non-host’ culture. Furthermore the intention is not to argue that host students perceive all ‘non-host’ students to be ‘equally different’, nor is it to posit that cultural difference is based exclusively upon ‘Maturity’ and its constituent categories. Within the data it is evident that host students contrast and compare students and ultimately perceive some students to be relatively culturally similar – for example, mature students of Irish nationality – while others are perceived to be relatively more different – for example, Chinese students recently arrived in Ireland with low English language competencies. This introduces the concept of ‘Cultural Distance’ and raises questions as to how it may relate to intercultural contact on campus.

For the purposes of this research, ‘Cultural Distance’ is conceptualised from the host students’ perspective, and refers to the level of difference host students perceive exists between them and a student they perceive to be culturally different. Within the data ‘Cultural Distance’ emerges as a significant category, as evidenced by the code *‘Perceiving Cultural Distance’* (22). This code contains instances of host students comparing or contrasting students primarily according to their nationality, as opposed to their values or behaviours within the academic environment. An example of this is Cara’s comments, where she compares the Irish, English and Indian cultures:

> Like the English, in England, I think they are very similar [to Irish culture]. Everything I think is the same, even the currency – I know the currency is the Euro now – but like the way people go on. They still speak English even if their accent isn’t the same. Compare an Irish person to an Indian person. Their food is different, the way they dress is different, their religion is different, their colour skin…everything is different. So they’re not as…they’re like completely different.

As is evident in this example, while nationality is used to label individuals, host students compare and contrast these students in a variety of ways. Within the data, clothing, religion, food, skin colour, first names, surnames, gender roles, language, social habits (particularly alcohol consumption), communication styles, attitudes and values, are all employed as ‘dimensions’ upon which cultural distance is articulated. A list of codes indicating ‘Cultural Distance’ is shown in Table 5.8 overleaf.

In terms of how perceived cultural distance informs intercultural contact, the data suggest that host students perceive intercultural contact to be easier with culturally ‘proximate’ students, which in turn impacts upon the likelihood of contact taking place. Contemplating what she would do were she in a room with an English student and a Japanese student, Clodagh remarks:

> I suppose if I had to go up and talk to them individually, I would pick the English person first. Again, because I would associate them more like myself in terms of their upbringing and their lifestyle … automatically the first thing I would think of is the English person, they’re our neighbours, and you think of the drinking culture and there’s no language barrier and the schooling system and they probably have connections with Ireland more strongly than the Japanese student.

Table 5.8 Codes supporting perceived 'Cultural Distance' within the Data

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Africans dressing very differently	1
Asian students being more quiet than other students	5
Chinese having discrete values and morals	1
Chinese women being less forward romantically than Western women	1
Differentiating cultures based on attitudes to alcohol	6
Feeling more comfortable engaging with proximate cultures	1
Finding it harder to communicate with more distant cultures	1
Gender roles varying across cultures	2
Germans being more direct than Irish	3
Germans having different approaches to romance	1
Irish and English culture being similar	5
Hair being a status symbol for African women	1
Humour varying across cultures	5
Noting intracultural variations	5
Perceiving Africans as more religious than other cultures	3
Perceiving Asians to be very culturally different	5
Perceiving certain cultures to be more open to discussion	1
Perceiving Cultural Distance	22
Perceiving Europeans to be more conservative than Irish and English	1
Perceiving Filipinos as similar to Irish based on religion	1
Perceiving Japanese students as mysterious	1
Perceiving Northern French culture as similar to Irish	1
Perceiving other European cultures to be similar to Irish culture	1
Students from Western cultures being louder	2

This idea that students will engage in contact with students they perceive to be more culturally similar is also articulated by Frank, as he speculates about meeting a Spanish and Chinese student:

> If I'm in the sports club and I am talking to someone from Spain, say it's a Spanish guy, and I'm talking to him about football…I can bring up so many things that we have in common. Ya know, the fact that we're both European, broadly speaking. Whereas, ya know, a Chinese [student], ya know, 'Hello, how are you?', 'Who are you?', 'What do you do and what are you interested in?', cos I don't really know. And there are not too many parallels that I can draw on.

As the perceived cultural distance grows, the likelihood of intercultural contact taking place decreases, given that the contact is perceived to be increasingly problematic. As Carol explains, "I suppose Japanese and Chinese cultures, we don't know as much about them, so we are probably a bit less likely to get to know them, there is just such a huge gap there". Ultimately, in instances where host students perceive the cultural distance to be too great, contact or relational development may be perceived to be untenable:

> Maybe the difference is too big to be making a friendship, you know. Maybe there is too many…maybe they don't have enough in common, you know. (Etain)

Based on the data analysis, 'Cultural Distance' therefore represents an important aspect of host students' perception of cultural difference. It appears to impact directly upon students' experiences of intercultural contact on campus and in the following chapter it will be linked with the important concepts of 'Separation' and 'Homophily'. Many of the studies referenced in Chapter 3 also found cultural distance to constitute a major factor impacting upon intercultural relations among students (Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005; Trice 2004; Gareis 2000, 1995; Ang and Volet 1998; Redmond and Bunyi 1993; Furnham and Albhai 1985). Furthermore, in highlighting European students' tendency to interact primarily with other European students, which he terms 'Eurocentrism', Otten (2000: 18) is also evoking the idea of cultural distance. This again emphasises the importance of not treating international students as a homogenous group, particularly when studying intercultural contact.

5.8 Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on host students' perceptions of culture *within the specific context of an institution of higher education*. This approach is deliberately distinct from that commonly used in studies of intercultural relations in higher education, in which nationality or race are commonly employed as an *a priori* proxy for cultural identity. It can be argued that operationalising culture exclusively according to nationality may render the research context, in this case an institute of higher education, of lesser importance. As such, issues germane to the specific context may be overlooked or under-explored.

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that although ‘Nationality’ and ‘Age’ are employed as labels to differentiate cultures and categorise students as culturally different, the perception of diverging values and behaviours is central to host students’ construction of cultural difference. This in turn implies that the actual context is of fundamental importance to students’ perception of culture. By encouraging students to articulate the ways in which they perceive fellow students to be ‘culturally’ different, issues which relate specifically to the academic environment have been identified, as have some of their implications for intercultural contact. These differences have been encapsulated within the concept of ‘Maturity, which is underpinned by ‘Academic Motivations’, ‘Added Responsibilities’, and ‘Authority’.

As will be shown in Chapter 8, cultural differences, such as language and communication style, which are often identified as obstacles to intercultural contact in existing studies, do indeed emerge as very significant barriers in this study. However, as has been highlighted by students’ discussions on mature students of Irish nationality, a common native language does not appear to constitute a common culture within the academic environment.

Having explored in detail host students’ perceptions of cultural difference within the academic environment, the next chapter focuses on the state of intercultural relations on campus from the perspective of these students.

Chapter 6: CULTURAL GRAVITY

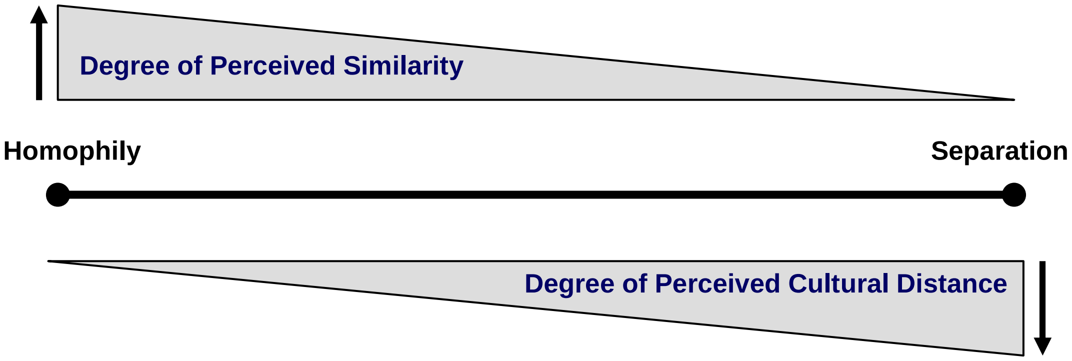
"We know them, but we don't know them. You know that kind of way?" (Claudine)

6.1 Introduction

The findings presented in Chapter 5 have argued that host students' perception of cultural difference is fundamentally based upon a comparison of students' values and behaviours within the specific academic environment. From the host students' perspective, students' espousal of certain values, reflected in their behaviours, identify them as part of the cultural 'ingroup' or a cultural 'outgroup'. Specifically, host students identify international students and mature students as comprising the cultural outgroup based on their perceived 'Maturity' and the values and behaviours underpinning this. In the case of international students, their perceived 'Cultural Distance' from the ingroup appears to be accentuated by differences in national cultural identity, such as language and communication style.

With this in mind, this chapter focuses on gaining an insight into the actual state of intercultural relations between these groups from the perspective of host culture students. As has been stated, this study does not aim to provide generalisable scientific data on the frequency of intercultural contact and profundity of intercultural relations in statistical terms. Nonetheless, it is important that the analysis gives an indication of the overall state of intercultural relations on campus from the perspective of host students. This is achieved through the presentation and exploration of the categories of 'Separation' and 'Homophily', both of which have emerged strongly in the course of data analysis, and relate closely to the idea of cultural distance discussed in section 5.7. Pervading both these categories is the concept of students 'gravitating' towards perceived familiarity – 'Homophily' – and away from perceived difference – 'Separation'. This idea is represented in Figure 6.1 overleaf.

Figure 6.1 Relationship between 'Homophily' and 'Separation'


Degree of Perceived Similarity
Homophily
Separation
Degree of Perceived Cultural Distance

6.2 Separation

The category of 'Separation' encompasses codes which refer to intercultural contact *not* taking place between students in the university environment. As such, it gives an indication of the level of intercultural contact, or lack thereof, from the host students' perspective. As can be seen from Table 6.1 overleaf, this category is a significant one in terms of the number and density of codes. Most notably, the codes *'Host and CD students sitting in separate locations'* (27), *'Host students not mixing with Asian students'* (12), and *'Host students not mixing with CD students'* (14), suggest that cultural segregation is an significant issue among students on campus and that intercultural contact is below the level institutional leaders would desire.

While the category of 'Separation' is not concerned with the actual reasons for the lack of intercultural contact – these will be explored in detail in Chapters 7 and 8 – the point can be made that instances of separation appear to be both *intentional* and *unintentional*. Intentional separation refers to situations where students deliberately avoid intercultural contact. Unintentional separation, meanwhile, refers to situations in which students, although aware of a lack of intercultural contact, are unable to explain it, or accept no responsibility for it. This is evidenced by codes such as *'Not knowing reasons for lack of mixing'* (10), *'Not deliberately avoiding CD students in class'* (1), and *'Poor mixing not being intentional'* (1). As Sorcha remarks:

> There'd be no great friendships between the Irish and the foreign students, but again that wouldn't have been intentional, it's just how it happened I think.

Table 6.1 Codes indicating 'Separation' between students from different cultures

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Avoiding people who you see as different to you	1
Being aware of segregation in class	1
CD students finding it hard to mix with Irish	1
CD students not knowing local students	1
Class segregation reinforcing barriers	1
Greater diversity leading to less mixing	1
Group segregation hindering mixing	1
Host and CD students sitting in separate locations	27
Host and CD students socialising in different venues	3
Host students not mixing with Asian students	12
Host students not mixing with CD students	14
Irish and CD students having separate college lives	2
Irish and CD students not being close friends	5
Irish students not thinking about mixing with CD students	1
Knowing Irish class mates but not CD classmates	1
Lamenting lack of mixing	1
Muslim students not socialising with Irish students	1
Not deliberately avoiding CD students in class	1
Not having lunch with CD students	7
Not knowing French classmates	1
Not knowing reasons for lack of mixing	10
Not mixing due to cultural differences	1
Not mixing with African students outside college	1
Not talking with CD students	2
Observing CD students being on their own	1
Perceiving poor intercultural relations in class	2
Poor mixing not being intentional	1
Segregation happening from Day 1	1
Segregation hindering mixing	1
Separate interests leading to separate behaviours	1
Separation from CD students being the norm	1
Short term exchange students not integrating	1
Students sitting in segregated groups	3
Younger Irish students not mixing with mature students	2

Within 'Separation' a particularly dense code is that of *'Host students not mixing with Asian students'* (12). Students across each of the three courses identify Asian students, particularly Chinese students, as a cohort with which they have little or no contact. Clodagh comments, "There is Asian students on campus I'd see around, but I wouldn't know them to talk to", while Yvette explains:

> They wouldn't be in my social circle. I'd never have any problem with it or anything, just, they're just not in my social circle at all like. They don't come into it like.

This may be linked with the relatively large cultural distance host students perceive between themselves and Asian students (section 5.7). Alternatively, the explanation may be simply based on environmental factors. None of the three courses from which students were sampled had students of Asian ethnicity registered in them, and so the host students may have reduced opportunities to actually interact with Asian students, which in turn inhibits intercultural ‘Acquaintance Prospects’. This relates to the categories of ‘Proximity’ and ‘Curriculum’, which are discussed in sections 7.2 and 7.4 respectively, and the pivotal role each plays in intercultural contact between students.

In providing a qualitative indication of the level of intercultural contact among students on campus, analysis of ‘Separation’ also suggests that the positive intergroup contact which has been argued to foster the benefits of student diversity discussed in Chapter 3 is apparently not occurring. This in turn relates to the category of ‘Institutional Support’ (section 7.5), and implies that the potential of cultural diversity in the student body is not being fully realised. This is an idea which Jane reflects on:

> I suppose because we’re not mixing there’s no real impact. Whereas say, in another college where people are mixing and that everybody is thrown into together and told get on with it…you’d get to know more about other cultures and kind of find out about different family situations and just different kind of people like. But because there’s nothing here, there’s no real benefit.

It should be noted that the aim of ‘Separation’ as a category is not to suggest that there is no intercultural contact taking place on campus. That is certainly not the case. Most host students speak about having some intercultural contact, while a small number talk about developing intercultural friendships. In particular, Jack explains how his best friend in college is a Nigerian student who has been in Ireland for several years, which offers an interesting contrast with those students who report having little or no contact with students from other cultures. Furthermore, instances of intercultural contact are distributed amongst the categories examined in the following chapters, and so are not discussed in detail here. However, ‘Separation’ is an important qualitative barometer of the level of intercultural contact taking place from host students' perspective and can be linked with the argument that greater cultural distance reduces the likelihood of intercultural contact taking place (section 5.7). With this in mind, attention now turns to the category of 'Homophily', which represents a key concept underpinning 'Separation'.

6.3 Homophily

> *"At the end of the day they will probably flock together anyway. I think it's a fairly natural situation."* (Frank)

One the most compelling categories emerging from the data analysis is 'Homophily'. As discussed in section 3.5.1, 'Homophily' was identified as one of the key factors impacting intercultural friendship development by Gareis (2000). In the current study, this category was originally labelled 'Gravitating towards Similarity', but it was later decided that 'Homophily' was a more suitable label. Although the homophily principle will be discussed from a theoretical perspective in detail in Chapter 9, it is useful at this point to clarify what the concept means.

According to McPherson et al. (2001: 416), "Homophily is the principle that a contact between similar people occurs at a higher rate than among dissimilar people". The hypothesis predicts that where the option in available, individuals will associate with others similar to themselves. As Owen puts it, "I think people are generally drawn to what they know and what they see in other people that is themselves". Homophily, therefore, fosters homogeneous groups, which are further solidified over time by shared experiences. As such, it increases the likelihood of 'Separation' from dissimilar others, including students perceived as culturally different. Consequently, it may represent a significant barrier to intercultural contact.

Within the data, references to homophilic behaviour among students are abundant. The concepts of 'sticking' with cultural peers, or 'gravitating' towards individuals perceived to be similar, are those which most obviously evince the phenomenon. Table 6.2 provides an extensive list of codes supporting 'Homophily' within the data.

Table 6.2 Codes highlighting instances of 'Homophily' among Students

Title of Code	Number of references within code
African students sticking together	1
Asian students keeping to themselves	3
Banding together with conationals when abroad	2
Being drawn to similar others	1
Being friends with conationals of same age	1
Being good friends with conationals	3
CD students going for lunch together	1
CD students hanging around with other CD students	4
CD students mixing amongst themselves	2
CD students naturally gravitating towards familiar things	1
CD students naturally sticking with cultural peers at the start	1
CD students sitting together in class	5
CD students socialising with other CD students	8
CD students sticking together	19
Chinese students mixing with each other	5
Conational students sticking together	3
Conationals sitting together from Day 1	1
Eastern Europeans sticking together	1
Forming groups based on age	1
Forming groups with cultural peers	1
Gravitating towards cultural peers	3
Host students sticking together	2
International students pairing together for lab work	2
Irish students choosing to sit with Irish friends	1
Irish students socialising with each other	1
Irish students sticking together on work placement	1
Males sitting together in large class of females	1
Mature students hanging out together	1
Mature students sitting together in class	2
Mature students sticking together	2
Naturally flocking together	1
Naturally gravitating towards what is familiar	2
Nigerian students sticking together	1
Not hanging around with mature Irish students	1
Prioritising friendships with Irish (conationals) at start of college	4
Seeking people who you identify with on Day 1	3
Socialising with students of similar age	1
Spaniards sticking together	2
Staying with cultural peers in first year	1
Sticking to what you know	5
Sticking to what's familiar in a new environment	4
Sticking with cultural peers	1
Students sticking within racial groups	2

Looking at Table 6.2, it should be noted that host students report their own homophilic behaviour – their personal, lived experience – but also make reference to homophilic behaviour among students perceived as culturally different – their observed experience. Both of these are important and highlight the reciprocal nature of intercultural contact. Reflecting on her own tendency to stick with cultural peers, Elaine highlights how nationality and age are both factors:

> If there was two people in a room and one was Irish and one was…I'm not saying that I wouldn't be friendly to the other, but I would be more inclined to talk to the Irish one more than you would the Nigerian or whatever. I think it's just because they are from the same place as you and they know more…not that they know more, but they are used to Irish culture. Common like, yeah … because she was a mature student as well like – I'm not saying I have no stuff in common with mature students – but like, you have more in common with them and they are the same age group as you and you're interested in the same things.

Similarly, Samantha's thoughts indicate that homophilic tendencies are linked with anxiety reduction and may be stronger during the early stages of college life:

> I think it's more subconsciously that you always just go for people that you think will be easier to talk to. You don't want to make things difficult for yourself. You won't go up and take a challenge ya know. You're on your first day, you're nervous, you're gonna try to talk to somebody so you're not gonna make it harder on yourself by talking to someone that mightn't be able to talk very good English back to you, or that you'd have no common ground with. So you'll go for someone that's kind of like yourself.

This idea of subconsciously gravitating towards the familiar links with Eve's awareness of homophily, which appeared to grow as our discussion unfolded:

> We got to pick our own lab partners, and the international students all paired together bar one. They all like, all the international students paired together. I never noticed that before until now … That's so strange! I never noticed that before. I've no explanation for that whatsoever. Only…I don't know, cos I think…Simona and Tatiana are good friends *anyway*, but why are they good friends? Now I'm thinking, 'Why are they really good friends?'. I dunno. Maybe it was when they came, when they first came over or something. I'm trying to think of an explanation and I can't think of one! … I'm genuinely interested as to why that's after happening!

Given the high frequency of the term 'sticking together' in the data – the code *'CD students sticking together'* contains 19 references – it was important to explore this in greater detail, to consider the possible meaning of ‘sticking together’. By definition, ‘sticking together’ represents a collective behaviour; one cannot ‘stick’ to oneself. Furthermore, it implies a conscious or unconscious stance towards one’s environment, including other individuals and/or groups. On the one hand, it may reflect a deliberate strategy based on a disinterest in, or dislike of, ‘outgroup’ members[41]. On the other hand, it may be an enforced strategy adopted as a reaction to a given situation, such as a response to situational anxiety, or rejection by other groups. As such, it can be linked with Branscombe et al.’s (1999) ‘rejection-identification’ model mentioned in section 3.4.1. Tan and Goh (2006: 656) argue that host students stick together based on common interests, whereas international students group together more for reasons of security.

Similarly, the concept of ‘gravitating towards the familiar’ implies unconscious, natural behaviour, such as that outlined by Eve above. Indeed, the idea of homophilic behaviour being ‘natural’ contrasts with Amy’s thoughts on engaging with students from other cultures: “A lot of people wouldn’t do it naturally. They would kind of feel it’s forced”. Likewise, Carol reflects on her initial contact with a French student, which took place after several months of college: “I don’t know how to describe it. It just didn’t seem natural, because they had already formed friendships and so had we”.

Having identified ‘Homophily’ as an important phenomenon within the data, further analysis is needed to explore host students’ perspectives on the primary factors underpinning homophilic behaviour within the college environment. Understanding these factors may provide deeper insights into the barriers which must be overcome in order to improve intercultural relations between students. This analysis identifies four subcategories within the data, ‘Commonalities’, ‘Availability of Cultural Peers’, ‘Perceived Ease of Communication’, and ‘Security’, each of which will be discussed individually. Figure 6.2 provides a visual representation of the subcategories which comprise ‘Homophily’.

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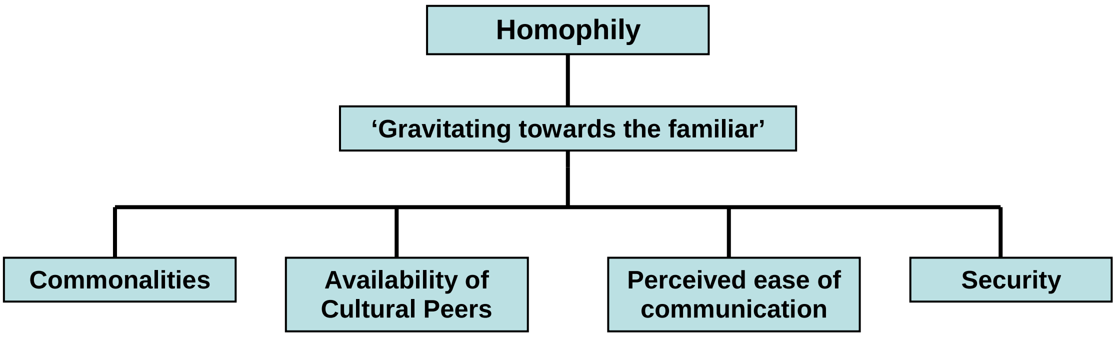
[41] This approach would reflect a ‘Separation’ acculturation strategy, which is one of the four strategies proposed by Berry (1980; 1997; 2008), each of which indicate a discrete relationship between the newcomer and the host society.

Figure 6.2 'Homophily' and its Subcategories


Homophily
'Gravitating towards the familiar'
Commonalities
Availability of Cultural Peers
Perceived ease of communication
Security

6.3.1 *Commonalities*

The sub-category of 'Commonalities' refers to aspects of students' overall identity which they perceive they share with another student or students. This may include nationality, age, experiences, values, goals, course of study, interests, and background. Having emerged as a sizeable sub-category within the data, the primary objective is to explore how 'Commonalities' relates to 'Homophily' and ultimately informs intercultural contact.

In essence, the sub-category of 'Commonalities' encapsulates the 'similar' referred to in the aforementioned definition of homophily. While Table 6.2 has highlighted the many instances of homophilic behaviour within the data, Table 6.3 lists codes supporting the hypothesis that (perceived) commonalities heavily inform students' interactions.

Table 6.3 Codes highlighting the relationship between Commonalities and Interaction

Title of Code	Number of references within code
'Being in the same boat' facilitating relations	4
Common experiences facilitating communication	1
Common interests facilitating contact	8
Common values facilitating mixing	2
Commonalities determining who you mix with	3
Commonalities facilitating mixing	13
Friendship being based on commonalities	14
Shared humour facilitating interaction	3

While commonalities facilitate acquaintance and relational development between students, the data also suggest that host students assume similarities with cultural peers, who they typically identify based on nationality and age. As Emer remarks, “You’re going to think you have more in common with the Irish because you’re Irish. It’s a perception”. This idea that sharing nationality leads to assumptions of commonalities is also evident in Jack’s comments:

> I suppose you’d think, ‘This lad here is Irish, so I can talk to him’. Like, ‘I might have something in common with this lad, more than I have with someone else like, someone from Holland or wherever’. ‘Sure I might have more in common with an Irish person’.

Crucially, the data also suggest that host students perceive a definite *lack* of commonalities between themselves and students perceived as culturally different, which has serious implications for intercultural contact. Indeed, a lack of perceived commonalities was also identified as a significant issue for intercultural contact in the studies of Kudo and Simkin (2003) and Ujitani (2006). Furthermore, it can be linked with a number of the barriers to intercultural contact listed in Table 3.3, such as ‘Age gap between students’, ‘Cultural Distance’, ‘Differences in Communication Styles’, ‘Different Interests’, and ‘Lack of shared experiences between Students’.

Within the data host students’ perceived lack of commonalities with culturally different students is evinced by codes such as *‘Hosts lacking commonalities with CD students’* (8), *‘Not mixing with CD students due to lack of commonalities’* (6), and *‘Hosts avoiding contact due to perceived lack of commonalities’* (2). David suggests, “I don’t think you can communicate with someone if you have no common ground because if two people are making small talk it’s just pathetic”. Jane, meanwhile, reflecting on her relationship with a mature Nigerian student during work placement, argues:

> There’s just nothing to link us! There isn’t! … There actually *are* not things in common. Because I talked to the woman for four weeks and like if there was, like it would be great, because like that, I could talk to her about all that stuff that she wanted to know about her daughter that she would have never said to her daughter. So that was grand like. But apart from that, she’d be like, ‘Oh, I put my dinner on last night and it will be ready tonight’, and, ‘We like to slow-cook things’, and, ‘Is that not really tough?’, ‘No, I like it like

> that', 'Ok!', ya know. Who am I to criticise that? Or when she says, 'Oh, Irish food is so bland', and just differences like. Nothing in common! Different tastes in food, in music, in clothes, in people, ya know.

Overall, data analysis indicates that the sub-category of 'Commonalities' has important implications for intercultural contact. Host students' perceptions of commonalities underpin 'Homophily', which in turn underpins 'Separation'. Likewise, a perceived lack of commonalities is an obstacle to intercultural contact. Coupled with this, we find evidence that host students perceive there to be few commonalities with students they identify as culturally different, whereas they either assume, or genuinely share, commonalities with cultural peers, who they typically identify based on nationality or age.

Returning to the central concern, we can posit that the perceived lack of commonalities constitutes a significant barrier to intercultural contact from the perspective of host students. The challenge for those parties tasked with improving relations therefore, may be to create or identify such commonalities, a point which is discussed in greater detail in section 7.5.1.

6.3.2 Availability of Cultural Peers

Having highlighted the importance of 'Commonalities', the point must also be made that in order for 'Homophily' to develop, individuals require 'similar others' to be available to them. With this in mind, the sub-category 'Availability of Cultural Peers' refers to instances where students from the same culture – termed 'cultural peers' or 'co-culturals' – are accessible to each other within the college environment. Importantly, host students discuss this concept primarily with regard to students of other cultures having access to cultural peers, rather than reflecting on host students having access to cultural peers. The reason for this may be that as the host majority group, availability of cultural peers is a given.

As has been discussed, 'Homophily' is closely linked with 'Separation', given that in situations where students have the option of the interacting with cultural peers, they will tend to do this rather than engaging with students from other cultures. Having access to cultural peers may therefore disincentivise students from interacting with students they perceive to be different, as they may instead opt to stay within the safer, culturally familiar context. Conversely, the unavailability of cultural peers may promote intercultural contact. As Etain suggests: “If there was only one or two of them they would have to mix more. You only mix when you have to”. Likewise, when asked if she mixes with her German and French classmates, Kimberly remarks:

> Not massively really at all now. Cos there are so many of them … one of the problems with the Germans is there is so many of them. They don’t feel the urgency and then we don’t feel the urgency either to like, you know, get them mingling, because there are so many of them…I can’t really say to DCU, ‘Bring less over!’, but that would really help…I think that’s a big thing. You should never let too many people of the one…like who are friends, or the one type or one area, come together, because then there is no attempt to mix.

Analysis of the data also suggests that ‘Availability of Cultural Peers’ not only facilitates homophilic behaviour, but also reduces the *need* for students not from the host culture to interact with hosts, given that a group can function more independently than an individual. In such instances, the perceived utility of contact with hosts is replaced by contact with cultural peers. This argument is supported by Volet and Ang (1998: 7-8) who suggest that “when co-national support is strong within the host country, students may not need to rely on the host culture as the primary context for social interactions”. Further support for this thesis can be found by reference to Todd and Nesdale (1997a: 6), who suggest that when international students have cultural peers available to them “the pursuit of intercultural contacts comprises an expenditure in time and effort which is not *necessary* to their social wellbeing” (original italics).

This idea of ‘need’ emerges frequently within the data, and is further discussed in section 7.6, when analysing the respective stances and motivations of host and non-host students to engage with each other. When speculating about international students’ interest in engaging with Irish students, for example, Yvette remarks:

> I think they are kind of indifferent about it. They seem to come over and there’s loads of them so they don’t *need* to. Like they don’t *need* to mix with Irish students.

Kimberly elaborates on this point:

> You don’t have to put the effort in when you have people that you are with, that speak your language, that are from the same area. They have the same interests, the same traditions. You just don’t feel the need then to mix.

Indeed, where multiple cultural groups have cultural peers available, this creates further barriers, as the perceived need to interact with different cultures diminishes for each group, given that collectively the group can operate in a more self-sufficient manner.

Overall, the ‘Availability of Cultural Peers’ emerges as a significant barrier to intercultural relations insofar as it fosters ‘Homophily’ and reduces individuals’ need to engage with students perceived to be culturally different. Furthermore, while speculating about how the availability of precise numbers of cultural peers might correlate quantitatively with intercultural interaction is not an aim of this study, it does appear that the actual numbers of students from a given group may be influential. The data suggest that relatively large groups have a greater ability and tendency to exist independently with minimum contact with host culture students. As Yvette comments:

> Half of those students are just going to go and like it’s kind of sad to think that they came over here and just stayed in their own groups. They didn’t interact … It’s like they have come over here but haven’t really experienced the Irish culture. Because they’re just in their own apartment, they’re coming to lectures, and then they’re in with their own friends, who are…they’re not Irish people so how can they get into it? Do ya know what I mean? I just think it’s kinda sad.

This implies that the size of the group may be inversely proportional to their level of intercultural contact, while not having cultural peers available implies the need to mix with other students, and so drives intercultural contact. This will be further discussed with regard to the theoretical concept of ‘institutional completeness’ (Breton 1964) in Chapter 9.

Finally, the category of ‘Availability of Cultural Peers’ raises important questions for policy makers whose current internationalisation policies seek to ‘recruit’ large numbers of international students from specific international ‘markets’. For example, Volet and Ang (1998: 8) argue that the presence of large numbers of international students from the same country "is inhibiting the formation of culturally mixed groups". This point is also supported by Dunstan (2003: 70):

> In very large institutions, it is understandable that students are frequently alienated from each other and that they prefer to stay on their own side of cultural borders in spite of physical proximity with others. This is particularly true when groups of similar background are recruited into cohesive student populations.

This emphasises the point made in Chapter 3 that the mere presence of students from different cultures will not ensure interaction. Furthermore, it may lead institutions seeking to promote intercultural relations on campus to question whether levels of structural diversity should actually be capped. Referring to the high levels of international students in New Zealand, for example, Smith and Rae (2006: 42) ask "what is the optimal level of international students at a New Zealand public tertiary institution, and how might such an optimum be defined?".

6.3.3 Perceived Ease of Communication

While the 'Availability of Cultural Peers' represents an environmental condition facilitating 'Homophily', the 'Perceived Ease of Communication' is something students associate with, and expect from, homophilic encounters. This is highlighted in Table 6.4 overleaf. Within the data this association emerges strongly, including references to language skills, accent interpretation, as well as communication styles, such as conflict styles and approaches to working in groups. Highlighting the perceived ease of communication in homophilic contact, Owen and Eve remark:

> I think it comes back to the ease thing. It's just easier not to [mix]! It's easy just to talk to some people you've know all your life, who speak the exact same and use the exact same sort of words as you, and a similar accent that you kind of understand. Sometimes it's just easier to go with whatever is the most recognisable to you and easy to understand. (Owen)
>
> You stick to what you know. Like when you're in your group of Irish people and there's a group of Spanish people as well, or Chinese people, or whatever, you'll stick to your own group. Like because, whatever, they're all speaking your same language. They're all, ya know, it's what you're used to. I always find that. Definitely. Definitely. Stick with what you know. (Eve)

As a result of the perceived ease of their communication, ‘Homophily’ leaves students feeling more comfortable in their environment. As Samantha remarks of her relationships with other Irish students, “they are the same as you. So whatever is closest to you, you are more comfortable around”. Owen echoes this when he suggests “it’s a more comfortable thing. It’s not necessarily a better thing, but it’s quite easy to just stay with people who will understand everything you say”. A clear link between ‘Homophily’, ‘Perceived Ease of Communication’ and ‘Language’, therefore emerges from the data, and is evident in the voice of several other students, including Claudine:

> When you are talking to an Irish student you are a lot more relaxed. Like you and me talking, or talking with anyone, you can just chat away to them. But I find that with a person from a different race you are watching what you’re saying, you feel like you have to say things differently so that they can understand you. Not making things easier, but you’re just trying to make sure that you’re not talking too fast and you’re rephrasing your questions and stuff like that, which I do find I do a lot of the time.

Table 6.4 Codes supporting a link between ‘Homophily’ and ‘Perceived Ease of Communication’

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Assuming it is easier to communicate with cultural peers	1
Being easier managing conflict with cultural peers	1
Being able to communicate with people of similar background	1
Being able to relate with Irish students better than CD students	1
Being easier to communicate with your own culture	7
Being easier to mix with cultural peers	3
Being easier to relate to students your own age	1
Being easier to talk when you share commonalities	3
Being easy staying with people you know	1
Commonalities facilitating communication	10
Common experiences facilitating communication	1
Finding it easier to do groupwork with cultural peers	6
Finding it easier to mix with similar cultures	2
Finding it easier to stick with your own type	1
Finding it easier to 'touch' cultural peers	1
Gravitating towards students you can easily communicate with	1
Mixing easier with people who speak your language	1

Within existing empirical studies, the importance of ease or difficulty in communication also evident. Ujitani (2006) refers to differences in communication styles inhibiting intercultural relations, Volet and Ang (1998) include similarity of communication style within the concept of ‘cultural-emotional connectedness’, and Kudo and Simkin (2003) identify international students’ communication skills as central to their friendship development with local students. Interestingly, Claudine also discusses how the ease of communication associated with ‘Homophily’ underpins one’s relationship development by facilitating the formation of trust at a faster pace:

> Trust is built, but it can be built a lot quicker with Irish students because you know, like they know where you’re coming from, and you know where they’re coming from, and you know what sort of person they are. You get to know them a lot quicker I think.

Furthermore, Carol’s comments, which again relate to relationship development, suggest that the familiarity associated with ‘Homophily’ enables her to ‘touch’ others more easily:

> There is a familiarity with the Irish. Like getting to know them, it’s just so much more easy. It’s easier to ‘touch’ them, for want of a better word. It’s just easier to know where they are coming from. Like to know what kind of people they are.

From the data analysis it becomes evident then that ‘Homophily’ affords host students an ease of communication and interaction which they do not associate with intercultural contact. This idea is examined in greater detail in Chapter 8, within the category of ‘Nature of Interaction’.

6.3.4 Security

In addition to ‘Homophily’ being underpinned by ‘Commonalities’, fostered by the ‘Availability of Cultural Peers’ and associated with a ‘Perceived Ease of Communication’, it is also linked with feelings of personal security. The concept of ‘Security’ is articulated by students evoking ideas of safety and anxiety reduction associated with contact with students they perceive to be similar to themselves. The use of gerunds such as ‘clinging to’ what is similar by Carol, and metaphors of a ‘safety blanket’ and ‘safety zone’ proffered by Kimberly, evokes images of the security host students attribute to homophilic encounters. As Laura, a mature student, comments:

> I think it’s probably the safety of a group. The safety of something you know. And I see that not just in university, but in any situation. People just tend to stay with what’s safe and comfortable, rather than maybe exploring new territory.

As is evident from Table 6.5, the sub-category of ‘Security’ does not emerge as strongly from the data as the previous three subcategories. However, it can be juxtaposed with the much larger category of ‘Anxiety’, which is discussed in detail in section 8.2.1. Also, the security of homophilic interaction can be linked with the category of ‘Time’ discussed in section 7.8, as it deals with host students’ tendency to seek similar others from a very early stage of college, partly as a strategy to overcome feelings of uncertainty and anxiety associated with being in a new, unfamiliar environment.

Table 6.5 Codes supporting ‘Homophily’ as a source of ‘Security’ within the Data

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Associating risk with IC contact	2
Being anxious when talking with CD students	3
Being scared of the unknown	2
Clinging to other English speakers in non-English country	1
Fearing the unknown	2
Feeling safe with cultural peers	1
Feeling safe with the familiar	1
Finding security with co-nationals	2
Linking danger with the unfamiliar	1
Sticking to the familiar to reduce anxiety	1
Sticking together to overcome difficulties	1

6.3.5 Summary of Homophily

Given the very large size of the category of ‘Homophily’, it is important to concisely clarify its relationship with intercultural contact based on the evidence found within the data. Analysis of the data suggests that ‘Homophily’ not only represents a significant barrier to intercultural contact, but that homophilic behaviour is the norm among students. This is based on host students' self-reported behaviour and their observations of other students.

While 'Homophily' is based on perceived 'Commonalities', the 'Availability of Cultural Peers' plays a central role in the phenomenon, as it facilitates homophilic behaviour by affording accessibility to cultural peers. This in turn raises questions about the impact of group size on intercultural relations. Finally, as has been shown, 'Homophily' is also linked with a 'Perceived Ease of Communication' and a level of 'Security' different from that experienced in intracultural contact.

6.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has focused on the categories of 'Separation' and 'Homophily' in a bid to gain a qualitative understanding of the level of intercultural contact taking place on campus from the perspective of host students. The data analysis indicates that although host students have experiences of intercultural contact, these are infrequent and largely superficial, and references to regular intercultural contact and intimate intercultural friendships are few. This lack of intercultural contact mirrors that which has been identified in many existing studies exploring contact between international and host students (section 3.4.1).

While quantitative research may produce generalisable findings on the level of intercultural contact taking place between students of different ages and nationalities, the in-depth analysis of these categories, in particular 'Homophily', provides valuable insights into the nature of intercultural contact on campus. Given that 'Homophily' appears to represent an almost instinctive barrier to intercultural contact, further exploration of the concept is certainly desirable, given that in explicating its properties and dimensions, strategies to overcome it may be identified.

Overall, aside from situations in which intercultural contact is engineered and somewhat beyond their control, students' behaviour, as reported and observed by the host students, appears to reflect a 'natural', ineluctable, gravitation toward what is perceived to be culturally familiar. While perceived similarity underpins homophilic behaviour, perceived difference increases the likelihood of ‘Separation’. Undoubtedly, this has significant implications for intercultural contact on campus.

While the data analysis outlined in the following two chapters will continue to highlight and comment on the level of intercultural contact taking place on campus, immediate attention now turns to the specific factors which may impact upon the likelihood of intercultural contact from the perspective of host students. These are encompassed under the core category of ‘Acquaintance Prospects’.

Chapter 7: INTERCUTLURAL ACQUAINTANCE PROSPECTS

7.1 Introduction

This chapter is concerned with host students' perspectives on the factors which influence the likelihood of intercultural contact taking place. These factors are subsumed under the core category of intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects'. In addition to identifying these factors, the aim is to provide support for them within the data, and consider how they exert influence on students' intercultural contact.

'Acquaintance Prospects' should be understood as the likelihood of intercultural contact taking place between students on campus. The concept is similar to that of 'Acquaintance Potential', defined by Todd and Nesdale (1997b: 63) as "the opportunity to get to know the other person". However, while Todd and Nesdale's (ibid.) concept is concerned primarily with environmental or situational factors that bring students into physical proximity with one another, the category of 'Acquaintance Prospects' includes additional elements, such as students' motivations to interact with each other.

Figure 7.1 presents each of the factors, or categories, which conflate to form 'Acquaintance Prospects'. In all, seven categories are identified and examined. In analysing each one, the specific objective is to understand how that category informs 'Acquaintance Prospects' from host students' perspective. As in Chapter 5, regular reference to this figure may facilitate following the discussion as it progresses, particularly as this is the largest chapter of research findings. Finally, while each category is discussed separately, many are closely interrelated and overlap to varying degrees, thereby highlighting the complexity of the phenomenon.

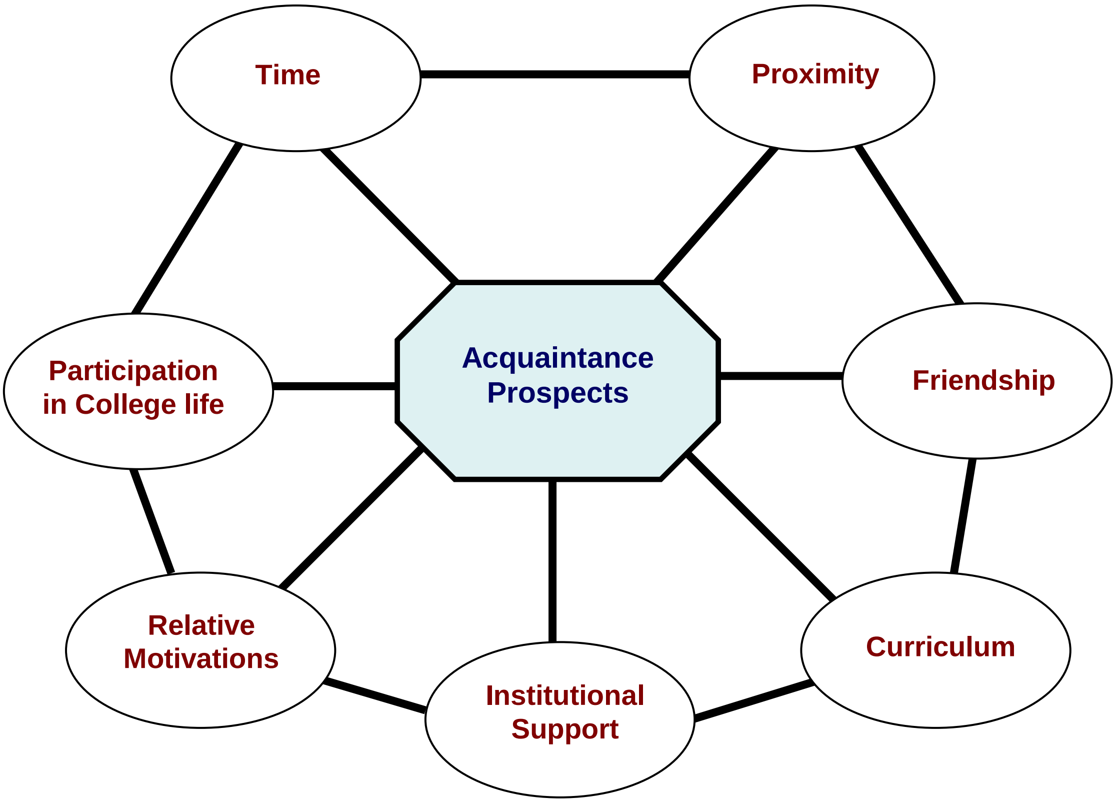

Time
Proximity
Participation in College life
Acquaintance Prospects
Friendship
Relative Motivations
Institutional Support
Curriculum

Diagram 7.1 Categories identified as central to Intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects'

7.2 Proximity

> *"If you're not in a day-to-day environment where there are other nationalities, then you're not going to meet them or maintain contact with them."* (Sally)

Central to the category of intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects' is the idea of 'Proximity'. This category is distinct from the other categories which form part of 'Acquaintance Prospects' in that it constitutes a prerequisite for intercultural contact. While categories such as 'Relative Motivations' are, as we shall see, influential agents informing intercultural acquaintance prospects, 'Proximity' is an imperative which underpins several categories. Put simply, physical proximity to an individual facilitates acquaintance with that individual by increasing the likelihood of interaction taking place. Given modern technological innovations, such as the Internet and other applications which allow remote communication, it may be posited that ‘Contactability’ or ‘Accessibility’ may be more appropriate terms than physical ‘Proximity’. However, technology did not emerge as a factor impacting upon students’ intercultural contact on campus, whereas physical ‘Proximity’ certainly did.

Within the broad university environment, the host students reflect on ‘Proximity’ in terms of their living situation, as well as their curricular and extra-curricular activities. While only three of the students, Owen, Daragh and Frank, actually report living with students they define as culturally different, there is general consensus that cohabiting with a student from another culture facilitates intercultural contact. Furthermore, there is recognition that living with students from other cultures increases the likelihood of becoming acquainted with their broader social network, and indeed could also facilitate cultural learning, an idea further explored in section 8.3.1. As Owen remarks:

> I’m actually living with two French fellows at the moment. It would seem, it might be just because of the two French lads I am living with, that I am experiencing a lot more foreign students ... You have these things, living with these French lads, and you get into these groups and you talk to them about the differences and their culture and where they come from and stuff, and I think I probably will be better from now on talking with people from different cultures as well.

Daragh expresses similar thoughts about becoming acquainted with greater numbers of students from other cultures as a result of living with a Japanese student:

> One of my room mates is Asian and he is over from Japan for a year. Yeah, [I] don’t know if there’s a lot more [Asian students] than last year. Maybe I wasn’t aware of them last year because I think they all live in College Park and they don’t get stuck with Larkfield, but I see more of them this year because I know a few of them.[42]

In addition to discussing the implications of living *with* a student from another culture, host students also speak about how living *near* another individual may influence acquaintance prospects. This again highlights the importance of ‘Proximity’ in contact and relational development. As Jane explains:

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[42] Both College Park and Larkfield are student residence buildings.

> It's more a convenience thing. Say there are these areas in town where lots of people from the same nation live together. So say three of the people might be from that one apartment block. So they would see each other on the stairs and they'd be like, 'Ah sure let's get the bus home'. So it's not whether we want to or not, it's just circumstances.

In particular, the host students differentiate between living 'on campus' or 'off campus', even if the off-campus accommodation is run by the university. When asked to identify the main factors creating obstacles for host students becoming acquainted with culturally different students, Ivan suggests, "physical ones. Like, I know that a lot of exchange students do live over in Shanowen[43]. A lot of them, like obviously, are on the other side of where the other people live". Such a lack of proximity is clearly a barrier to intercultural contact, as this issue is mentioned by a number of students, with Sorcha perhaps being particularly expressive:

> It's difficult because the majority of foreign students live in Shanowen, whereas the majority of Irish students would live at home or on campus … whoever you'd live near you'd probably tend to be closer to, so when they all moved in to Shanowen together they obviously bonded and stuff, but it wasn't intentional, I don't think, that, to separate the two sides … One girl from our course lives on campus that I know of, but the rest live in Shanowen or houses over by Shanowen. So of course, you know, it's easier for them to pop into each other. Just like if I have friends on campus it's easier to pop into their flat.

Turning attention away from one's living environment, the host students also highlight the importance of 'Proximity' in terms of their curricular and extra-curricular contexts. Ivan in particular emphasises the importance of 'Proximity' to intercultural contact as he reflects on his lack of opportunity for contact with Asian students on campus:

> They're not in any of my clubs or societies or any of my lectures. I have no 'way' of really contacting them. You do see them around, but I have never really met them socially or anything like that.

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[43] Shanowen is a university owned off-campus residence approximately five minutes walk from the campus.

This idea of students coming into contact in the university environment is explored in greater detail in section 7.7, ‘Participation in College Life’. At this juncture, however, the point should be emphasised that host students perceive ‘Proximity’ to be central to ‘Acquaintance Prospects’. Without satisfying the prerequisite of ‘Proximity’ in one’s living, academic, or social environment, intercultural acquaintance prospects are fundamentally compromised, as the opportunity for contact diminishes. Indeed, the argument for creating a diverse student body is premised on the notion that proximity will facilitate intercultural contact. With this in mind, it should be again noted that the findings outlined in Chapter 5 indicate that students have different seating patterns within lectures, which creates distance between them.

Proximity has also been identified as a major factor impacting intercultural contact in existing studies. It is proffered as a factor in the findings of both Takai (1991) and Gareis (1995, 2000), who refers specifically to co-habitation as an important facilitator. Ujitani (2006), meanwhile, identifies proximity as one the four major factors influencing intercultural relational development within existing literature, and also identifies it as a factor in her findings. Furthermore, it is encompassed within the concept of ‘propinquity’, which Kudo and Simkin (2003) have identified as a primary facilitator of intercultural contact. In addition to this, Brown (2000: 47) proposes proximity as a crucial factor influencing both contact and group cohesion, and refers to a seminal study by Festinger et al. (1950) which found that students’ friendship networks were heavily influenced by physical distance, a finding that was later supported by Ebbesen et al. (1976). Similarly, McPherson et al. (2001), cite Verbrugge’s (1983) study, which concluded that residential proximity was the key determinant of friendship and socialising, while Milem et al. (2005: 28) argue that “proximity is a strong determinant of friendship selection”.

Given that both ‘Curriculum’ and ‘Participation in College Life’ will be discussed in detail in sections 7.4 and 7.7 respectively, further references to these are not included at this juncture. Instead, the focus now shifts to the category of ‘Friendship’ and its impact on intercultural acquaintance prospects.

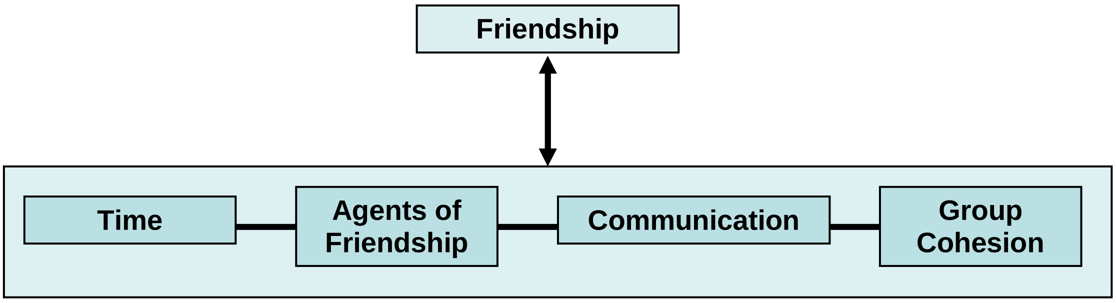
7.3 Friendship

> *"So, it's just, you have your group of friends and then you have acquaintances and that's how it stays. You'll wave to them and that's it like."* (Kimberly)

'Friendship' emerges as a very sizeable category within the data. It is apparent that friendship development represents a major priority for host students at the start of university and that their experience of university is significantly shaped by their friendship group. The data also suggest that host students view friendship formation as a linear process, moving from superficial acquaintance to progressive levels of familiarity and intimacy over time. However, the primary focus is to understand how this category may influence intercultural contact from the host students' perspective.

In order to facilitate a thorough analysis of 'Friendship', the category was fractured. This involves re-categorising constituent codes under specific sub-headings in an attempt to explicate the properties and dimensions of the category. Probing the data in this way enables a deeper analysis, which helps to link the category to the central research concern. This process produced four subcategories, shown in Figure 7.2. Each of these will now be discussed in greater detail.

Figure 7.2 Constituents of 'Friendship' emerging from the Data



7.3.1 Time

A major concern for students starting college relates to friendship development in their new environment. As Carol recalls, "my main concerns before going to college were, 'Who am I going to be friends with?'". This mirrors the comments of Milem et al. (2005: 28), who argue that “first year is the period when friendship selection is the dominant aspect of a students’ social life”. Recognising the utility of friendship(s) is important in understanding why this is such a concern for students. Within the data, students discuss friendship in terms of providing security, information, and support. These conflate to reduce feelings of uncertainty and anxiety, which are often elevated at the start of college. In this sense, friendship formation significantly facilitates students’ adaptation to college life, while a lack of friendship can leave students feeling isolated and disengaged from the college experience. This is highlighted by Etain’s reflections on her lack of friends during her first semester in college:

> Like I came here on my own. I didn’t know anyone and that’s very, very hard. But like I only met them [friends] at Christmas I would say. Once I met them then I was grand. But up until Christmas it was just horrible … You’re bored like. Like there’s nothing to do cos there’s no one. You went to college and then you’re just going back to your house for the rest of the day watching TV like. Just boring. Not good for you like.

Analysis of the data suggests that Etain’s experience is actually uncommon, insofar as most students indicate that they formed long-term friendships at a very early stage of college, in some cases on the way to college on the first day of orientation. Samantha recalls how seeking friends was a strategy to reduce anxiety and isolation at the start of college: “Yeah, you go up and talk to someone straight away because everyone is just dying to see someone so they’re not standing on their own”. Amy also expresses similar ideas:

> Everyone was kind of like standing there awkward the first day, and then groups of friends kind of arose within the first two weeks.

Indeed, the density of the codes ‘*Forming core friendships at the start of college*’ (10), and ‘*Friendship groups forming very early in college*’ (12), evince the rapidity with which friendships are formed in college. This is important, as it suggests that the first weeks of college are hugely important for students’ friendship development, which in turn has significant implications for their intercultural acquaintance prospects.

7.3.2 Agents of Friendship

While friendship-seeking emerges as a common activity among all students, it is necessary to identify and examine which factors impact upon exactly *whom* host students develop friendships with, so that this can subsequently be discussed with reference to intercultural contact. As was discussed in the analysis of ‘Homophily’ (section 6.3), data analysis suggests that friendship is closely related with perceived ‘Commonalities’, whereby students gravitate towards those they perceive to be similar, and once established, additional commonalities are identified or created through shared experience. As such, ‘Friendship’ is closely linked with the category of ‘Homophily’.

Specifically, the data suggest that host students typically form friendships with students of the same nationality and age group, who have shared interests and who are in their course of study. The code *‘Friendship being based on commonalities’* (14) provides support for the relationship between friendship and commonalities, while Elaine’s comments, in this case referring to mature students, provide a good example of how this is articulated by students:

> I’m not saying I have no stuff in common with mature students, but like, you have more in common with them [younger Irish students] and they are the same age group as you and you’re interested in the same things.

Students’ course of study forms part of a much larger category, ‘Curriculum’, which emerges very strongly from the data. While this is analysed in detail in section 7.4, within the context of friendship formation, the codes listed in Table 7.1 highlight how influential one’s course of study can be in terms of friendship formation. As Jack remarks:

> The course would be very important in the way of who you meet up with and who you become friends with in the end. The course is always going to have something to do with it.

This is perhaps to be expected, given that the course of study brings students together in close proximity for substantial periods of time and assigns tasks which may demand interaction. Furthermore, the very fact that students have selected the same course indicates some degree of common interest in terms of academic subjects.

Table 7.1 Codes highlighting the relationship between Course of Study and Friendship

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Cooperative learning facilitating friendship	5
Course being central to friendship formation	13
Course being main avenue for meeting people	3
Forming work groups with existing friends	5
Having majority of friends within course of study	4
Having to find new friends after changing course	2
Making close friends based on course and nationality	2
Needing friends within your class	2
Sitting with friends in lectures	6

The dynamic and referral-based nature of students' friendship network development is also very evident within the data, as exemplified by the code '*Making friends through friends*' (16). Metaphors such as 'branching out' (Amy) and a 'domino effect' (Emer) allude to friendship networks developing on the basis of friends introducing friends to other friends. As Emer puts it:

> I was friends with my best friend and we used always be together and then you'd start chatting together and it's like a domino effect. Like when you get friends with them, and then they're friends with them, so you're friends with them.

This pattern of friendship formation mirrors Yum's (1988) thesis that intracultural social networks are different to intercultural social networks. Specifically, she suggested that intracultural networks are interlocking and underpinned by 'transitivity', which is the idea "my friend's friends are my friends" (ibid.: 252). In comparison, she proposes that intercultural networks are radial, uniplex and based on relatively weak ties (ibid.). Additional, albeit less dense codes which relate to friendship development include '*Living proximity facilitating friendship development*' (6), '*Proximity facilitating friendship*' (3), '*Socialising being important for friendship development*' (5), and '*Spending time together underpinning* *friendship*' (4). Each of these links with other constituent categories of 'Acquaintance Prospects' which are discussed in separate sections, such as 'Proximity', 'Participation in College Life' and 'Time'.

Overall, the data analysis indicates that 'Friendship' is heavily influenced by students' course of study and perceived commonalities, both of which create conditions favourable to intercultural contact. As we have seen in section 6.3, however, host students perceive relatively fewer commonalities with students perceived as culturally different, implying that one of the primary reported foundations of friendship formation appears to be lacking in intercultural contexts.

7.3.3 Communication

The concept of 'Communication' also emerges as an important element of friendship formation and development. This includes references to the importance of conversation to friendship development – '*Conversation being vital to friendship development*' (6) – and, as mentioned in section 6.3, the 'Perceived Ease of Communication'. Within the subcategory of 'Communication', references to a shared sense of humour and an appreciation of 'slagging'[44] emerge as prominent codes. With regard to humour, Jack, whose best friend is actually a Nigerian student who has lived in Ireland for several years, remarks:

> If you can have a bit of humour and you have a chat and a laugh with someone you are obviously going to get on with them quicker … And there's good sense of humour between the two of us. We get on fierce well.

Furthermore, while 'slagging' partly relates to humour, it also operates at a deeper level, indicating a common understanding between both parties, as well as a degree of trust. As Sorcha comments:

> We just mess with each other and slag each other whereas some of them, we wouldn't feel we could slag them because the differences in Irish language, like our slang, we wouldn't want to offend them because if they didn't understand what we meant by it.

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[44] 'Slagging' refers to humorous, reciprocal, and sometimes highly personal, mocking between friends which is common in Ireland. While such humour falls under the category of 'aggressive humour' (Miczo and Welter 2006) insofar as it appears to derogate the target, it can also be argued to constitute a form of 'affiliative humour' (ibid.) which elicits laughter and other forms of amusement in targets.

Coupled with this, the *depth* of the communication also emerges as an important factor in friendship development. The need for honesty, trust, transparency and increasing levels of self-disclosure all emerge as important aspects in friendship development. This finding mirrors those of Ujitani (2006), Lee (2006) and Kudo and Simkin (2003), which found self-disclosure to be an important factor informing students' intercultural contact and relational development. Furthermore, it relates directly to social penetration theory (Altman and Taylor 1973), which will be discussed in Chapter 9. As Daragh states:

> If it was with a close friend and I was talking about something like that [religion], I wouldn't curtail what I had to say because of their religion, even if it was going to offend them based on their religion. I would still say it and we would have a discussion on it.

The importance of self-disclosure to friendship development, as exemplified in Table 7.2, can be contrasted with students' discussion of the actual nature of their intercultural contact, which is explored in detail in the next chapter in sections 8.2.3, 'Language', and 8.2.4, 'Compromising Identity'. However, at this juncture, the main point to be made is that 'Communication', understood as the successful sharing of meaning with another individual, constitutes a central aspect of friendship development from host students' perspective.

Table 7.2 Codes highlighting Self-disclosure as an important aspect of Friendship Development

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Asking more personal questions as you get to know someone	1
Avoidance of a topic compromising relationship	1
Breaking down barriers through self-disclosure	4
Close friendships needing to be based on transparency	3
Deepening friendship through talking	4
Openness being a central aspect of friendship	1
Trust being an important aspect of friendship	2
Valuing honesty of opinion less among acquaintances	1
Valuing verbal face to face contact	1

7.3.4 Group Cohesion

Another important concept related to 'Friendship' is the concept of 'Group Cohesion'. Within the data, students explain how their friendships lead to the creation of friendship groups which are bound by 'Group Cohesion'. This concept can be understood as subscribing to the implicit and explicit 'rules' of a group. 'Group Cohesion' appears to permeate all levels of college life, both within the curricular environment – '*Forming work groups with existing friends'* (5), and '*Sitting within groups in lectures*' (3) – and also within the extra-curricular environment, including students' social life and eating behaviours, such as who they lunch with.

Importantly, data analysis suggests that 'Group Cohesion' constitutes a barrier to intercultural contact from the perspective of both ingroup *and* outgroup members. For members of the ingroup, the cohesion of the group impacts upon tendencies to engage and develop relationships with students from the outgroup. As Claudine remarks, "Once, I think, Irish students get into a group we kind of tend to be cosy and that's it. We're not really accepting to letting anyone else into it". Kimberly expresses a similar view when she comments:

> Eventually you make your own little group of friends and then you just kind of like stop talking to other people. Not in a mean way, it just happens to everybody. You make your own friends and then just go on.

This implies that 'Group Cohesion' limits students' proclivity and/or ability to develop intercultural relations on campus. Furthermore, the concept also encompasses the idea of peer pressure, which ingroup members may exert upon each other. A number of students identify this as a barrier to intercultural contact. When asked how she believes her friends would react were she to express her desire to mix with students from other cultures, Yvette responds:

> They'd be like 'What! You're crazy. No'. Yeah, yeah. I suppose like that group mentality thing as well like. You're not just gonna say like, 'I wanna be friends with the French students', if your friends are just like, 'No!'. Like, it's just the way, ya know. It's young people. We get peer pressure.

Likewise, Cara talks about being concerned about how her friends might react were she to make an effort to befriend students from other cultures:

> Like they are together and we are together. It's just kind of like a clique that I don't know if it would change if I was going for lunch with her, and then would the other people be annoyed because I was going for lunch with another person not in our group? You know that way? ... I noticed last year, when I started talking to people from different countries, everyone was kind of like, 'Oh, are you friends with her now?! Why are you friends with her?!'. Some people are really against people coming into the country and things like that.

Peer pressure was also found to a barrier to intercultural contact by Boucher (1998), while Li et al. (2005) identified strength of identification with ingroup to also constitute a barrier. Table 7.3 below provides a list of codes that highlight 'Group Cohesion' as a barrier to intercultural contact *specifically from the perspective of ingroup members*.

Table 7.3 Codes highlighting 'Group Cohesion' as a Barrier to Intercultural Contact from the perspective of Ingroup Members

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Being easier to engage with CD students before friendship groups are established	1
Being hard to introduce new friendship group members	1
Cliques hindering mixing with other cultures	5
Friendship group being a barrier to meeting CD students	11
Interacting primarily with core friendship group	2
Peer pressure being a barrier to intercultural contact	6
Pre-existing friendship groups hindering mixing with others	1
Sticking with cultural peer group hindering integration	1
Sticking within core friendship group	5

Coupled with the proposition that ingroup membership may hinder intercultural contact, the data analysis also indicates that 'Group Cohesion' constitutes a further barrier *from the perspective of outgroup members*. Codes supporting this are shown in Table 7.4. Students speak in detail about their tendency to avoid approaching groups of students from other cultures, as opposed to individual students. They suggest a variety of reasons for such avoidance, primarily relating to feelings of intimidation resulting from group size and group cohesion, as well as uncertainty about the openness or receptivity of the group to their efforts to interact. This relates to the category of 'Anxiety' (section 8.2.1). This uncertainty and anxiety is heightened when the group comprises students perceived to be culturally different. As Elaine remarks:

> When they are all together like, ya know, it's kind of hard for someone to go over, ya know. It's kind of hard like. Like some of my class – and they'd all be together – I don't know how many of them there is, but when you would go over you would feel kind of intimidated like … I think it's because there are so many of them. Not that there's so many of them like, but in my class when they are together like, I think it's more that like. And you think, well I would think, that they would look down on me or something, like I don't know. I kind of get that impression.

Table 7.4 Codes highlighting 'Group Cohesion' as a Barrier to Intercultural Contact from the perspective of Outgroup Members

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Avoiding approaching big groups of CD students	2
Being hard to approach and enter a different cultural group	7
Being intimidated approaching groups of CD students	5
Group size hindering contact	10
Nature of a group deterring others to engage	2
Not mixing with CD students because they stick in a group	1
Preferring to approach smaller groups of CD students	1

As well as the barriers discussed above, another interesting concept emerging from the data is that of 'friendship capacity'; the idea that individuals, in this case host students, have a finite capacity for friends within the college environment. Once this capacity has been reached, their motivation to seek out or reciprocate advances from potential friends is reduced. Referring to Irish students she knows, Sorcha suggests:

> I suppose they just weren't bothered making the effort to integrate with the other foreign students because there are enough Irish, I suppose they thought, to be friends with.

Perhaps the comment conjuring the richest image of this comes from Kimberly:

> You get kind of *saturated* with meeting people in college everyday. You meet so many people and I think there’s only so many…you don’t need to know so many people.

Overall then, ‘Group Cohesion’, as a subcategory of ‘Friendship’, appears to constitute an important barrier to intercultural contact by constructing obstacles for both ingroup and outgroup members. Consequently, it further complicates intercultural ‘Acquaintance Prospects’ and is another example of the complexity of the phenomenon.

7.3.5 Implications of ‘Friendship’ for Intercultural Contact

Analysis of the data has highlighted the importance of ‘Friendship’ for host students, the rapidity with which friendships tend to form in college, how friendship networks typically develop, the factors that combine to determine who students befriend, the dynamics of communication between friends, including the importance of self-disclosure, and the impact of ‘Group Cohesion’. The key consideration, however, is how these collectively relate to host students’ intercultural ‘Acquaintance Prospects’. Does the category of ‘Friendship’ as explicated thus far facilitate intercultural contact from the host students’ perspective? Does it hinder it? Or simply have no impact upon it?

As has been shown, host students typically form friendships quickly in college. This is partly an anxiety-reducing strategy employed by students, whereby they form friendships to reduce the uncertainty of a new environment. In forming friendships for this purpose, perceived familiarity and similarity are initially preferred to novelty and difference. Accordingly, host students’ friendships are often underpinned by commonalities with others based on nationality, age, shared interests and their course of study. This implies that their core friendship group is generally monocultural and based within their course of study, while, based on the ‘domino effect’ of friendship referral, their extended friendship network also tends to be primarily monocultural This process does little to foster intercultural acquaintance prospects, as the students’ friendship strategy is one which sees them distancing themselves, or ‘gravitating away’, from perceived cultural difference.

Given that the course of study appears to heavily influence the composition of friendship groups, it is important to state that in courses which have relatively low levels of ‘structural diversity’, the likelihood of students within that course engaging in intercultural contact is further reduced, as the prerequisite of ‘Proximity’ is not satisfied. As regards the process of friendship development, in which a shared sense of humour, reciprocal ‘slagging’, and mutual self-disclosure are important, the data suggest that host students perceive each of these to be relatively more problematic and high-risk in an intercultural context. Indeed, Ujitani (2006) identifies different approaches to humour, including teasing, as significant issue intercultural relational development, while Pearson-Evans (2000) also identifies humour as a factor in Irish students’ relationships with Japanese students while in Japan. As such, the dynamics of friendship development as articulated by the host students again constitute an obstacle not simply to intercultural acquaintance, but to intercultural friendship development. Finally, with regard to the concept of ‘Group Cohesion’, we have seen how this constitutes a barrier to intercultural contact both from the perspective of the ingroup members and the outgroup members, albeit for discrete reasons.

In summary, the implication is that the nature of ‘Friendship’, as it emerges from the data, presents challenges rather than opportunities for intercultural ‘Acquaintance Prospects’. As mentioned above, students’ course of study impacts heavily upon the friendship formation, and it is to this category of ‘Curriculum’ that attention now turns.

7.4 Curriculum

> *“I think it’s definitely one of the reasons that our class is so well mixed. It’s because of the way that all of the work is set out.”* (Jack)

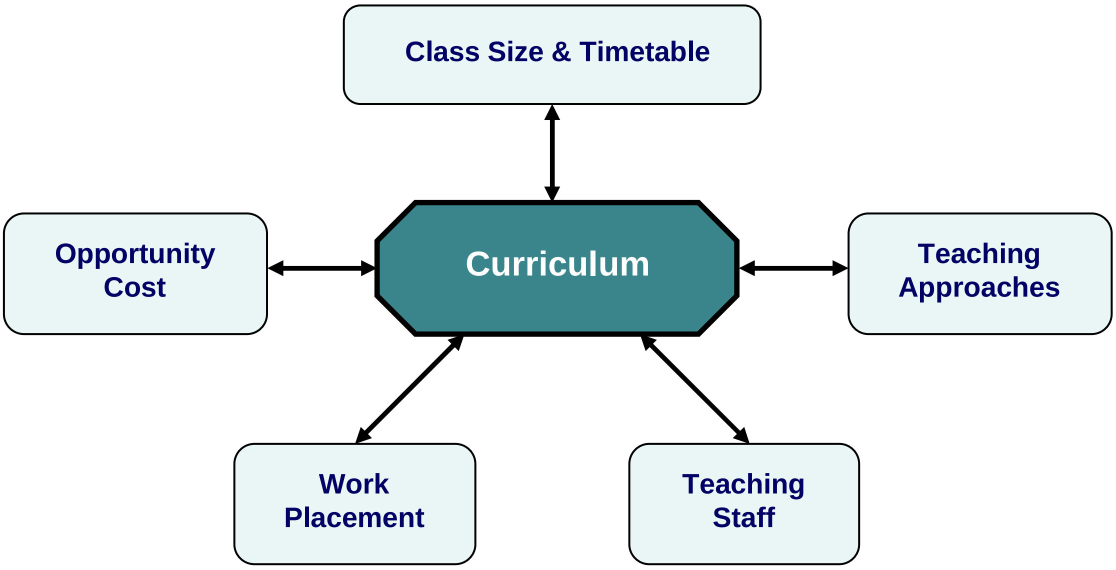
The very sizeable category of ‘Curriculum’ incorporates references to all aspects of students’ course of study, including class size, timetable, teaching styles, laboratory work, work experience, assessment, subject material, modules, and lecturers. Although the importance of ‘Proximity’ as a prerequisite for intercultural contact was discussed in section 7.2, ‘Curriculum’ is arguably the most important category for intercultural ‘Acquaintance Prospects’ for a number of reasons.

Firstly, ‘Curriculum’ brings students together on a regular basis, which, being based on ‘Proximity’ and ‘Time’, is one of the conditions recognised as fostering acquaintance prospects. Secondly, the data highlight that students’ course of study is at the very centre of their experience of college life, both socially and academically, and determines to a significant degree which students they spend time with. As was discussed in the previous section, and shown in Table 7.1, ‘Curriculum’ impacts heavily upon students’ friendships in college. Thirdly, ‘Curriculum’ is a category over which administrators, lecturers, programme chairs and other decision makers can exert enormous influence. Albeit bound by certain constraints, relevant decision makers can determine class sizes, timetables, subject material, teaching approaches, the nature of student assessments, and workload. As such, it can be argued that it is within the immediate control of institutions to develop curricula, understood in the broadest sense, which significantly promote intercultural acquaintance prospects and foster intercultural relations among students.

Lastly, whether reflecting on existing elements of their ‘Curriculum’ which currently foster intercultural acquaintances, or on elements which could theoretically increase intercultural acquaintance prospects, students provide rich data relating to the relationship between ‘Curriculum’ and intercultural contact. In doing so, each student can contribute to the creation of curricular model which could truly promote intercultural contact among students.

The size and complexity of ‘Curriculum’ raises challenges regarding how best to present its analysis; should it be discussed on a course-by-course basis? Should it be discussed under a series of subcategories encompassing each of the courses? Or, should it be discussed by listing specific aspects of ‘Curriculum’ which students suggest hinder or facilitate intercultural acquaintance prospects? In the event, a combination of all three has been employed, although the second option, that of identifying subcategories across courses, constitutes the primary format for presentation. As with ‘Friendship’, the very large size of ‘Curriculum’ demanded that the data be fractured and re-categorised, resulting in the emergence of five subcategories, shown in Figure 7.3. Having discussed each of these subcategories in detail, a final section will consider how they collectively may inform intercultural ‘Acquaintance Prospects’.

Figure 7.3 Subcategories of 'Curriculum' emerging from the Data



7.4.1 Class size & Timetable

The concept of 'Class Size' incorporates references to the *number of students* in a class, as well as the *physical space* within which tuition actually takes place. The data suggest that 'Class Size' impacts upon intercultural acquaintance prospects insofar as such prospects appear to increase in classes comprising smaller numbers of students. Coupled with this, smaller spaces also appear to facilitate acquaintance potential, as they bring students physically closer together, which again can be linked with 'Proximity' as a facilitator of interaction. The density of the code '*Smaller classes facilitating mixing*' (13), provides support for this, as do the thoughts of Sorcha:

> When we have smaller classes I think there'd be more integration … I think smaller lectures are more relaxed really. Like after the big ones everyone just leaves and goes off to their next lecture or whatever, whereas after a smaller one there'd be more people just hang around, chat, whatever.

Students who regularly attend large lectures with several hundred students, speak about the difficulty of becoming acquainted with other students in such an environment. Conversely, students whose course comprises a relatively small number of students indicate that mixing is easier. David, an AC student, comments, "Our class group is a pretty small group, so we are pretty tight like", while Cara, a student in the same course remarks:

> This year now, because our class is much smaller, like there's 30 to 40 in our class, I kind of know nearly everyone now, personally, whereas last year I didn't.[45]

Research by Todd and Nesdale (1997a) also supports the idea that large groups complicate intercultural contact. It is important to note, however, that students' reflections on class size – and timetable also – are not exclusively related to intercultural contact. In fact, they relate primarily to contact between *all* students regardless of cultural identity, but nonetheless are of relevance to our central research concern. This suggests that students' intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects' may essentially constitute a subset of their overall acquaintance prospects within the university environment.

Coupled with class size, the data suggest that students' timetable, both in terms of the timing and intensity, can also influence 'Acquaintance Prospects'. Sharing a common timetable with another student facilitates contact with that student on the basis that similar routines may develop, such as going for lunch at the same time. Furthermore, Clodagh's comment regarding the intensity of the timetable indicates the role this can play:

> Well in our course as well, we have very long hours. Whereas in other courses they might – like say some of the Business courses, where I'd say there are international students – they might have only 12 hours a week, whereas we've 26 hours a week. So we see each other all the time, every day. So maybe they feel more comfortable with us.

This idea of timetabling intensity can again be linked with the category of 'Time' (section 7.8). Conversely, reflecting on courses which have less intensive timetables, Daragh remarks:

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[45] In her first year Cara was in the Common Entry Programme, which allows students choose a specific specialist stream after 1st year. Class size in Common Entry is therefore larger than 2nd year.

> I know this happens in EPL[46], where people don't know each other – I have some friends in EPL – maybe in that sort of thing where you only have 8 hours a week where you're actually together, and some people don't turn up for stuff – and that kind of thing happens – maybe in that class people are not as open with speaking to any aul person[47].

As such, longer, more intensive timetables, which tend to be more common in the Sciences than in Humanities, may foster 'Acquaintance Prospects' on the grounds that students spend much more time together in close proximity, and also have more shared experiences within the context of formal tuition. Finally, linking timetable with the idea of 'Opportunity Cost', which will be discussed in greater detail in section 7.4.5, Emer remarks:

> Like the only people I know are in Science because we do nearly a 40 hour a week with our labs. You don't see anyone else. You spend your Monday and Tuesday 12 hours in labs, so you only see your Science people.

7.4.2 Teaching Approaches

Separate from class size and timetabling, 'Teaching Approaches' emerges as a sizeable subcategory within 'Curriculum'. Students talk about how specific teaching approaches either facilitate or hinder intercultural contact, not only in terms of initial intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects', but also in terms of further relational development. The subcategory of 'Teaching Approaches' includes lectures, as well as approaches based on experiential, collaborative learning, such as group projects (common in all courses), 'practicals' (common in Healthcare), laboratory work (common in the Sciences), and industry work placement (common across many undergraduate programmes). However, in the case of work placement, this is discussed separately in section 7.4.4, given that it relates exclusively to students of Nursing.

Analysis of 'Teaching Approaches' is focused on identifying which approaches, from the perspective of host culture students, impact upon intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects', and for what reasons. As stated above, large class sizes, both in terms of student numbers and physical environment, which are typically associated with lecture-style teaching, do not appear to promote intercultural acquaintance prospects. It is not surprising then that the data also suggest that lecturing, a teacher-centred teaching approach, does little to promote acquaintance and interaction among students. As David remarks, “if it was just a lecture format, I think it would have been a lot more difficult to mix with people”. As regards the possible reasons for this, Claudine suggests:

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[46] EPL refers to the BA in Economic Politics and Law.

[47] In this context 'aul' (pronounced 'owl') is used as a slang term indicating any given person.

> Because you can come to lectures with your fellow students and never get to know them, because you’re just sitting in the class, you’re taking down what the lecturer is saying and then you’re going home.

Likewise, Yvette points out, “you’re not really going to start talking to them in a lecture. You’re not supposed to be talking to anyone in a lecture”. The overall implication is that lecture-style classes do little to foster students’ acquaintance prospects, be it with cultural peers or students from other cultures.

In contrast, the data indicate that laboratory work, ‘practicals’ and group work appear to create conditions conducive to intercultural contact. Each of these are student-centred activities that encourage, or sometimes force, students into direct contact and present them with common tasks that demand collective effort in order to succeed. As evident in Table 7.5, strong support for the ability of these approaches to promote student interaction can be found within the data.

Table 7.5 Codes supporting Student-centred Learning as an Agent for Student Interaction

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Group work increasing interaction	9
Lab work facilitating getting to know other students	12
Lab work forcing students to mix	5
Lab work leading to cooperative learning	3
Mixing with other students in labs	5
Shared tasks helping students talk to each other	4

This is highlighted by Daragh who, although not appearing overly enthused by his coursework, explains:

> In Science I think you are kind of forced to, for bad or good, to talk to your class and get to know them…they all get along because they all are stuck there looking at crap waiting for it to happen, waiting for something and they're forced to talk to each other and I think in a way that's good, because then they make friends and then they get along.

Similarly, Elaine, a nursing student, proffers group work as a means of promoting acquaintance prospects:

> I'd say that would help a lot if you were mixing in groups, if you had to work on a project. Because even people like who you wouldn't be so friendly with, if you are put in a group at the end of it you are good friends, because you have worked so hard together like. So it would probably bring more people together. Definitely I think.

In contrast with this, teaching styles and assessment formats that are not conducive to students working together are viewed as a hindrance:

> I know in Computer Applications, people in that [course] don't really get along because they don't…like they have labs and practicals, but they can email that in. They're not forced to be there. They are working in their own little world to be honest, whereas we have to work with the class and we have to work around each other. (Daragh)

In addition to this, the data suggest that teaching approaches which not only require collaboration between group members, but also encourage cooperation across groups, further increase intercultural acquaintance prospects. This type of cooperative learning appears to be most common among the AC students. As Jack explains:

> There's kind of cooperation. Our lab work is on a rota system. If there are five experiments to do in the last five weeks, everyone does one and if you have difficulties with something you can go over to someone who has done it already and they can help you out, and that has happened a lot in our class over the last few years because we have had two full years now of labs every week … If you cooperate it's a big benefit. Cooperation works very well towards the mixing of everyone in the class.

Additional, albeit infrequent, examples of cooperative learning are also found in other courses. Ivan, a BS student, provides one example:

> For one of our courses we have to come up with a CV and a cover letter, and it's great that I have the Germans there so they can actually correct my German and pretty much go, 'Oh yeah, I have a few CVs on my laptop'. And like I give them my brother's and my Mom's as examples, because there's such a difference when it comes to CVs and things like that.

These comments suggest that cooperative learning straddles the categories of 'Curriculum' and 'Relative Motivations' (section 7.6), again highlighting the complexity of 'Acquaintance Prospects'.

Importantly, while the data strongly support the idea that teaching approaches such as group work and laboratory work promote student interaction, the question remains as to whether such activities actually promote *intercultural* interaction, or simply lead students to interact within their own cultural peer group. On this matter the data are more ambiguous. Despite codes such as *'Advocating group work to facilitate mixing with CD students'* (6), *'Meeting CD students through class'* (8), and *'Getting to know CD students through group projects*' (4), the data also indicate that group work is often defined by monocultural groupings (see Table 7.6). Indeed, the discussion relating to the 'Availability of Cultural Peers' from section 6.3.2 is also of relevance here.

Table 7.6 Codes supporting the idea that Students tend to form Monocultural Groups during Group Work

Title of Code	**Number of references within code**
CD students doing group work together	1
Finding it easier to do group work with cultural peers	6
Forming groups based on age	1
Forming groups with cultural peers	1
Forming project groups based on nationality	2
CD students pairing together for lab work	1
International students pairing together for lab work	2

This suggests that even in situations where the teaching activities foster student interaction, *intercultural* interaction can prove elusive, given that homophilic tendencies can dominate. This is exemplified by Carol's comment:

> When he [the lecturer] gives out an assignment you just go up to the partner beside you, which will be one of my friends, one of my Irish friends. It would never really enter my head to go with one of the Frenchies or the Germans.

This tendency for students to form groups with cultural peers has also been identified by Ippolito (2007), Barron (2006) and Volet and Ang (1998), while Slavin (1990; cited in Wright and Lander 2003) found that when in control of the selection process, students tend to select group members who are like themselves. It is at this point, therefore, that interventions by teaching staff can be of enormous importance. Simple strategies employed by teaching staff, such as assigning students to groups instead of allowing them form their own groups, can significantly impact upon intercultural acquaintance prospects. This is strongly supported by codes such as *'Advocating assigned groups to facilitate mixing with CD students'* (16), and *'Being assigned partners facilitating meeting new people'* (3). As Cara recalls:

> In first year we had lectures and we had labs, but we could pick our own lab partners, and I felt that last year I didn't really interact with people from different countries. Like I just stuck to people that I knew from Dublin or down the country or whatever. But then, like this year, when you're forced together, like you do form friendships with people who are from different cultures and different backgrounds.

These sentiments are shared by students across each of the courses. Reflecting on the lack of intercultural contact between students, Owen, a nursing student, posits:

> A good way of tackling that would be just to have group assignments and things like that, and making it so that you can't choose who is in your group … because you'd be forming groups, which are not generally of your own choice, you will be formed into groups with people who you wouldn't have talked to before, and it kind of encourages integration.

Likewise, Yvette, an EB student comments:

> People should be more forced into like...say put into groups randomly with foreign people and not just always stick with Irish people all the time. Have to do presentations with them and, ya know, *have* to work together as a group, because then you *are* going to get to know them, and you *have* to speak.

At this juncture, the link between the categories of ‘Curriculum’ and ‘Institutional Support’ becomes very apparent, as does the important role that teaching staff can play as catalysts for intercultural contact. While ‘Institutional Support’ will be examined in detail in section 7.5, attention now turns towards the teaching staff and how they may impact upon intercultural acquaintance prospects.

7.4.3 Teaching Staff

Teaching staff, such as lecturers, tutors and laboratory assistants, constitute an important element of students’ ‘Curriculum’. Furthermore, as outlined above, decisions taken by teaching staff relating to teaching approaches and group formation can play an important role in intercultural acquaintance prospects. However, within the subcategory of ‘Teaching Staff’ codes such as ‘*Lecturers focusing on academic work only*’ (8), ‘*Lecturers ignoring diversity in class*’ (5), and ‘*Lecturers treating all students the same*’ (5), suggest that from the host students’ perspective, teaching staff are not actively engaging with student diversity in the learning environment and are not adopting deliberate strategies to promote intercultural contact between students.

References to specific instances of lecturers actively engaging with diversity in terms of promoting mixed work groups are few, despite the fact that such strategies are broadly advocated and encouraged by students when discussing ways to improve intercultural interaction (see section 7.5.1). When asked if his lecturers encourage students to mix, Frank (AC) responds; “The lecturers? They just lecture. In a nutshell. I mean they don’t really mention anything about other cultures”. Similarly, Yvette (EB) comments, “No. Never. It’s never mentioned like. I just think it’s really bad. Well, I suppose it’s not high on their priority list”. Etain (BNPY), meanwhile, expresses similar experiences:

> But the lecturers would never make any reference to like your country or ask them about their culture or anything like that. They never do, no … I suppose it’s ignored that way. Like they are just treated the same. As if we were all Irish.

It is also worth noting that, to a certain extent, students assign responsibility for promoting intercultural contact to third parties, such as lecturers. Claudine states:

> I think that the lecturers could do a lot more. I'm not blaming anyone, but at this stage of the year we did a thing, like one of our lecturers in particular, she's very good at it, she got us to introduce ourselves again even though we'd all met each other last year, just because there would be people who didn't know other people's names and stuff like that. She got a teddy and threw it into the air and you'd grab it and say something about yourself and you'd throw it at another person and it gets you to remember that person's name, which I thought was brilliant. Something like that would be great, because I still wouldn't know half the Africans, the people in that group's names.

Apart from raising the question of responsibility, this incident again highlights the power of minor interventions in promoting acquaintance prospects between culturally diverse students. In the following quote, Samantha recalls how her laboratory assistant helped 'break the ice' between the host and international students:

> One of our labs technicians, he is going around and he is really interested – ya know, first semester in first year, asking where people are from, getting to know them. Some of them were a bit like 'shocked', ya know. It was their first time mixing with people from Ireland and stuff, and the lab technician made a big effort to get them out of their shell. Ya know like, 'Oh, where are you from? That's really interesting!', and talking to them about it and then it would get the people around them interested too and talking to everybody. So he kind of broke the ice for them.

Although students were not pressed to suggest reasons why they feel lecturers generally tend not to prioritise student diversity, a number of them speculate that lecturers themselves could be anxious about discussing diversity issues in class, possibly stemming from their own uncertainties about interacting with diverse students. Orla remarks, "I suppose it's hard for the lecturers. They can't really push it either, because they can't really offend people. So it is tricky". This point is also made by Claudine:

> They [the lecturers] tend not to because of racial issues and stuff like that. They don't want to come across … some people can become very defensive over something that mightn't have been meant to be an insult or whatever…the teacher would always be that bit more wary of what she was saying.

Overall, the data analysis provides compelling support for the ability of teaching staff to facilitate intercultural acquaintance prospects among students. This is an encouraging sign, as teaching staff have a large degree of control over their teaching approaches. Less encouraging, however, is the indication that such interventions are largely infrequent, and that lecturers generally opt to ignore student diversity within the teaching environment.

7.4.4 Work Placement

The subcategory of 'Work Placement' relates specifically to students of nursing. This is because, at the time of interviewing, students from the other two courses had not yet done any work placement, whereas nursing students commence work placement in first year. Although this subcategory, therefore, excludes the voices of many of the students, it nonetheless warrants discussion as it represents a major element of nursing students' college experience and, as Claudine's comments indicate, emerges as an important aspect of their reflections on intercultural contact:

> I actually think it has an impact because when you go out on placement even – I'm kind bringing it all back to placement – you meet a lot of Filipino nurses and their way, I'm not saying it's better, but they have different methods of nursing and it's kind of good to see all the different aspects, the different approaches and that. They bring a lot of different ways of doing things and it's great to see it because their nursing care is just as good as our nursing care, so you see how to integrate it into your own practices, so I definitely would say that it has been a benefit.

Work placement is comparable to group work and laboratory work insofar as it involves active learning where students are required to mix and collaborate with other students. On the other hand, it takes place off-campus, and students on placement interact with qualified staff and patients, as well as students, who they may or may not perceive to be culturally different. In the course of interviewing, several students spoke about mixing with other cultures while on work placement, as evidenced by the code '*Interacting with CD students on work placement*' (12). In some instances, this facilitated contact with classmates with whom they previously had no contact. Referring to her experience working with her Nigerian classmate on placement, Claudine remarks:

> With the student that I'm on placement with at the moment, I had never met her before, even talked to her before. We went on placement and she's lovely like. She's really very nice, a very nice person. But like that, I'd never even talked to her and I was kind of very embarrassed on the first morning going up to her and introducing myself, because I'd been in her class since last year and didn't…like she didn't know my name and I didn't know her name. I would have only briefly said a few words to her on the corridor or in class, or if she'd ask me the time or whatever, but nothing concrete. And then like to go on to a placement for four weeks…and even when I went on to placement I am kind of a lot closer to the Irish student than I would be to the [Nigerian], so it just shows you the lack of getting to know someone.

Work placement, as well as facilitating acquaintance prospects, can also serve to create commonalities between students, which can facilitate relationship development. As Elaine comments about her experiences of work placement: "you are both in the same boat. You both know what you are going through and so you are more close to them then". Nonetheless, as indicated in Claudine's closing lines above, students may stick with other Irish students when on placement if that option is available to them. This again links back to 'Homophily' and the idea of 'gravitating towards the familiar'. Therefore, as in the case with group work and laboratory work, although work placement may promote student interaction, it may take further interventions to overcome students' homophilic proclivities and ensure *intercultural* interaction is actually facilitated. Finally, several students speak about how their contact with students from other cultures on work placement transferred into their subsequent on-campus relations. Among these, Jane's example is perhaps the most telling:

> But then when you are off placement then, I'd see her obviously, and she'd always be like 'Jane! How are you?', and I always remember her telling me on placement that her and her daughter had this kind of competition with their hair. They'd always try to get these weird braids, try to outdo each other. And she came in one day with all these swirly designs and I noticed her hair and she was like, 'You know, not even another lady there noticed my hair! And you did!'. And it was just another thing that I would have noticed to talk about, but only because we were on placement.

Overall then, 'Work Placement' appears to promote intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects' for the same reasons group work does; it can bring students together in a collaborative work environment based on shared tasks and shared experiences. However, as with group work, the data suggest that even with the conditions such as proximity and common goals satisfied, further third-party mediation is often needed to ensure the interaction is *intercultural* rather than *intracultural*.

7.4.5 Opportunity Cost

The detailed and complex nature of the preceding subcategories highlights the centrality of 'Curriculum' in students' college experience, and therefore in their experience of intercultural contact. With this in mind, it is also important to acknowledge an 'Opportunity Cost' associated with 'Curriculum', which has been alluded to in section 7.4.1. The concept of 'Opportunity Cost' is commonly associated with economics and is understood as the 'cost' of pursing one option instead of another. In the context of the current study, this implies that logically, students' experience of their own 'Curriculum' precludes their ability to experience another 'Curriculum' to the same degree. The data highlight that this is true especially in the case of their level of contact with students outside their immediate course of study. As Samantha comments:

> I haven't met anyone outside Science yet. Just because you do be in the classes together, you do your stuff together, there's never really a chance in DCU to meet other people outside your class because you meet the people in your class and they're the people you go to buy tickets for an event with, and it just sticks like that, and everyone stays in their group … I don't know anyone in DCU who is not in my class anyway. No. Not really.

Furthermore, Cara's experience implies that students' course is so central to their college life that changing course may result in changing one's core friendship group:

> Like last year, I was such good friends with Siobhán and Donnacha and we did everything together. And when they weren't in my class this year then, it was hard for me to form completely new friendships, even if I would see them like the odd time. He might ring and say, 'Do you wanna go for lunch?' or something, but because he wasn't in my class all the time, I felt like I had to be friends with someone in my class, so that I could…like they would be going on lunch the same time. I didn't want to be on my own.

The data suggest, therefore, that students’ course of study is fundamental to their interaction with other students, including their intercultural acquaintance prospects. This in turn implies that host students who are registered in courses with low levels of structural diversity may have fewer intercultural acquaintance prospects than students registered in courses with high levels, such as the three from which students were taken for this research. As Sally argues:

> I think, just basically, if you’re not in a day-to-day environment where there are other nationalities, then you’re not going to meet them or maintain contact with them.

However, as the data also indicate, structural diversity within the ‘Curriculum’, although creating conditions that facilitate acquaintance prospects, is not sufficient to ensure that intercultural contact actually takes place. This was already alluded to in the discussion on ‘Separation’ (section 6.2) and in Chapter 3. Furthermore, given the data and arguments presented in section 6.3.2 relating to the ‘Availability of Cultural Peers’, it can also be posited that structural diversity and acquaintance prospects are not directly proportional, as having groups of students from one culture within the same ‘Curriculum’ can reduce acquaintance prospects by facilitating homophily and separation.

7.4.6 Implications of ‘Curriculum’ for ‘Acquaintance Prospects’

As stated at the outset, ‘Curriculum’ constitutes a very sizeable and significant category, with numerous interconnected and sometimes overlapping subcategories. Therefore, it is important to concisely reflect upon ‘Curriculum’ in terms of how it informs intercultural ‘Acquaintance Prospects’ from the perspective of host culture students. The pivotal importance of ‘Curriculum’ to students’ college experience and their prospects of intercultural acquaintance clearly emerges from the data. When developed and delivered based on a deliberate strategy to promote student interaction, students’ ‘Curriculum’ can greatly facilitate intercultural acquaintance prospects.

Analysis of students’ experiences, opinions and suggestions, helps to identify conditions and strategies which, from these host students’ perspective, can promote intercultural acquaintance prospects. Firstly, a culturally diverse student cohort ensures that the conditions of structural diversity and proximity are met. Secondly, student numbers within a class should be relatively small, thereby encouraging interaction. Thirdly, tuition should have a strong student-centred focus, and be based upon on-going cooperative learning and shared tasks, the specific nature of which would vary depending on the academic course of study. However, while such approaches facilitate overall student interaction, further strategies are needed to facilitate *intercultural* rather than *intracultural* contact. As such, the 'Curriculum' should include teaching staff who, aside from being experts in their academic field, should also be skilled intercultural facilitators actively assisting students from all sides to overcome anxieties. As will be discussed in section 7.5.1, appropriate interventions by teaching staff are needed to overcome host students' homophilic tendencies.

Currently, however, based on the data analysis, the reality appears to be somewhat different. In particular, teaching staff appear to give little attention to promoting intercultural contact between students, instead adopting a primarily assimilationist approach to student diversity. Among the three courses from which students were sampled, it should be noted that in one of these courses, AC, intercultural relations – at least from the perspective of host students – appear to be substantially better than the other two. This is supported by the codes '*AC students mixing well with each other*' (9) and *'AC students having a class identity'* (4). Comparing each of these courses, we find that within AC there is no large cohort of students from one specific minority culture, which links to the idea of 'Availability of Cultural Peers' insofar as these students may not have easy access to cultural peers. This is not the case in the other courses. EB has large numbers of students from Germany and France, while BNPY has a large group of Nigerian students. As a result, the 'Homophily' reported within these last two is unsurprising. Furthermore, AC has a more intensive timetable, ensuring students spend longer together, and also is heavily based upon student-centred learning, particularly laboratory work. EB modules on the other hand are typically based on large lecture-style classes, while the classes for language tuition typically include Irish students only.

Overall, the data analysis indicates that 'Curriculum' constitutes a genuine opportunity to improve intercultural acquaintance prospects. However, the data suggest that from the host students' perspective this opportunity is not being fully realised at present. With this in mind, the discussion shifts to the next category underpinning 'Acquaintance Prospects', that of 'Institutional Support'.

7.5 Institutional Support

"I think there was nothing really organised for us to get to know each other. It's just left up to ourselves." (Carol)

'Institutional Support' refers to the aspects of students' college environment and experience over which the institution exerts control and which may influence intercultural acquaintance prospects. In this regard it is similar to 'Curriculum'. It encompasses the availability of venues for student interaction, the existence of structural diversity within the student body, the provision of student accommodation, management's support for the promotion of intercultural relations, the potential for students to participate in extra-curricular activities on campus, such as Clubs and Societies, as well as the support provided by staff, along with interventions and initiatives to facilitate intercultural acquaintance and relational development.

Although 'Institutional Support' is a category over which the institution exerts a high level of control and which can heavily influence intercultural acquaintance prospects, the data indicate that students perceive very little institutional support for the promotion of intercultural acquaintance prospects. Evidence for this perceived lack of institutional support can be found in codes such as '*Being unaware of institutional support for mixing*' (6), '*Criticising lack of institutional support for mixing*' (5), and '*Institution not intervening to promote mixing'* (5). When reflecting on institutional initiatives aimed at promoting intercultural contact, Frank is very direct in his criticism:

> I mean there has been nothing so far that would engage me with a bunch of other students…that would put me in a situation where I had to at least speak with foreign students. I mean if I didn't want to, I would never have any contact with foreign students…it's my own choice. I could easily avoid them. I mean, basically, I think that proves that whatever measures DCU may have are not sufficient, or not working anyway.

Comments echoing a perceived lack of institutional support are common in the data. Cara remarks, ‘I’m not aware of anything really that they are integrating Irish people with people from different cultures’. Kimberly meanwhile differentiates between institutional support and student-run clubs and societies when she says, “DCU don’t. The clubs and societies do. But I suppose that’s not really DCU. That’s the students really. No, there’s not a massive amount done to mix the two”. Finally, Eve comments:

> I’m trying to think. I know they have the International Office and stuff like that but I can’t actually think of anything that they do to promote [interaction].

Within the data, the degree of uniformity and consensus of opinion among students across the three courses relating to a perceived lack of institutional support for promoting intercultural relations is telling. This is despite the fact that a number of students, as we have seen in the last section, speak about the power of group work to facilitate mixing. While the students themselves are not necessarily familiar with the management structure of the university, Owen makes an interesting comment about the overall institutional ethos which may relate to the lack of institutional support:

> I suppose, we’re still very much institutionally Irish. Like there’s a lot more of people of different cultures and different countries in Ireland, but I think we still operate in a very Irish way … I just see, the personnel, the way people operate. Because of course predominantly people who would be running the college would be Irish, and maybe it’s just the fact that I have grown up in Ireland and I’ve experienced Irish people most of my life that I see these things as being Irish. But I don’t get the feeling that, although people are a lot more experienced with a lot more different cultures, it’s not affecting the way things are being run on an official level.

Irrespective of whether students view clubs and societies as student-run organisations, rather than institutionally supported entities, the data also indicate that these are considered an important vehicle for meeting students of other cultures on campus. This is exemplified by the density of the code ‘*Clubs and Socs facilitating meeting with CD students’* (14). Like ‘Curriculum’, it can be argued that clubs and societies bring students together on a regular basis and therefore facilitate acquaintance prospects. As Kimberly comments, “I mean clubs and societies of course are a huge benefit and they get people to mix a lot”. Furthermore, in signing up to specific clubs, the assumption is that students share a common interest, which may further facilitate their acquaintance prospects by matching or creating ‘Commonalities’. However, as was discussed in ‘Curriculum’, the ‘Availability of Cultural Peers’ again emerges as an issue with regard to the actual contact taking place within clubs and societies:

> I mean again, if they’re in a club and society the chances are they’re in it with someone they know, and if it’s in a big group then it’s back to the thing I’m talking about again like! You stick to what you know. (Eve)

This again emphasises the pervasiveness of homophily as a barrier to intercultural contact. Furthermore, Yvette suggests that many international students in particular do not participate in clubs and societies, which consequently reduces the prospects of intercultural acquaintance taking place as the prerequisite of ‘Proximity’ is not satisfied; “Clubs and Socs are a really good way to meet people, but they don’t join a lot of clubs and socs. A lot of them don’t”.

7.5.1 Interventions

“Well, I suppose that we wouldn’t be opposed to being nearly forced into having contact and mixing together. That would be good.” (Noelle)

Within the category of ‘Institutional Support’, ‘Interventions’ emerges as an important subcategory. ‘Interventions’ refer to policies, actions, and initiatives taken by staff at any level to promote intercultural relations between students. The perceived lack of institutional support of intercultural contact outlined above contrasts strongly with host students’ calls for interventions to increase contact, as shown in Table 7.8. One example comes from Samantha, as she reflects on one particular intervention:

> Obviously I thought it was a great idea mixing the Lab partners and getting them in so they got to meet Irish students and not just kept to themselves, because it could have went the total opposite other way otherwise. Just putting them in situations where they have to mix with other students, because it can be hard for people to break the ice on their own.

Table 7.8 Codes indicating Students' Support for Institutional Interventions to promote Intercultural Acquaintance Prospects

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Advocating assigned groups to facilitate mixing	16
Advocating early interventions to help mixing	6
Advocating forced mixing	16
Advocating organised events to promote mixing	5
Advocating third party interventions to facilitate mixing	3
Having to be forced to mix with CD students	1
Interventions helping you learn about other students	1
Needing to split groups to help mixing	1

Laura, a mature student, also speaks at length about the lack, and potential importance, of interventions for promoting intercultural contact among students:

> I know there's a week for mature students just before university began, but if there was week just for maybe - it might be hard to organise - but maybe just to mix the Irish, French and German students…I don't know what happens in the international week, for the students, but even getting Irish students to show the other students around Dublin, or organising something like that where they are doing things together. I actually think it's quite, nearly crucial at this stage.

Interventions imply that contact between culturally diverse students is either facilitated or actually enforced. This in turn raises the question as to *what is it about such interventions that actually facilitates the contact*, particularly when we consider that in many instances the prerequisite of 'Proximity' has already been satisfied. Further analysis of the data suggests that students associate interventions with overcoming the initial uncertainties associated with intercultural contact. Uncertainties and anxieties relating to how to approach students from other cultures, judging whether they wish to interact or not, and concerns about how one's peer group might react to efforts to engage with culturally diverse students, are all reduced by interventions which essentially take the decision out of their hands.

Returning again to Laura's thoughts on interventions, she suggests, "there's that comfort factor and there's a fear of making a fool of myself … So I think maybe the

University would need to help them a little bit there". This idea of fear as a barrier is supported by Cara, who comments, "it's maybe fear of rejection as well. Fear that maybe they might say 'No', so you don't want to ask them in case they say 'No'". This is discussed in greater detail in the next chapter under the topic of 'Anxiety' (section 8.2.1.).

While there are many instances of host students supporting the idea of interventions to promote intercultural relations, the discussion becomes more complex as some students voice either their opposition to such interventions, or qualify their support based on the specific nature of interventions. The codes opposing interventions or expressing concerns about them are listed in Table 7.9. While these codes are not dense, they are nonetheless important, as they indicate that interventions may face opposition and need to be carefully planned and facilitated in order to be successful. Furthermore, analysing students' opinions and thoughts on the specific nature of interventions provides useful insights into what they perceive to constitute an effective intervention.

Table 7.9 Codes indicating Students' Concerns about Institutional Interventions to promote Intercultural Acquaintance Prospects

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Advocating non-interventionist approach	2
Being ambivalent about assigned groups	1
Expressing concerns about organised mixing	1
Feeling awkward being pushed together	1
Interventions being a 'Catch 22'	1
Opposing forced mixing	1
Outlining possible dangers of interventions	1
Perceiving engineered social mixing as 'uncool'	1
Seeing institutional interventions as artificial	1

Samantha talks about the preferred nature of interventions from her perspective:

> Like if the lecturers made a point in the first week to do group activities, ya know like, without making a big deal of it, mixing international students and Irish, in a situation where they have to talk and just broke the ice the way it happened in our Labs…If that is done in a sly way, not in an obvious way, so that they weren't pointed out as being different.

Claudine also supports the idea of subtle interventions when she says, “Just to do it in a non-obvious way, I think would be better because it would make it a lot easier”. Likewise, David, who is sceptical about the value of interventions, bases his scepticism on the concern that interventions might create barriers between students by focusing on their differences, rather than their commonalities:

> I don’t think that it’s something that can be engineered to happen. I think that if an effort is made to aid the integration of the students that it is probably counterproductive, because by doing that you are singling them out saying, ‘This is them and this is us’.

Therefore, in planning interventions some students suggest it may be better not to focus on differences, but rather on commonalities, so that students do not feel singled out and group barriers are not inadvertently created by the actual intervention.

Summarising the most common points emerging from the data relating to interventions, the implication is that host students advocate interventions which:

- Bring students physically together (proximity)
- Take place at a very early stage of college (time)
- Involve a third-party facilitating the interaction (institutional support)
- Take place in a relaxed atmosphere (curriculum)
- Involve cooperative learning and/or shared tasks (curriculum)
- Do not draw attention to differences, but rather focus on, or construct, the commonalities between students (homophily)

How do these suggestions relate to specific interventions discussed in existing literature? In the first instance, given the substantial body of researching indicating a lack of interaction between international and host students, there is broad consensus that interventions are needed (Lee 2006; Wright and Lander 2003; Ramburuth 2001; Ward 2001; Smart et al. 2000; Todd and Nesdale 1997a). As Volet and Ang (1998: 17-18) comment:

> Spontaneous inter-cultural contacts are likely to be few and far between if students are left to their own choices … to allow all students to benefit fully from inter-cultural learning opportunities, more drastic, interventionist measures may need to be taken.

In terms of promoting the frequency and quality of contact between international and host students, interventions such as international residence halls (Nesdale and Todd 2000; Bochner et al. 1984), buddy-systems (Brawner Bevis 1997; Quintrell and Westward 1994), peer-pairing programmes (Ramburuth 2001), mentoring programmes (Austin et al. 2002), intergroup dialogue programmes (Clark 2002, Nagda and Zúñiga 2003; Zúñiga et al. 2002), shared tasks (Pritchard and Skinner 2002), ‘Family Dinner’ programmes (Dunstan and Drew 2001), specific cultural events on campus (Klak and Martin 2003), ‘lecture buddies’ programmes (Mendelsohn 2002), and intercultural interviews (Pandit and Alderman 2004) are worthy of note.

Many of these initiatives, in particular international residences, are based on the hypothesis that proximity will lead to contact and relational development. However, as discussed in section 7.2, proximity alone will not ensure contact. This is reflected in the varying success of such initiatives (Nesdale and Todd 2000). Furthermore, Gareis (2000) points out that while relatively informal and unstructured interventions were traditionally favoured, more recently the idea of formal, structured, and directed approaches is more popular.

Todd and Nesdale (1997a), meanwhile, proffer five conditions integral to the success of interventions: (i) A multi-focus, multi-method approach, whereby the intervention “overlaps or coincides with the full range of a student’s ongoing daily routine, rather than being a limited or separate activity in itself” (ibid.: 6), (ii) Commitment from staff and top leadership, (iii) Commitment from student leadership, (iv) Student participation, and (v) Timing. With regard to ‘Timing’, they (ibid.: 12) argue:

> It is simply crucial that the intervention commences on the first day of the new students’ arrival on campus when they are open to new experiences and their energy and enthusiasm can be channelled towards the development of new intercultural friendships.

This is certainly supported in the current findings, given that early interventions may avoid the creation of additional barriers. In Chapter 9, the nature of these interventions will be further discussed with respect to Allport’s (1954) ‘contact hypothesis', which proposes conditions theoretically argued to promote positive intergroup contact.

In terms of the overall implications of 'Institutional Support' for intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects', the data indicate that this can have a major impact upon intercultural contact, but at present the institution is not providing this support to the desired level. Like 'Curriculum', 'Institutional Support' represents a genuine opportunity to foster intercultural contact among students, yet is one which is not being maximised from the host students' perspective.

7.6 Relative Motivations

> *"You know, the foreign students can be exceptionally open and friendly, and so can the Irish and, you know, if that's the case, they will always meet and be friendly. But if it's not the case, if one element is missing, it's more difficult. And if both are missing, then nothing happens." (Frank)*

Frank's comments suggest that motivation is an important factor associated with intercultural acquaintance prospects. Within the context of this study, 'Motivation' emerges as an important factor in two primary ways. Firstly, host students discuss the importance of their own, self-reported motivation as regards their intercultural acquaintance prospects. This includes their reflections on the elements that underpin their motivation to engage with students they perceive to be culturally different. Secondly, they discuss the importance of the *perceived* motivation, or interest, of students from other cultures in engaging with them, and how that may impact upon their own motivation and behaviour, which ultimately informs 'Acquaintance Prospects'. Combined, these constitute the category of 'Relative Motivations'.

7.6.1 Host Motivations

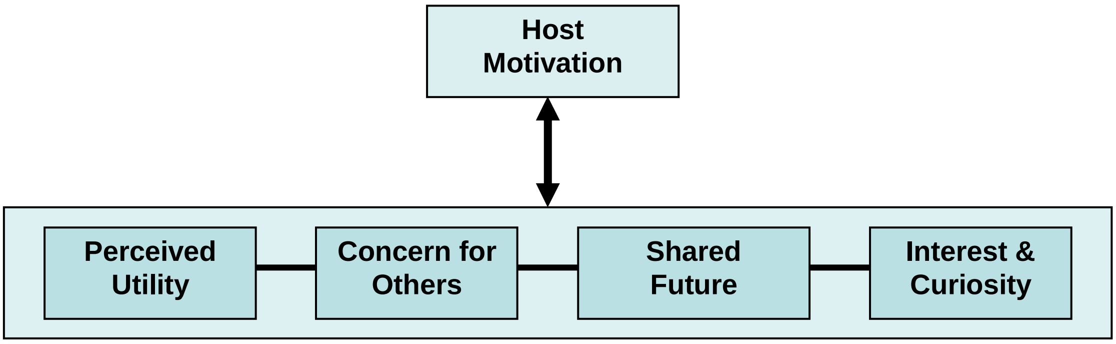
Interviewer: *Do you reckon that Irish students have an interest in meeting and mixing with students from other cultures?*
Jane: *I wouldn’t say there is a disinterest, but they’re just not pushed either way. If it happens it happens. If it doesn’t it doesn’t.*

Analysis of the data indicates that ‘Relative Motivations’ is an important factor influencing ‘Acquaintance Prospects’. This is exemplified by the code ‘*Motivation driving intercultural contact*’ (9). Several students highlight the role motivation plays in intercultural contact. Laura suggests, ‘I think there has to be a motivating factor for Irish students maybe to meet students of a different culture’, while Kimberly, perhaps again alluding to the ‘Availability of Cultural Peers’ remarks:

> You have to want to. And it’s very hard to do when there’s so many people and you have the pick of. How many people are in DCU? 10,000 or something? Like you know, there are just so many people you have to befriend.

Aside from identifying motivation as an important factor in ‘Acquaintance Prospects’ however, it is necessary to identify and examine the factors underpinning hosts’ motivation. Four main motivational factors emerge, as shown in Figure 7.4, each of which is discussed in greater detail.

Figure 7.4 Factors informing Host Students’ Motivation to engage in Intercultural Contact



Perceived Utility

The 'Perceived Utility' of interacting with students from other cultures emerges as an important aspect of host students' motivation. This concept of utility is based on a pragmatic outlook, whereby students are motivated to engage with students from other cultures based upon a perceived beneficial outcome, be it immediate or at some future point. Codes highlighting 'Perceived Utility' are shown in Table 7.10.

Table 7.10 Codes supporting 'Perceived Utility' as a Component of Host Students' Motivation for Intercultural Contact

Title of Code	Number of references with code
Asking CD students for academic help	2
Being motivated by pragmatic reasons	1
CD students being able to help host students with language	1
Hosts engaging with talented CD students	1
Identifying utility in mixing	10
Linking intercultural contact with utility	5
Mixing for reasons of utility	1
Mixing with mature students for utility	1
Mixing to improve language skills	4
Perceiving a value in mixing with CD students	3
Perceiving CD students as future support	2
Perceiving French students as learning resources	1
Seeing a value in meeting other cultures	3
Seeking contact based on future utility	2
Wanting to mix to improve language skills	1

The nature of this 'utility' is dependent upon an individual's perspective. For example, among EB students, language support emerges as the principal 'utility' function. This is not surprising, as these students study language and therefore perceive German, French or Spanish students as useful resources to assist with this. As Ivan explains:

> Well, I like am a big believer that in order to learn a language you have to speak it and you have to speak it with people. So I wanted to get to know them to actually speak German.

However, host students do not restrict 'Perceived Utility' to language support alone. Claudine, an AC student, talks about engaging with mature students for certain tasks, indicating a perceived utility relating primarily to academic support:

> Say if we're, you know, we're doing research on something and stuff like that, we always tend to link in with the mature students because they'd have a lot more experience in that field or whatever, and they're a great help like. They help us a lot if we need to know something.

'Perceived Utility' therefore suggests that host students' behaviour is strategic and deliberate. When asked what underpins an individual's motivation to mix with other cultures, for example, Kimberly remarks, "I suppose it's different with every person really. It's up to your needs and what would benefit you really". As such, the concept of 'Perceived Utility' introduces the idea of a 'cost-benefit' analysis underpinning interaction, where the outcome of an interaction should outweigh the cost, however each may be defined. This perceived 'cost' will be discussed in detail in section 8.2.2 when exploring the category of 'Effort'.

With the focus specifically on students' intercultural contact, in instances where the perceived utility of the outcome eclipses the perceived cost, intercultural contact is more likely to occur. This has been highlighted in the case of host students seeking language support. Therefore, articulating the potential value of intercultural contact may stimulate acquaintance prospects. Indeed, Bird and Holmes (2005) and Todd and Nesdale (1997a) argue that universities should focus on identifying the benefits of intercultural contact in order to promote contact, while Ujitani's (2006) findings also suggest that utility is a factor in intercultural relational development. However, in focusing primarily on the utility of the interaction, this could result in host students viewing students from other cultures as resources, rather than individuals, and could lead them to value some students above others. Equally, if individuals find themselves satisfied with the current situation, there would be little incentive to engage with students from other cultures. This is a point to which Owen alludes:

> You know, you're happy, and we've got to that stage now here. We have a certain amount of affluence, 'cultural contentment', that's it. And it probably leaks into every aspect of our lives. We don't care about politics anymore, we don't care about community and things like that, and to a certain extent we are possibly not motivated to learn about people, because a certain amount of society these days has kind of reached a certain quality of life where they're content for that to be it. Sheltered.

Therefore, while ‘Perceived Utility’ is clearly an important agent underpinning host students’ motivations to engage with students from other cultures, strategies aimed at promoting intercultural contact should be mindful of using this as a motivational factor.

Concern for Others

In contrast to the rewards-based idea of ‘Perceived Utility’, a more civic-minded, empathic motivational agent emerges from the data, albeit to a lesser degree. This relates to host students’ concern for the wellbeing of culturally different students. One student in particular, Cara, spoke at length about this:

> I always find I make a bigger effort maybe with international students just because I always feel that maybe they don’t know anyone and maybe they don’t, like, maybe they don’t have anyone to talk to or anything. So I always do make an effort just to say hello and that sort of stuff as well…Like I wouldn’t like to see anyone down and depressed and low. I want to see them happy and enjoying life. I wouldn’t like to see anyone down in the dumps just because they are in a different country and they don’t know anyone.

The fact that ‘Concern for Others’ does not emerge as strongly as ‘Perceived Utility’ tells us little about students’ overall civic-mindedness. Hosts, for example, may believe these students need no help or assistance, particularly when we consider their comments regarding the ‘Availability of Cultural Peers’. Furthermore, it may be that host students do not initiate intercultural contact because they may assume it would be an inconvenience for the other student. Talking about his decision to turn down invites to go out socialising with his French flatmates, Owen explains:

> I kinda don’t want to be making them to have to put an effort in when they are going out to have a bit of craic, d’ya know? I have been offered a few times, as I said, but the effort...I didn’t want to put their friends through that or myself ya know.

In this respect, concern for others could actually constitute a barrier to intercultural contact, which is an interesting idea. Finally, although civic-mindedness is often considered a desirable attribute, the danger of this particular motivational agent is that it may lead host students to view intercultural contact as a duty, rather that a choice. This in turn could compromise the actual nature of the interaction.

Shared Future

The prospect of sharing common future experiences with students perceived as culturally different also emerges as a factor underpinning host students' motivation to engage in intercultural contact. As Cara remarks, "I had to form friendships in the class because like I was going to be with these people for the next 3 years. So I had to!". References to this are particularly common among the EB students, as this degree programme involves two years of study in another university outside Ireland. As Ivan and Sally, both EB students, state:

> You might as well make some sort of an effort to get to know them, because you're only here with the Irish people for two years. You're together with all the Germans for four. So you might as well make some sort of an effort. (Ivan)

> I think this year we are kind of trying to make an effort because we know we have to go to France for two years together and we don't really know each other. I know all the Irish, but I wouldn't know many of the French. (Sally)

As regards why exactly the prospect of a shared future should constitute a motivational factor, this is not necessarily clear. For some students, it may link back to the idea of 'Perceived Utility' already discussed, given that this 'Shared Future' could be taking place in an environment where relations with these students could prove particularly beneficial. This idea is evident in Sorcha's comments:

> We're going to spend two years over in Germany with them, so there's no point in going over as separate groups, because we will need their help as well, so we don't want to alienate ourselves and be on our own basically.

For other students, the idea of 'Commonalities' being created via shared experiences over time provides motivation to engage with students perceived to be culturally different. This in turn relates with the category of 'Time' as one which informs intercultural acquaintance prospects. Furthermore, it links with the theoretical concept of 'induced homophily' which will be discussed in Chapter 9.

Interest and Curiosity

The last of the four motivational factors emerging from the data analysis relates to students' 'Interest and Curiosity'. This differs from 'Perceived Utility' insofar as it is not necessarily associated with a specific beneficial outcome, other than possibly satisfying one's curiosity. Ujitani (2006) also lists personal interest and curiosity as a facilitator of intercultural contact, while a lack thereof is identified as a barrier by Takeda and St. John-Ives (2005). A more interesting perspective comes from Arasaratnam (2005, 2004), whose studies indicate a positive correlation between 'sensation seeking', understood as "the need for new and exciting stimuli" (2005: 184), and individuals' motivation to engage in intercultural contact. This idea is based on the premise that intercultural encounters can provide novelty, uncertainty and anxiety, which may satisfy sensation seekers' appetite for excitement and even risk. Indeed, research into the relationship between sensation seeking and intercultural contact is growing (Arasaratnam 2005; Arasaratnam and Banerjee 2007).

Within the data several students speak about how important having an interest in other cultures is for improving intercultural acquaintance prospects. Carol remarks that "It's just nice to get to know people who are out of my bubble like, completely separate", while Cara explains:

> I'd be intrigued as to what the country is like, so I might start talking to them … I would be curious, I'm not sure about other people. Like other people might not be like me at all. They might keep to themselves and not interact at all. But I'd just be curious.

Jane, meanwhile, reflecting on an intercultural event held in another location, suggests,

> Everybody who was there anyway *wanted* to be there. You know, would be interested in finding out something else. It's a primary concern going to something like that. That would be your agenda for going to something like that.

Finally, perhaps interpreting 'Interest and Curiosity' in a slightly alternative fashion, Owen's comments raise the allure of romantic possibilities as a motivational factor for host students' contact with culturally different students, although these appear to be dashed by language barriers:

> Admittedly there was a bit of interest at the beginning of the year when I mentioned to the lads how many French women there were around the house. But unfortunately French women, again, speak a lot of French!

Therefore, while having an interest in interacting with students from other cultures is a positive motivating factor, the actual nature of the interaction itself, in terms of the potential communication challenges which one may experience at the intercultural interface, may still present obstacles which need to be overcome. As Orla suggests:

> I think they would have to be interested as well in talking to somebody. And not be put off by the fact that they may have language difficulties or look different or be culturally different.

This point creates a link between students' motivations and their actual experiences of intercultural contact, which is the focus of analysis and discussion in the next chapter. Prior to closing this discussion on host students' motivations, however, it is important to note that while host students generally recognise that having an interest in other cultures is important for intercultural contact to take place and intercultural relations to develop, the students do not necessarily indicate that they themselves hold such an interest. As Jane openly remarks:

> I just don't think we care about mixing! I wouldn't be thinking like, 'I've heard her say a few really interesting points, and I'd love to learn more about that'. It's just college, ya know. It doesn't matter!

Likewise, when asked if she felt that host students have an interest in meeting students from other cultures, Etain replies, "No. No. No. I don't think so."

Overall then, based on the data analysis, it is clear that the host students view motivation as an important factor influencing 'Acquaintance Prospects'. While motivation appears to be underpinned by 'Perceived Utility', 'Concern for Others', 'Shared Future' and a personal 'Interest and Curiosity', the data also suggest that not all of the students actually hold these motivations, and so are perhaps reflecting on them in theoretical or hypothetical terms.

7.6.2 Perceived Stance of the Other

> *"But maybe it's not Irish students not mixing with them! Yeah, maybe it's the other way around?"* (Jane)

Jane's suggestion is an apt introduction to a discussion on how the perceived stance of students from other cultures may impact on 'Acquaintance Prospects' from the perspective of the host students. Given that interaction by definition involves more than one party, it is logical to assume that both parties play some part in the likelihood of intercultural contact taking place. Host students speak in detail about their perceptions of how motivated or interested students from other cultures are in becoming acquainted with them, which implies they attach importance to this issue. Data relevant to this is categorised under the concept of 'Perceived Stance of the Other'.

The 'Perceived Stance of the Other' refers to the openness or disposition of students perceived to be culturally different in relation to host students, *from the perspective of the host students*. Specifically, it incorporates references to the level of interest which host students believe these students have in engaging with hosts in social or academic contexts. It also encompasses host students' perceptions of the attitudes held by these other students towards them, as well as host students' reflections on attempts made by students from other cultures to engage with them. This is therefore quite a complex concept, as it is based on one party's perceptions of the perceptions held by another party towards the first party – a type of "I think that they think…" scenario[48].

The 'Perceived Stance of the Other' is assessed by the host students based on their personal interpretation of the behaviour of students from other cultures, and directly impacts upon host students' disposition and behaviour. As Carol recalls:

> It just didn't enter my mind about the French and the Germans, because they were a bit more standoff-ish … And one of the guys is much more quiet. He's kind of like a cool dude as well like. Too cool to speak English! So it's kind of harder to get to know him.

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[48] This is termed "second-order intensionality" (Cartwright 2000: 182).

In terms of whether or not host students perceive students from other cultures to be actually interested in engaging with them, the data reveals diverging perspectives, ranging from perceiving a strong interest to no interest. Furthermore, several students reflect on their own inability to actually gauge this interest. As regards host students' perceptions that other students are not motivated to engage with them, Sally comments:

> Sometimes I get the impression that they just don't want to talk to the Irish people, they just want to talk to the French and that's it, or maybe the Germans. Sometimes they just, I dunno, they just give me the impression that they have no interest in talking to us.

Yvette, meanwhile, linking with the idea of 'Availability of Cultural Peers' as a factor reducing motivation to mix, suggests:

> I just think that they are kind of indifferent about mixing with Irish students. Maybe they don't like us, I don't know … They just keep to themselves … they live together, they speak their own language together as well, they don't speak English. Ya know, even if you sit beside them in a lecture they all sit together in one row and they wouldn't talk to us.

Interestingly, there is also a suggestion that this perceived lack of motivation to engage with hosts may be context specific. While discussing the nature of group work, Laura, a mature student, explains:

> I'm doing another project with some Germans and an Irish girl, and the Germans didn't want this Irish girl, but she was put in our group by the teacher. They said they had done one project with her and she hadn't pulled her weight … I suppose again it's what motivates. I know the Germans want to get things done well, so if they think you're good they will approach you, you know what I mean? So that's their motivating factor.

This ideas links directly with the construction of cultural difference outlined in Chapter 5, whereby host students differentiate themselves based partly on work ethic and academic motivations, and provides a good example of how diverging values may inhibit intercultural contact. Furthermore, it links with Asarantnam's (2005: 187) concept of 'purpose_explore', which she uses to differentiate international students who are focused on their academic studies alone – low 'purpose_explore' score –

from those who wish to fully experience the local culture – high ‘purpose_explore’ score. In her study (ibid.) she found a positive correlation between ‘purpose_explore’ and students’ motivation to interact with people from other cultures, suggesting that students who prioritise academic life have a lower tendency to engage in intercultural contact. In addition to this, there is a suggestion that the lack of interest which host students perceive other students to have may in fact be linked with low-self-esteem among the host students. As Yvette remarks, “Irish people don’t have the self-esteem I don’t think to, just you know, we just kind of assume that they don’t want to talk to us”. This issue of self-esteem is discussed in greater detail as part of ‘Anxiety’, in section 8.2.1.

Despite the frequency of statements perceiving a lack of interest in mixing with host students, the data also provides instances where host students feel students from other cultures are motivated to meet and mix with them. Samantha, while alluding to the comfort offered by homophily, explains that “sometimes in DCU they can be more comfortable around their own, but a lot of the time they do really try to mix and they do make a big effort”. In a similar vein, Sally remarks:

> Some of them want to keep to themselves, keep to their own nationality and that’s that. A lot of them I think, a lot of them do want to mix though, I would say that. Especially with the French this year. You can hear them, ‘We need to mix, we need to go, we need to talk more’. We said it to them and they said the same thing to us.

This point raises the question of what may underpin non-host students’ motivation to engage with hosts. Just as ‘Perceived Utility’ emerges as a motivational agent among host students, it also appears to emerge here. Just as the EB students proffer language support as a motivational factor from their own perspective, they also suggest that language support is a major reason why students whose native tongue is not English would make contact with them. Furthermore, referring back to the discussion in section 3.4, we are reminded that contact with host students is commonly associated with beneficial psychological and academic outcomes for international students, which would therefore motivate them to interact with hosts. However, it must be noted that host students are speculating in relation to non-host students’ motivations, rather than reporting their own position.

Finally, a number of host students refer to their uncertainty about non-host students' desire to engage with them, and how they tend to gauge this interest. Importantly, this uncertainty in turn impacts directly upon hosts' behaviour and ultimately 'Acquaintance Prospects'. Claudine comments, "Well, you don't know what way they are going to respond to you. You don't know if they want you to come over and talk to them", while Kimberly explains:

> So you don't know whether to talk to them outside clubs and societies because you don't know if they want to talk to you! … They seem to be happy like. And they all live together and they're just, you know, and they organise things without us. Without inviting us! That sounds really petty but it's true, you know.

In attempting to gauge the disposition and openness of non-host students, host students use different strategies to draw their conclusions. Claudine, for example, says:

> Well, body language and stuff like that. You can tell if you go over to someone and you sit beside them. They are going be a lot more welcoming if they are smiling back at you and, you know, the way they are sitting with you … if you're trying to talk to somebody and their answers are short and they're not saying much, you kind of get the hint that this person wants me to get lost basically.

However, conclusions based on one's interpretation of body language (kinesics), space relations (proxemics) and speech (prosody and paralinguistics) may ignore cultural differences in communication styles which, although complicating the exchange, may not indicate of a lack of interest on the part of the non-host student (Fitzgerald 2003).

Lastly, further complicating matters, there is the danger that non-host students may be perceived as being too 'pushy' in engaging with host students, which can prompt host avoidance. When asked about factors that might reduce the likelihood of mixing with students from other cultures, Cara suggests, "Somebody who is trying too hard. Someone who is trying to mix with people but too in your face". With this apparent 'Catch-22' scenario in mind, it is useful to consider how 'Host Motivations' and the 'Perceived Stance of the Other' conflate to inform intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects'.

7.5.3 Implications of ‘Relative Motivations’ for ‘Acquaintance Prospects’

The data clearly indicate that the motivation of both host students and the *perceived* motivation of non-host students directly influence ‘Acquaintance Prospects’. Indeed, the category of ‘Relative Motivations’ links with Kassing’s (1997) concept of ‘intercultural willingness to communicate’, which is defined as “one’s predisposition to initiate intercultural communication encounters” (ibid: 400). To a certain extent, these represent a symbiotic relationship, whereby the perceived motivation of one informs the motivation of the other. Identifying factors such as ‘Perceived Utility’, ‘Concern for Others’, ‘Shared Future’ and ‘Interest and Curiosity’ provides a useful insight into the key elements shaping host students’ motivations for intercultural contact. As such, policy makers seeking to promote ‘Acquaintance Prospects’ may focus on these in order to stimulate motivation. However, as stated, this should be done in a fashion which encourages ongoing contact and relationship development, as opposed to transient superficial encounters.

While host students are broadly articulate and forthcoming when discussing their personal motivations for engaging with students from other cultures, their speculation about the motivations of the ‘Other’ are understandably couched in uncertainty and ambiguity. This may be partly due to their relative inability to interpret culturally bound behaviour. Furthermore, misinterpretation can lead to host students disengaging and losing motivation to engage. This highlights the need for host students to be educated about how communication styles may vary across cultures, which may address this issue to a certain degree.

Finally, levels of motivation (both self-reported and perceived) are linked with the ‘Availability of Cultural’ peers. This again highlights the interdependence which exists between many of the categories emerging from the data. Furthermore, the relationship between motivation and availability of cultural peers will be further discussed with reference to the theoretical concept of ‘institutional completeness’ in Chapter 9.

7.7 Participation in College Life

Interviewer:	*As an Irish student, what things would reduce the likelihood of meeting students from other cultures?*
Ivan:	*Reduce it? Em, if you don't get involved in clubs and societies and the course you've chosen.*

The category 'Participation in College Life' concerns the extent to which students participate in *curricular and extracurricular* life in DCU, and how this relates to 'Acquaintance Prospects'. This category includes activities such as attending timetabled academic classes, participating in clubs and societies, and socialising on or off campus with college friends.

Like a number of other categories, 'Participation in College Life' links with the category of 'Proximity', as participating in curricular or extracurricular activities brings students physically together on a regular basis. Furthermore, it also relates to 'Curriculum' and 'Institutional Support'. The hypothesis is that relatively greater participation in college life will increase the likelihood of 'Acquaintance Prospects'. Furthermore, it applies to both host and non-host students' participation, and raises the question as to whether host and non-host students participate in college life in the same ways.

With regard to participating in the academic side of college life the main factor influencing this is students' motivation. In Chapter 5 the perception of diverging motivations between host and non-host students was discussed in detail. In the context of this category, motivation includes internal motivations (such as personal interest) as well as external (such as feelings of obligation). In the absence of both, students will not attend. Etain, for example, explains:

> I'm here because I have to, not by choice. Ya know I'd prefer to be working earning money, but I have to just get something like, ya know. But I wouldn't see myself as being as into college as a lot of others.

When analysing ‘Curriculum’ the link between students’ course of study and friendship formation was clearly elucidated. This was based on the assumption that students actually attend timetabled classes, such as lectures, practicals and labs. In instances where students do not attend timetabled class, the opportunities to engage with culturally diverse classmates obviously diminishes. This is exemplified in Sorcha’s comment:

> And we weren’t very good for attending lectures in first year either. So it took a bit longer to get to know people, like the foreign students, because we’d go to our German lectures mainly[49].

With regard to the academic element of college life, another point worth noting is that the nature of the course or heavy workload may impinge upon students’ ability to participate in the extracurricular side of college life, thereby linking ‘Participation in College Life’ with ‘Curriculum’. This emerges in particular amongst the nursing students, whose course, as discussed in section 7.4.4, has an intensive work placement schedule. As Amy explains:

> But on campus we don’t really have that much time here. Most of it is spent in the hospitals. So we don’t really get a chance to branch out … So instead of us getting to, you know, experience it and talk to people from different courses, we are stuck and excluded away from everything … cos it’s so intense. We’re either in class, and we have 100% attendance, or we’re in placement, with 100% attendance.

7.7.1 Socialising

References to the non-academic aspect of students’ college life are included under the subcategory of ‘Socialising’. This can include participating in organised social activities, such as clubs and societies, or unstructured socialising, such as going to the college bar or simply having lunch on campus. As regards the relationship between ‘Socialising’ and ‘Acquaintance Prospects’, it is necessary to establish the importance of socialising for meeting other students, and then compare the self-reported socialising habits of host students with the observed or perceived habits of students from other cultures.

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[49] Students in Sorcha’s German class were Irish.

As highlighted in Table 7.11, the data suggest that host students consider socialising to be of great importance for meeting and developing relations with fellow students. If this is the case, it is necessary to contrast the socialising habits of host with the perceived habits of non-host students in order to makes statements about the relationship between ‘Participation in College Life’ and ’Acquaintance Prospects’.

Table 7.11 Codes highlighting the importance of Social Activities for meeting Other Students

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Advocating more socialising to increase mixing	5
Clubs and Socs facilitating meeting with CD students	14
Finding it easier to meet CD students socially than in class	1
Getting to know CD students better via socialising	2
Joining Clubs and Socs to make friends	1
Meeting CD students at college social events	2
Meeting CD students at parties	5
Meeting CD students in college sports centre	1
Meeting CD students in the bar	2
Meeting other students through societies	2
Organising social activities as a way of meeting CD students	1
Socialising being important for friendship development	3

Host Socialising

As discussed in section 5.6, ‘Host Approach’, many host students report prioritising the social aspect of their college life, as opposed to the academic aspect. This is one of the significant perceived differences with students from other cultures – their diverging priorities within the context of higher education. In this section we examine the specific nature of ‘Host Socialising’.

Two principal phenomena emerge from the data relating to host students’ socialising habits. Firstly, host students tend to socialise in the *public sphere*, typically, in pubs. Secondly, alcohol appears to play an integral role in their socialising habits. Support for this can be found in codes such as *‘Host students socialising in the bar’* (12), ‘*Alcohol being central to Irish students socialising*’ (6), and ‘*Younger Irish students drinking heavily’* (8). As Jane comments:

> But that's how you get to know people, out socialising with them. Well, with Nursing anyway. You go out, get drunk, talk about going to Coppers[50]. It's just one of those things that we do.

An additional factor which emerges quite strongly within the data concerns the relationship between students living arrangements and their 'Participation in College Life'. While living situations were discussed as part of 'Proximity', in this category their relevance is different, relating instead to how one's living situations may inhibit their ability to participate in college to the desired extent. Within the code *'Living far from campus making socialising difficult'* (9), students discuss how lengthy commutes hinder their ability to socialise on campus. As Daragh explains, "Location. Commuting is a big issue … the majority of people who aren't living very close to DCU don't get involved". This point is supported by Elaine:

> My social life. I wouldn't really go out as much as the rest of the students in my class. Like sometimes the girls would say 'Stay in mine' like, and I will go out with them, but it seems like so much hassle to have to go out all that way like. Because if you are in work the next day you would have to go home that night instead of staying in someone's house. That would probably be the only barrier.

This issue is similar to that identified by Trice (2004), who refers to 'commuter campuses' hindering relations between host and international students. Conversely, staying on campus appears to facilitate participation in social activities:

> Yeah, well we do tend to go out like a couple of nights a week and because the majority of my friends live on campus it's a lot easier to go out with them and stay with them. (Sally)

Given that participation in clubs and societies, which is also an important aspect of host students' social life and which offers opportunities to meet culturally different students, was already discussed in section 7.5, this is not discussed again at this point. Instead, attention turns to the observed social habits of students identified as culturally different.

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[50] 'Coppers' refers to 'Copper Face Jacks', a popular Dublin nightclub.

Socialising Habits of Students from Other Cultures

While the data indicate that host students socialise in the public sphere with alcohol playing a central role, the *perceived* social habits of students from other cultures are quite different. Codes supporting this are listed in Table 7.12 overleaf. The data suggest that students from other cultures socialise less in the public sphere and give less priority to alcohol. As Carol remarks:

> The Germans and French, they never really come to the events on campus. They kind of hang out in each others' apartment and they hang out with the third or fourth years – you know whatever years that are there as well, like the other French people that are ahead of them or behind them. So they tend to stick together a lot … we don't get the chance to [mix with them] in DCU because when I'm partying here I hang out in the 'Hub'[51] with all my Irish friends and they tend to stay in Shanowen or in their houses or wherever, so it's kind of hard to.

This point is made by several other students, including Yvette:

> They might come to social events like the Halloween Ball or the Freshers Ball or whatever[52]. They might come to them, but mainly they keep to themselves in their own apartments.

This idea implies that the condition of 'Proximity', necessary for intercultural contact, may not be satisfied in the social context. Apart from different venues for socialising, differing perceived attitudes towards alcohol are also very evident within the data. Some students refer to religious beliefs preventing students from consuming alcohol, or possibly frequenting venues where alcohol is consumed. This echoes the findings of Boucher (1998), which indicated that Muslim students in particular had difficulties mixing with Irish students. Daragh, when discussing the idea of getting free wine with a meal, as might happen in some cultures, suggests, "In Ireland if you were given free wine with your dinner you wouldn't hit dessert before you'd be falling off the table". Samantha elaborates on this point:

> It's mainly the Irish people that can take the whole drinking culture. The others don't, cos they drink a drink over a few hours, whereas we'd have it done in 20 minutes.

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[51] The Hub is the college social centre, comprising the college bar.
[52] The Freshers Ball is a ball organised for new first year students.

Carol, meanwhile, suggests reasons for their different attitude towards alcohol, when she remarks:

> They don't have the same mentality. They are much more the 'café-bar' mentality. They wouldn't be like pounding drinks at the bar. You know, they'd look on and go, 'Oh my God!'

This again links in with a point raised in section 5.5.3, where host students talked about feeling judged about their social habits, particularly their consumption of alcohol and resulting behaviour.

Table 7.12 Codes indicating the Social Habits of Students perceived to be Culturally Different

Title of Code	Number of references within code
African students not socialising in DCU	2
CD students having different socialising habits to Irish	5
CD students not attending college social events	1
CD students not being interested in social events	3
CD students not going to the campus bar	5
CD students not participating in college social life over time	1
CD students not socialising during the day	1
CD students not socialising in DCU	2
CD students socialising in private sphere	7
Mature students having a different social life to younger students	2
Mature students not socialising in college	4

Once again, the point must be made that these are the host students' *perceptions* of the social habits of these students. The extent to which these perceptions coincide with the reality is unclear. However, as occurred in Chapter 5, the reflections of the two mature students provide support for host students' perceptions. Laura, for example, comments:

> I suppose also because I'm older as well…I don't…I've done all my drinking and I had a great time, so I'm not really into that now. I don't mind going for a couple of beers. So I'm more work focused maybe.

Equally, the following short excerpt of the interview with Orla suggests mature students do not tend to prioritise social life on campus:

Orla: Because we are mature students and we just don’t socialise. No, no. No, we don’t really.
Interviewer: *So you wouldn’t go to the bar?*
Orla: No.
Interviewer: *Clubs and Socs?*
Orla: No.
Interviewer: *Sports club, or anything like that?*
Orla: No. No!

7.7.2 Comparison of Social Habits

Thus far, the data analysis indicates that the social habits of host students and students from other cultures are markedly different, at least from the perspective of host students. However, this is not to say the data do not include references to host and non-host students socialising together, or in the same venue. Codes such as *‘Meeting CD students at parties’* (6), *‘Meeting CD students at college social events’* (2) and *‘Meeting CD students in the bar’* (2), are examples of this. Furthermore, although alcohol appears to represent a barrier between students, several host students refer to alcohol as a facilitator of intercultural contact, as it reduces the anxiety they often associate with intercultural encounters and gives them greater confidence to interact with strangers. As Yvette remarks, “we just don’t approach them unless – and I know this is for a lot of people – a lot of people will talk to the French and Spanish students when they [the Irish students] were drunk”. Indeed, Ujitani (2006) also found that alcohol may facilitate intercultural relational development insofar as it facilitates self-disclosure.

Overall, however, the data indicate that the social lives of host and non-host students are sufficiently different that they impact negatively on intercultural ‘Acquaintance Prospects’ in real terms. Specifically, the condition of ‘Proximity’ appears to remain unsatisfied, which reduces the likelihood of contact taking place. This point is made well by Yvette:

> So then, like if they are not going to be socialising in the bar, that’s your main social place and they’re not there, you’re not going to see them there. Like you’re not going to meet them there when it’s a more relaxed environment or whatever.

Drawing some final conclusions from this section, the implication is that students' participation in college life impacts upon 'Acquaintance Prospects'. While socialising constitutes a major part of students' college life, factors such as workload and living arrangements appear to inhibit students' ability to participate in the extracurricular element of college life. Furthermore, although there are instances of intercultural socialising, particularly in the context of clubs and societies, the social habits of host students appear to differ substantially from those of international and mature students. This is particularly evident in terms of socialising venues – public versus private sphere – and the role of alcohol.

Overall, while 'Participation in College Life' in theory fosters 'Acquaintance Prospects', in reality it is the nature of this participation which determines the relationship with intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects'. Within the current findings, divergent reported and perceived approaches to participation appear to hinder intercultural acquaintance prospects.

7.8 Time

'Time', the last of the categories comprising 'Acquaintance Prospects', constitutes an important category within the data as it represents both a *context* within which intercultural acquaintance prospects can be considered, while also representing a *condition* impacting upon intercultural acquaintance prospects. That is, students use 'Time' as a context for reflecting on their college experiences, including intercultural contact, while also identifying it as a condition needed for relations to develop. Indeed, 'Time' is a concept which permeates a number of the categories already discussed, such as 'Friendship' and 'Curriculum'.

Exploring 'Time' firstly as a context within which to consider intercultural acquaintance prospects, the data indicate that students' early college experiences are defined by heightened uncertainty; uncertainties relating to their new environment, how things operate, what their course will be like, who they will spend most time with, how to cope with new teaching styles, and numerous others. This uncertainty is evinced by codes shown in Table 7.13. Accordingly, students take steps to reduce their uncertainty, and one of the ways they do this is by seeking friendships.

As discussed in section 7.3, friendships can reduce uncertainty by providing security and providing access to information. As has also been discussed, students tend to form lasting friendships very quickly at very early stages of college, and such friendships are typically based on perceived similarities, as to engage with students perceived to be different would possibly increase uncertainty and so would not be a logical strategy. The data suggest that students typically befriend students of the same nationality and age with whom they feel they can easily communicate, particularly students in their course.

Table 7.13 Codes supporting the Association between the Start of College and Feelings of Uncertainty

Title of Code	Number of references within code
All students facing common challenges at start of college	1
Being alone on Day 1	1
Feeling awkward on first day	2
Feeling daunted on Day 1	1
Feeling nervous on Day 1	1
Feeling very isolated at start of college	1
Not wanting to be alone on Day 1	1
Seeking security on Day 1	1
Wanting to minimize challenges on Day 1	1

Data analysis suggests that 'Time' impacts upon intercultural acquaintance prospects insofar as host students' early stages of college are defined by strategies aimed at reducing uncertainty, including gravitating towards students they perceive to be culturally similar and avoiding students they perceive to be culturally different. The implication therefore, is that when commencing college the likelihood of host students becoming acquainted with students from other cultures is compromised by the uncertainties they experience in their new environment. As Cara comments:

> I would have been aware in 1st year, when I started meeting people, you'd know they're from a different country, you'd know straight way, and you might feel – I didn't feel it but you might feel – 'Ah, I'll just make friends with Irish people and then I might consider – well not 'consider', that's mean of me – I might say like, 'Oh I'll go and talk to her today', but have your core group first, and then go and talk! You know? Like have your friends.

Similarly, Carol refers to prioritising meeting cultural peers at the outset of college:

> I think for the first couple of months in 1st year I kind of only really thought about getting to know the Irish because it just didn't occur to me to get to know the Europeans.

This is a significant issue, as it has been highlighted that additional barriers, such as 'Group Cohesion', may be created over time, which further complicate intercultural acquaintance prospects. It also reinforces the argument that interventions should take place from the first day of college (section 7.5.1).

Moving onto the concept of 'Time' as a *condition* for intercultural acquaintances to occur and develop, Table 7.14 lists some of codes emerging from the data which highlight the need for time in order to become acquainted and develop relations with students from other cultures.

Table 7.14 Codes indicating the Need for 'Time' to make Contact and Develop Intercultural Relations

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Advocating spending more time with CD students to help mixing	1
Becoming more relaxed talking with CD students over time	1
CD students needing some time to get mixing with hosts	1
CD students opening up over time	1
Developing relationships with CD students over time	3
Getting to know CD classmates over time	1
Getting used to diversity over time	1
Needing time to get to know CD students	3
Not considering making friends with CD students at the start	2
Socialising with CD students over time	1
Taking a while to meet CD students	2
Taking longer time to get to know CD students	1

As regards host students' need for relatively more time to become acquainted with students from other cultures, it may be posited that until host students' uncertainty issues have been addressed, they tend to avoid intercultural contact as this may increase uncertainty. This raises the idea of 'Host Culture Adaptation', whereby host students, finding themselves in a new environment, need time to adjust and adapt to this environment. Although the notion that 'hosts' themselves might face adaptation stress is not prominent in intercultural literature, Sheridan (2005: 63) comments that "cultural adaptation is akin to such transition experiences as going to college or bereavement". Furthermore, Beekhoven et al. (2004) argue that entering higher education is a challenge for all students, while Furnham and Bochner (1986: 153) point out that two of the principal problems faced by international students are actually also shared by host students, given that they relate fundamentally to entry into higher education. These are (i) identity conflict related with late adolescence, and (ii) academic challenges and "stressors associated with transition to a new school or university". As such, the idea of host adaptation finds support in existing literature. Indeed, this idea of a cultural adaptation experience which does not involve crossing national boundaries is similar to that of 'temporal acculturation' referred to by MacLachlan (2003) when discussing how cultural changes that take place over time may require the dominant group to adapt.

Table 7.15 Codes supporting the Idea that Host Students face an Adaptation Experience upon commencing Higher Education

Title of Code	Number of references within code
College being a major change for students	1
College being different to secondary school	2
College having more diversity than secondary school	1
Finding your feet over time	1
Getting used to diversity over time	1
Getting used to not being spoon-fed	1
Having friends facilitating settling into college life	1
Having to adjust to college life at the start	1
Irish students adapting to a new teaching style	1
Irish students being used to rote learning	1
Host students having to adjust to college life	2
Irish students not being used to critical thinking	1
Not being prepared for diversity in college	2
Not having an identity at start of college	1
Settling in over time	1

Table 7.15 provides examples of codes evincing the idea of host students experiencing a cultural adaptation as they commence higher education. Underpinning some of these codes, we find the voices of the students themselves who reflect on

their transition to college. Some students associate the transition with a loss of identity. For example, Emer remarks, ‘The change to college. Nobody knows who you are’. For others, such as Samantha, the novelty of the environment requires adaptation:

> A lot of the class wouldn’t be used to being around different cultures. You know, like if you go to school in like Malahide or Tallaght or whatever, you’re around just your people. Whereas all this is coming together when you go to college, people from everywhere, it’s totally different. It’s just a break from the norm like. You’re going away from everything that you’ve come from.

Elaine expresses similar thoughts on her move to college from secondary school:

> Most of us are out of Leaving Cert and, ya know, we have grown up with people our same age. Most of our friends are always the same age as us like. And when you go to college it’s a mix of all different ages like. That’s probably hard to adjust to when you first start off.

Carol also reflects on the shock of her move to higher education and how it related to her intercultural contact:

> I think maybe it’s just the shock of coming to college and not being spoon-fed … I just didn’t think there was going to be different nationalities in our class, like it never kinda entered my head. I wasn't really prepared for it so I just didn’t really make an effort.

Many of the emotions referred to in the above quotations and in the voices of other students are similar to those often associated with experiences of cross-cultural adaptation; feeling shocked, lacking an identity, being unfamiliar with a new environment. Therefore, just as ‘Time’ is central to an individual’s cross-cultural adaptation, particularly in established models’ such as those proffered by Oberg (1960), Bennett (1986), Kim (1988a), and Anderson (1994), ‘Time’ also emerges as a factor in host students’ adaptation to college life, and this in turn has implications for their intercultural ‘Acquaintance Prospects’.

Overall, evaluating the importance of ‘Time’ as it relates to intercultural acquaintance prospects, the data suggest that in the early stages of college, intercultural acquaintance prospects are compromised by host students' strategies to reduce uncertainty. Furthermore, as has been discussed above, host students often experience their own transition shock as they move from secondary school to higher education, and adjustment to this requires time. Over time, as uncertainty decreases and students settle into their new surroundings, intercultural acquaintance prospects may theoretically improve. However, both in the case of uncertainty reduction and adaptation to the realities of higher education, 'Time' represents an opportunity cost. That is, by the time students have adapted to their new environment, additional, previously non-existent barriers to intercultural acquaintance, such as 'Group cohesion' may have emerged.

7.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented the very large core category of intercultural 'Acquaintance Prospects', and has identified and explored the diverse components underpinning it, several of which are interrelated. In terms of gaining an understanding of the factors which impact upon intercultural contact from the perspective of host culture students, those elucidated in this chapter are extremely important.

The data analysis suggests that host students perceive intercultural acquaintance prospects as a subset of general acquaintance prospects in college, with intercultural acquaintance prospects seen as relatively more problematic. This is due not only to the cross-cultural nature of the interaction, but also due to the fact that they perceive students from other cultures to have distinct values, behaviours and routines. This in turn can mean that the condition of 'Proximity', which emerges as a factor pervading several categories, is not satisfied to the same degree as it is with their cultural peers.

Similarly, the categories of 'Curriculum' and 'Institutional Support' provide important insights into how intercultural acquaintance prospects could be improved as part of deliberate strategies to promote intercultural contact on campus. Given that these two categories represent clear opportunities to foster intercultural contact which can be shaped by the institution, they are central to the notion of a university's 'institutional will' to create a positive institutional climate for student diversity (Kuh and Umbach 2005: 21). Specifically, this can be understood as “students’ perceptions that the institution encourages and values interaction with people from different backgrounds” (ibid.: 17). However, the findings suggest the much work needs to be done on creating such a climate.

In addition to this, the homophilic behaviour highlighted in Chapter 6 is again evident in the analysis of host students’ ‘Friendship’, which is a major priority for students in college and heavily informs their overall college experience. Equally, the importance of students’ ‘Participation in College Life’, both academic and social, is also evident, although diverging social activities emerge as a significant barrier to ‘Acquaintance Prospects’.

The relative motivation of students, both reported and perceived, is also central to intercultural ‘Acquaintance Prospects’. Highlighting the discrete and contrasting motivational factors underpinning host students’ behaviour again facilitates the development of policies and programmes aimed at further encouraging intercultural contact. Lastly, ‘Time’ has been identified as both a context and factor germane to intercultural ‘Acquaintance Prospects’.

Viewed together, these factors highlight the extremely complex nature of intercultural contact on campus and indicate that policies and strategies to promote intercultural contact between students need to be well planned, well managed, and supported in real terms.

Chapter 8: NATURE OF INTERACTION

8.1 Introduction

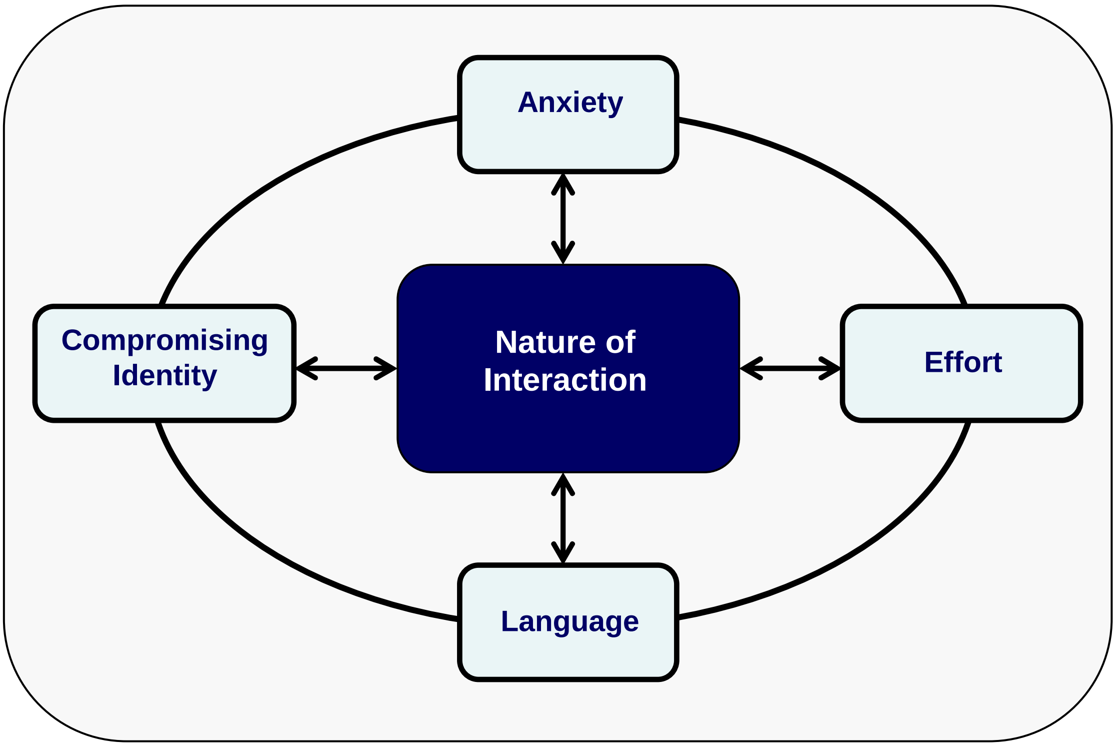
Having focused on the multiple factors which impact upon intercultural acquaintance prospects, this final chapter of research findings is concerned with the actual nature of the intercultural contact from the perspective of host students. It explores host students experiences of intercultural contact, the factors which may shape these experiences, and the implications these may have for intercultural relational development.

The chapter is divided into two parts. Section 8.2 explores the issues which emerge from host students' discussions of their experiences of intercultural contact. It considers how these issues may relate to each other and what implications they may have for intercultural contact. Section 8.3 examines the category of 'Relative Competencies', comprising two subcategories, 'Self-Perceived Host Competence' and 'Adaptation to Host Culture', which impact upon experiences of intercultural contact and moderate the issues discussed in section 8.2.

8.2 Issues relating to Intercultural Contact

With regard to host students' experiences of intercultural contact, four main categories have been identified within the data; 'Anxiety', 'Effort', 'Language' and 'Compromising Identity'. These are shown in Figure 8.1 overleaf. Each category is discussed in detail in this section before making some concluding comments based on their collective implications.

Figure 8.1 Categories informing Intercultural Interaction identified within the data



8.2.1 Anxiety

The category of ‘Anxiety’ relates to host students’ feelings of apprehension and emotional unease or discomfort – including embarrassment, fear and intimidation – within the context of intercultural contact[53]. Anxiety emerges as a very important theme pervading the data, and analysis of the category focuses on identifying instances of anxiety, exploring the reasons behind it, and discussing the possible implications for intercultural contact.

Instances of Anxiety

Like several of the categories explored in the previous chapter, ‘Anxiety’ is linked with a number of other categories. Furthermore, the category bridges both

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[53] In the previous chapter the idea of anxiety was discussed in terms of students’ initial feelings of uncertainty and insecurity at the start of their college life. While such anxiety may not stem directly from intercultural contact, it nonetheless impacts upon intercultural acquaintance prospects insofar as host students take steps to reduce uncertainty and anxiety by seeking familiarity, typically in the form of cultural peers. However, in this chapter the concept of anxiety is explored specifically in relation to intercultural contact.

‘Acquaintance Prospects’ and ‘Nature of Interaction’, as students discuss their anxieties prior to, as well as during, intercultural contact. With regard to anxiety stemming from the prospect of contact with culturally different students, this has been termed ‘intercultural communication apprehension’ (Neuliep and McCroskey 1997: 145). Table 8.1 lists some of the codes highlighting instances of ‘Anxiety’ within the data.

Table 8.1 Codes highlighting Instances of ‘Anxiety’ among Host Students

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Being anxious about interacting with CD students	3
Being anxious when talking with CD students	8
Being intimidated approaching groups of CD students	5
Being intimidated by intercultural contact situations	4
Being more self-conscious talking with CD students	2
Being scared of the unknown	2
Fearing cultural difference	3
Feeling academically intimidated by CD students	3
Feeling embarrassed initiating contact with CD student after a long time having no contact	2
Feeling silly trying to enter a group of CD students	1
Feeling uncomfortable around CD students	2
Feeling uncomfortable asking CD students personal questions	3
Feeling uncomfortable talking to CD students about social life	1

Given that uncertainty and anxiety is commonly associated with intercultural contact (Duronto et al. 2005; Nesdale and Todd 2000; Barna 1994), host students’ reports of such feelings are not surprising. What is of particular interest, however, is the degrees of anxiety discussed, ranging from feeling ‘silly’ and ‘awkward’ to more powerful emotions of ‘fear’ and ‘intimidation’. Elaine, for example, remarks, “you feel a tiny bit intimidated from them, to make conversation with them. I dunno. Not that they look down on you, but you just feel a bit intimidated”. Owen’s comments, meanwhile, indicate a different level of anxiety around intercultural contact: “to meet someone who doesn't know anybody you know, or anybody belonging to you, or anything like that, could be kind of scary – in a kind of subconscious way”.

The fact that students experience varying degrees of anxiety connected with intercultural contact may be based upon their personal psychological make-up and/or external factors, such as the size of the group of students with which they interact. For example, in talking about the students she perceives to be culturally different in her class, Clodagh suggests the cause of anxiety stems from the individual: “Like they are not the kind of people who would judge me, but it’s our anxiety. It’s within ourselves that the problem is, not with them”. Alternatively, Claudine’s comments suggest that it is group dynamics, which can be linked with ‘Group Cohesion’ (section 7.3.4), that heighten anxieties:

> Yeah, well it’s kind of intimidating when there’s a group. A biggish group and, ya know, they’re a different culture, and it’s kind of hard to break in through that, even if you really were trying like, because they mightn’t be as accepting to have you coming into their circle, you know that kind of way. And it’s just kind of intimidating to try to even start, so a lot of the time you’re just not bothered … once they’re kind of in their own little circle no one really tends to want to interfere or whatever, cos it’s their culture and they have different ways and you don’t want to be coming in, not throwing your weight around, but kind of coming in and like ‘Awww’, you’d feeling like an awful plonker! You know that kind of way? So that kind of would put a restriction on you even trying to socialise or go over and make friends and stuff like that.

Factors underpinning Anxiety

Coupled with identifying specific instances of anxiety, it is necessary to explore the factors which underpin it within the specific context of intercultural contact. Data analysis suggests that host students’ anxiety around intercultural contact may stem from a concern for the ‘Self’ – an internal focus – or a concern for the ‘Other’ – an external focus – or indeed a combination of both.

In terms of anxiety stemming from a concern for the ‘Self’, codes such as *‘Being afraid of being perceived as racist’* (12), *‘Being anxious about being rejected by CD students’* (2), *‘Being concerned about being misunderstood by CD students’* (3), and *‘Irish students worrying about being made look stupid’* (4), each provide support for this idea. Eve remarks, “Like the Irish have this thing about being afraid of looking stupid. Do you know that way? I always think that we’re afraid to look any way stupid”, while Clodagh’s thoughts suggest that concern about possible rejection or disapproval by other students may also play a role in host students’ anxiety:

> Maybe that’s a thing as well; that we're afraid to go up and strike a conversation with an international student in case they are not going to accept us. In case they think we are not ‘culturally proper’ almost, if that makes sense.

The most evident concern for the ‘Self’ emerging from the data, however, relates to students’ concern about being misrepresented or perceived as racist as a result of miscommunication across cultural lines. As Owen explains:

> And there’s a terrible fear, I think, among people of looking like a racist. I think that’s something that really – now maybe it’s just me – but I think people are quite afraid of coming across as culturally ignorant because it has become kind of ‘light racism’ almost. You know, it’s a different thing altogether, but it can manifest itself like that.

This particular concern is very apparent within the data despite the fact that ‘race’ does not emerge as a significant theme in students’ overall discussion. Claudine also articulates her concerns regarding the possible risks involved in intercultural contact:

> You don’t want to be branded with anything. You don’t want to be branded as being racist or anything like that. You don’t want that image of yourself going out, so you’re trying to protect yourself kind of, from any of that stuff being said about you. So that all affects it like … So definitely you don’t want to be labelled as anything. You don’t want to get into trouble over anything.

From Claudine’s comments, it is clear how the perceived heightened risk of misrepresentation associated with intercultural contact may cause anxiety which may prompt students to avoid or disengage from such contact. Finally, returning again to Owen, we see how anxiety about one’s own ignorance may be accentuated by situations of intercultural contact:

> But there’s so many massive differences – at least superficially they’re massive differences anyway – that you do get worried about your own ignorance. And while you might have an interest in finding out what that is, you‘re not fully sure how to ask about it without sounding first of all like an idiot – cos you don’t know, cos they know more than you, and you don’t want to look like a fool – but also you don’t want to insult that person.

This final comment from Owen allows the discussion of ‘Anxiety’ to segue from concern for the ‘Self’ to concern for the ‘Other’. Host students express anxiety about unintentionally offending or embarrassing students from other cultures while interacting with them. This is evidenced by the particularly dense code *‘Being anxious about offending CD students’* (18). Cara speaks about this anxiety in some detail:

> You’d be conscious of what you’d be saying to them in case you offend them. Like with the group [referring to her core group of Irish friends], the five of us, you feel like you could say anything to them, because you know that they wouldn’t get offended and you could maybe laugh and joke and like they wouldn’t really get offended and if they did, they’d say it to you. But with the other people, you’re really conscious of what you are saying, just in case you offend them … I wouldn’t like to feel like I was talking to somebody and they got offended by what I said, even though I wasn’t aware of what I said, I just said it as a joke, but they would get offended by it … It is in your mind because you don’t want to offend them, you don’t want them to feel bad about what you say, because it would have a bad effect on me if I felt that. I might think later on that night, if I said something to someone, ‘Oh my God, why did I say that!? I shouldn’t have said it’. And that’s going through my head for hours and hours, ‘Why did I say that? I shouldn’t have’. And I don’t want that burden on me then, just because I talked.

Cara’s comments are significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, they compare and contrast experiences of *intra*cultural contact with *inter*cultural contact, thereby highlighting the latter to be more problematic. Secondly, Cara’s final point, where she refers to a ‘burden’ and the potential negative outcomes for herself reveals a link between concern for the ‘Other’ and concern for the ‘Self’ within the context of ‘Anxiety’. Coupled with this, reflecting on her contact with mature African students, Claudine indicates that age differences may further complicate intercultural relations:

> You don’t know if you’re going to go over and talk to them and say something and put your foot in it, ya know, because like with our jokes, and Irish jokes and stuff like that, you wouldn’t know if they’d take offence to it … they might take it up wrong, and because a lot of them are a lot older as well, there’s a whole age barrier there … it’s even harder if someone thinks you’re being rude or something like that and then you just get disheartened with it and you’re kinda like ‘Well, I can’t be doing this every day!’. It’s tiring like. It would get tiring after a while so you just kinda think, well,

> I'm not gonna try anymore, and now I do try, but I link in a lot more with the Irish students because it's just that it's easier like, cos they know that you're not being rude or whatever.

Apart from highlighting age as a further complicating factor, Claudine's comments again highlight the uncertainty associated with intercultural contact and the potential negative outcomes resulting from miscommunication, while simultaneously indicating the perceived ease of intracultural contact.

Thus far, with regard to the factors underpinning host students' anxiety around intercultural contact, the indication is that students are concerned with their own wellbeing and that of others. However, not all students are uniform in their thoughts on this. The comments of both David and Daragh contrast sharply with those of the students presented above. As Daragh candidly explains:

> I've a very good habit of putting my foot in it, so at this stage I really couldn't care less whether people think I'm an ass, cos I've said really stupid things at times. And like it happens…I guarantee if I start talking to someone I will eventually accidentally say something that they may perceive to be slightly stupid, or it may actually offend them accidentally. Like you know, I was talking to one of the guys from France who was saying that 'Ireland is full of alcoholics. You don't know how to handle your drink!', and I said, 'Yes! But we don't surrender as much!', something like that. He took it as a joke, but he wasn't happy because it turns out he is from a part of France where during the Second World War the Resistance was very busy and then there was a huge slaughter of people by the Nazis. So, not exactly the best thing to be saying.

Daragh's comments indicate little anxiety about how others perceive him, although he does recognise his potential to cause offence. Similarly, David's thoughts contrast with the more cautious, self-checking behaviour described by many other students:

> You don't say something to offend someone, but you don't curtail your own opinions because you think it might offend someone. You say what you have to say and if someone is offended, then let them be offended. You don't go out of your way to offend someone, but if you have something to say, say it.

These contrasting approaches raise the question as to whether a more cautious approach, such as that typified by Cara's comments, may or may not be preferable to an approach similar to that outlined by David. In the case of Cara, for example, heightened levels of anxiety, arising from a genuine concern for the 'Self' and the 'Other' appear to hinder intercultural contact and relational development. However, her awareness of possible cultural misunderstandings may reduce the likelihood of miscommunication in situations where contact does take place. In this respect, anxiety can be linked with competence, whereby the host student is aware of his/her relative intercultural 'incompetence', which leads to unease. In contrast with this, David's approach, apparently reflecting low levels of anxiety, appears to make initial contact easier. However, his apparent lack of concern for the 'Other' may increase the potential for offence and cultural clashes, which may in turn result in negative outcomes and disengagement. This idea will be further explored in Chapter 9 with reference to the theoretical concepts of 'thresholds of anxiety'.

Self-Esteem

In addition to anxiety stemming from a concern for oneself and others, the issue of host students' self-esteem also relates to 'Anxiety'. Low self-esteem emerges as an unexpected but significant issue pervading the data. This was already made apparent in Chapter 5 when discussing host students' perception of academic inferiority, and was also alluded to in section 7.6.2, 'Perceived Stance of the Other'. With regard to 'Anxiety' however, low self-esteem, exemplified by low confidence and a poor self-image, appears to fuel host students' anxiety around intercultural contact. As Laura remarks:

> I think the Irish need more confidence in communicating with other people. I think there is this feeling of maybe, it's often been said, 'inferiority complex' or, again I think it's a confidence thing and a few inhibitions and I think that is definitely a barrier … one of the Irish girls said she thought the French were more sophisticated than the Irish, which I don't agree with actually, but then, that's what I mean, it's her *perception*.

The data suggest that self-esteem not only impacts upon the likelihood of host students engaging in intercultural contact, but can also be impacted upon as a *result* of such contact. As such, it is both a determining factor and product of intercultural contact. Several students report that intercultural interactions prompted feelings of personal inadequacy, primarily relating to their academic ability, but also – in the case of a small number of female students – relating to their physical appearance. Yvette, for example, remarks:

> I suppose it's really stupid and shallow, but like the German and the French girls are really gorgeous. They're all really naturally…like they're just, you know. So maybe Irish girls feel like, 'Ah, French guys would just have no interest in Irish girls!'. Something to do with that maybe. That could be part of it as well.

In terms of the factors underpinning low self-esteem, these were not explored in detail. However, two students suggest that host students' low self-esteem is symptomatic of low self-esteem within Irish national identity and is linked to Irish history. Laura comments:

> I think the Irish have been a little bit lacking in confidence for a long time. So I think we are only beginning to develop as a nation, because you know we've had our independence since [19]22, but I think our whole history has sort of made us the underdog, and it takes time to come out of all that, as the Germans are much more confident and the French are as well.

Similarly, Yvette argues:

> I just think Irish people as a nation don't have very high self-esteem. I dunno, maybe it's because of the British influence…as a nation when it comes to confidence we're just miles behind.

Whatever the roots of the perceived and self-reported low self-esteem, it appears to constitute an issue within the context of intercultural contact, particularly in situations where contact may actually reinforce low self-esteem.

Impact of Anxiety

Having identified instances of anxiety among host students and explored the possible causes of it within a context of intercultural contact, the impact of such anxiety must also be considered. Data analysis suggests that students' feelings of anxiety may precipitate avoidance of further intercultural interaction, or, in situations where the interaction reinforces or creates anxieties, a discontinuation of contact. Support for this is found in the code *'Anxiety leading to avoidance'* (14). As Claudine explains, "It's just kind of intimidating to try to even start, so a lot of the time you're just not bothered”. Likewise, Laura, a mature student, remarks, “my observation is that some people feel that the other culture might be much different and might be a bit scary, so [they] just stay away”.

‘Anxiety’ therefore emerges as an important issue in understanding host students’ experiences of intercultural contact. With this in mind, the potential importance of interventions, as discussed in section 7.5.1, which can encourage students to interact across cultural boundaries and reduce anxieties, becomes even greater. Such interventions may ‘trump’ anxiety by forcing students together and giving them shared activities. As Etain explains:

> You don’t know whether they want to be talked to like. They might have something else to be doing. But at least if you have to do something, the two of you have to be there, you might as well make the most of it and talk away. And there’s not pressure, and no ones’ worrying, ‘Oh they probably don’t want to talk’, or anything like that.

Similarly, Orla suggests that giving students the opportunity to actually talk about cultural difference may reduce anxieties by increasing awareness:

> I mean maybe giving people a chance to talk about the different cultures they are from or whatever, so that there’s more awareness, better understanding, and less fear.

This idea of reducing anxiety through awareness and cultural knowledge is discussed in greater detail in section 8.3. At this point, however, some final thoughts on ‘Anxiety’ are presented.

Overall Implications of ‘Anxiety’

The issue of anxiety relating to intercultural contact emerges as an important one among host students and has important implications for intercultural relations on campus. Overall, analysis of the data suggests that intercultural contact creates anxieties for host students which are greater than those typically experienced in intracultural contact. This in turn can be juxtaposed with the ‘Security’ and ‘Ease of Communication’ associated with homophilic interaction discussed in section 6.3.

Anxiety stemming from uncertainty, low self-esteem and a concern for the ‘Self’ and/or the ‘Other’, can therefore act as a disincentive for host students to engage in intercultural contact. In particular, intercultural encounters which accentuate rather than alleviate anxiety increase the likelihood of avoidance or disengagement, as individuals will typically seek to avoid situations which impact negatively upon their psychological wellbeing. Lastly, while ‘Anxiety’ may inhibit initial intercultural contact, host students’ concerns about the appropriateness of asking personal questions when engaging with students from other cultures, can constitute a barrier to relational development, an issue which is explored in greater depth in section 8.2.4.

8.2.2 Effort

Coupled with the anxiety associated with intercultural contact, ‘Effort’ emerges as another important theme within the data. This category refers to host students’ perceptions of intercultural contact being relatively more challenging and demanding than intracultural contact. Codes such as *‘Finding it harder to communicate with CD students’* (10), *‘Intercultural contact being an effort’* (20), and *‘Perceiving intercultural contact as challenging’* (6), provide the strong support for this. Indeed, a search of the entire data set reveals 112 instances of the word ‘effort’[54]. Furthermore, apart from direct references, the notion of ‘Effort’ is articulated in alternative ways by several students. For example, while speculating about host students’ lack of intercultural contact on campus, Frank suggests, “maybe they are just not willing to go that *extra inch*” [author’s emphasis], while Cara explains, “it takes that *little bit extra* in someone to go over and to start talking” [author’s emphasis]. Likewise, Clodagh remarks, “if I was to talk to the Japanese person I would be kind of almost challenging myself to see could I strike a conversation with them”, again implying ‘Effort’ by perceiving the interaction as challenging.

Students’ perceptions that intercultural contact constitutes an effort is supported in the literature. Yokota (1989; cited in Takai 1991) found perceived effort to be a barrier to intercultural contact among students, while Ang and Volet (1998: 19-20) remark: “Breaking out of one’s comfort zone (Volet & Tan-Quigley, 1995) and negotiating the crossing of cultural barriers (Phelan et al, 1991) requires deliberate, mentally demanding effort, whether a students is a sojourner or a local resident”.

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[54] This includes uses of the word by the interviewer, and may also include words such as ‘effortless’. While frequency of the word should not therefore be taken as an indication of the degree of effort host students associate with intercultural contact, it does however indicate that the concept of ‘Effort’ is prominent among students.

While the views of many host students could be used to highlight the idea of ‘Effort’, Eve’s comments are particularly germane:

> I suppose you do have to make slightly more effort…I think you have to make more effort to find something in common with people from other cultures. Because the cultures are different I suppose. That’s what it is. But you do have to make more effort to, to try and find something that maybe you could talk about and stuff like that. And then I suppose if you can find that thing and you’re sitting having a chat or whatever and then…I mean you can’t come back later on and have the same conversation again. D’ya know what I mean? It means you have to go find something else to talk about then next time. Ya know that way? The effort is *always* going to be there!

Eve’s implication that the effort associated with intercultural contact will be consistently present is particularly revealing. Furthermore, remarks such as those by Claudine, who claims “It’s not worth the hassle”, suggest that intercultural contact is assessed in terms of a cost-benefit analysis, whereby students compare the perceived effort with potential outcomes, and behave in accordance with their evaluation. This idea was already raised in section 7.6.1, when explicating the idea of ‘Perceived Utility’ as a motivation for intercultural contact, and will be examined from a theoretical perspective in Chapter 9 with reference to social exchange theory (Thibaut and Kelley 1959).

Having established that many host students perceive intercultural contact to constitute an ‘Effort’, the question arises as to whether host students decide to make this effort, and also, what specifically it might involve. With regard to the first of these questions – making the effort or not – there is ambiguity within the data, and the point can be made that self-reported behaviour may not reflect actual behaviour. As was discussed in section 7.6, ‘Host Stance’, host students report making some effort to interact with students from other cultures. However, self-reported references to a lack of effort are abundant within the data, as evidenced by the code *‘Host students not making effort to mix with CD students’* (16). Furthermore, the prominence of the categories of ‘Homophily’ and ‘Separation’, as outlined in Chapter 6, both suggest that intercultural contact is infrequent.

Applying the logic of the cost-benefit approach outlined above, however, the perceived ‘Outcomes of Intercultural Interaction’ will heavily inform subsequent intercultural contact. In situations where outcomes are perceived or expected to be beneficial, and out-weigh the perceived ‘Effort’ involved, the likelihood of subsequent interaction is strong. Conversely, in situations where the outcomes are perceived to be negative, or the effort – however it is defined – too great, such interaction may be judged to be inutile, thereby leading to avoidance. With this in mind, it is necessary to explore host students’ perspectives on the ‘Outcomes of Intercultural Interaction’. Once again, however, there is ambiguity within the data.

Codes such as *‘Perceiving benefits from intercultural contact’* (12), *‘Valuing diversity in higher education’* (13), *‘Seeing a value in meeting other cultures’* (7), and *‘Broadening outlook through intercultural contact’* (6), indicate that host students’ view intercultural contact as theoretically beneficial, which in turn suggests that it may indeed be ‘worth’ the effort. These benefits are typically articulated by reference to the qualities and characteristics, such as open-mindedness and having cultural knowledge, which host student associate with intercultural competence, and which will be discussed in detail in section 8.3. As Clodagh explains:

> It’s good to mix with other cultures. You get on and see it’s a big world. It’s bigger than just Irish people. And ya know, not to be naïve and think that there’s no different people out there with different views and different ways of being brought up.

Other benefits are more academic in nature and relate to the idea of ‘Perceived Utility’ discussed in section 7.6.1. However, while it is encouraging that host students perceive some benefits from intercultural contact, there are also numerous references to negative outcomes from intercultural contact, which, again applying a cost-benefit lens, augur badly for intercultural relational development. Some of the codes highlighting negative outcomes are listed in Table 8.6 overleaf.

Table 8.2 Codes relating to Negative Outcomes of Intercultural Contact[55]

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Becoming defensive due to misinterpretation	1
Becoming frustrated having to explain words to CD students	1
Becoming tired of self-checking when talking with CD students	1
Being annoyed by noisiness of French students	1
Being put off by romantic intensity of Germans	1
Cultural miscommunication leading to disagreements	2
Differing eating habits causing annoyance	1
Experiencing cross cultural clashes during work placement	1
Feeling frustrated with French cooking habits	1
Feeling ignorant talking with Asian students	1
Feeling insulted by French students talking French in front of you	1
Feeling judged by mature students	5
Feeling judged by CD students	11
Feeling misunderstood by CD students	1
Feeling pressurised by CD students	4
Irish students being annoyed by direct communication style	1
Negative experiences of IC contact leading to avoidance	9

These codes are of interest for two primary reasons. Firstly, they highlight the diversity of contexts, such as work, dining and romance, where intercultural issues may arise, even within an educational environment. Secondly, the code *‘Negative experiences of IC contact leading to avoidance’* (9) is of particular relevance, as it highlights the implications of perceived negative outcomes. As Cara concisely explains, regardless of the context in which the negative outcomes take place, “you’re not going to be pushing yourself into meeting other people because of how bad the first time was”.

In addition to this, factors such as the perceived ‘Anxiety’ (section 8.2.1), the ‘Availability of Cultural Peers’ (section 6.3.2), ‘Group Cohesion’ (section 7.3.4), as well as a basic lack of interest (section 7.6), may all underpin the lack of effort which host students mention. Furthermore, Owen comments on a number of Irish students who disengaged from a situation of intercultural contact by claiming they could not understand the other student, although his own opinion is somewhat different:

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[55] The codes listed in Table 8.1, relating to ‘Anxiety’, are not included in this table, although several of them do relate to negative outcomes of intercultural contact.

> It was more like they actually closed their ears as opposed to they actually couldn't hear … They don't want to make an effort so they use that as an excuse.

In terms of the actual *nature* of the effort, it may take various forms depending on the individual perspective. As was highlighted in Eve's comments on the earlier page, effort may be gauged based upon the ongoing challenge to identify commonalities, which contrasts directly with 'Homophily'. 'Effort' may also be evaluated in accordance with host students' having to engage the ambiguity and uncertainty they associate with intercultural contact and manage the anxiety and potential miscommunication which was outlined at the start of the chapter. Furthermore, the need for patience is also proffered. As Yvette explains, "You have to speak clearly and slowly and some people just don't have the patience for that". However, the fundamental issue underpinning the 'Effort' host students attribute to intercultural contact appears to relate to 'Language', a category which will now be examined in detail.

8.2.3 Language

"The ability to communicate would be very important. Like honestly if we couldn't communicate, if I could not get across what I was trying to say and he could not do the same, that would be a very…that would be a major stumbling block to begin with." (Daragh)

"It's very hard to talk to someone if they can't understand you." (Etain)

The category of 'Language' emerges as central to host students' experiences of intercultural contact, and a major factor complicating intercultural encounters. 'Language' includes the subcategories of 'Accent', 'Slang' and 'Humour', each of which emerges as an important issue within the data. Pervading each of these subcategories are two prominent themes, 'Language as a Barrier' and 'Adapting Language for Intercultural Contact', both of which are explored in detail below.

Language as a Barrier

As can be seen from Table 8.3, references to language constituting an issue in intercultural contact are abundant within the data, and contrast sharply with the small number of references to language not being perceived as an issue among host students[56]. This mirrors the findings of numerous studies which identified language as a barrier to students' intercultural contact (Tan and Goh 2006; Ujitani 2006; Takeda and St. John-Ives 2005; Trice 2004). Overall, host students indicate that students from other cultures, with the possible exception of Asian students, have a good level of English, particularly written English – *'CD students having good English'* (12). As Samantha comments, "a lot of the students that are here are excellent at English. Sometimes she does be writing things and I can't think of it!". However, in the context of oral communication, issues relating to 'Accent', 'Slang' and 'Humour' emerge as significant obstacles.

Table 8.3 Codes highlighting 'Language' as an Obstacle in Intercultural Contact

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Accent hindering conversation	2
African names being difficult to pronounce	1
CD students having difficulty with Irish colloquialisms	1
Humour being a stumbling block	6
Humour potentially causing IC misunderstandings	3
Humour varying across cultures	5
Irish students not understanding CD's accents	3
Language representing a barrier to communication	26
Language barriers preventing having craic	1
Language being a barrier to mixing	7
Language differences causing miscommunication	4
Language difficulties causing frustration for Irish students	2
Language difficulties making social interaction difficult for CDs	1
Slang hindering conversation	8
Strong Irish accents making it hard to understand Irish students	1

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[56] Codes such as *'Being able to understand important messages in another language'* (1); *'Language not being a barrier'* (1); *'Language not being an issue for shared academic work'* (1) suggest language is not perceived as a barrier.

With regard to students' accents, there are references both to the difficulty host students may have in understanding the accents of students from other cultures, and to the difficulties those students may have in understanding host students' accents. Recalling an instance of intercultural contact, Elaine explains, "I don't think it's their English. It's more their accent like. It was very hard to understand them". Host students' difficulty understanding accents is also raised by Jane, who candidly points out that even in intracultural contact accents can constitute a barrier to communication:

> One of the guys is always saying, 'Jesus, I can't understand a word they're saying!'. But he's from South Tipp[57], and we can't understand a word he's saying anyway! Ya know, he can't understand what their opinion is because he can't understand what they are saying in the first place. So he has no interest in listening to it.

Aside from the humorous aspect of Jane's comment, this again highlights how language barriers prevent or complicate the exchange of opinions, which in turn can cause either party to loose interest and disengage. Adopting the perspective of students who are not familiar with Irish accents, Yvette suggests:

> I think no matter how good at English someone might be, they still mightn't understand you cos of your accent. They could be from a different country and they just don't have a clue what you're saying.

Within the data, 'Slang' also emerges as an important hurdle frustrating communication from the perspective of host students. Sorcha comments, "sometimes the foreign students wouldn't realise or wouldn't know exactly what we meant … so I think Irish slang is a big thing definitely". A specific example of this comes from Jane, who recalls an incident with an African student during work placement:

> When we were on placement Matilda had to say to me, 'Well, what does that mean?', and I [had] kinda said, 'Ah, sure it's grand', or, 'That's savage', or 'Animal' or something. And she'd be 'What are you talking about? That doesn't make any sense!'.

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[57] 'Tipp' refers to 'Tipperary', a county in Ireland.

Host students not only indicate that slang can cause communication problems, they also point out that explaining slang terms can further complicate matters and stunt the flow of conversation. Yvette states, “You just wouldn’t explain it. They just wouldn’t understand it. Then that kinda hinders conversation I suppose”. Similarly, Owen remarks:

> Mostly they are very good at English. Mostly it would be Irish phrases. The colloquialisms they wouldn’t really fully get … Even though their English is very good, there’d be things I say, turns of phrase and expressions that they just wouldn’t have any understanding of, and I nearly wouldn’t be able to explain what it meant.

Closely related to ‘Slang’ is the issue of ‘Humour’ in intercultural contact. This was alluded to in section 7.3.3, as part of the analysis of ‘Friendship’. From host students’ perspective, the dangers of humour are two-fold. Firstly, there is the possibility that the other party may not understand that a comment is intended to be humorous. Within the context of the current study, examples of this include host students explaining, or expressing anxiety, that students from other cultures might not understand the common use of sarcasm and, in particular, ‘slagging’, in Irish culture. As mentioned in Chapter 7, ‘slagging’ is a form of good-natured teasing which involves making fun of someone, but generally in a non-malicious fashion. Although Keltner et al. (2001: 229) explain that “Teasing is central to human social life”, in intercultural contexts it represents a highly risky communication strategy, as playful teasing could be misinterpreted as a direct, deliberate and deeply personal insult. As Emer explains:

> I think Irish people have a tendency towards sarcasm humour, and they kind of get it, whereas if I did that to a group of Chinese they might be offended and I’d be, ‘Uh oh!’. They wouldn’t like it, but I know [the] Irish, we do. We slag each other, but not in a bad way … Sometimes you’d slag someone and you’d be, ‘Oh, did they take that wrong way?’.

This awareness of the dangers of ‘slagging’ in intercultural communication is evident among many host students, and is reflected in the comments of both Etain and Elaine:

> I always mess with my friends. We'd be messing like. But Jesus, you couldn't go saying that to them, cos they might take it seriously like. That's a good point, yeah, it is. Because you wouldn't know if they know you're messing. They might think you're serious if you call them…ya know. They might get fierce insulted then. (Etain)

> They'd [the Irish students] be worried that they would take it up as racist like, probably. Even though it's a sign of having a laugh. Cos that's probably linked back to our culture like, ya know. That's not the same in their cultures. Well, I don't know, but it might be different in their country – that you wouldn't slag your friends! (Elaine)

Coupled with the risk of humour not being interpreted as such, a second identified danger of humour in intercultural contact relates to the possibility that, although recognising that the other party is employing humour, the other individual may simply not find a comment, gesture or act humorous. As Cox (1999: 47) explains, "Different cultures have a different sense of humor, and what is considered amusing in one culture may be considered offensive by another". While the risks of humour can also apply in intracultural settings, the risk is greater in intercultural contexts. As Orla remarks, "What we find funny other people don't find funny. So we need to be aware of that as well". Kimberly expresses a similar opinion when she comments: "They kinda laugh, but it's a kinda nervous laugh. Yeah, they just don't seem to get our sense of humour really to the same extent as we do". The issue of humour is therefore a complex one. At one level humour can be used as a 'social lubricant' (Fitzgerald 2003: 20) to build friendships and overcome barriers. As Smith and Bond (1998: 255) remark: "Shared humour is a potential antidote to the anxiety, tension and irritations that characterize much cross-cultural interaction". On the other hand, however, for various reasons – subtleties, insider knowledge, background context – humour can be difficult to communicate across cultural lines, and is a risky strategy and must be carefully employed (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner 2002). Indeed, Spencer-Oatey and Xiong (2006) identify difficulties understanding jokes and humour in English as a major problem faced by Chinese students studying in Britain.

Overall, conflating the challenges arising from accent, slang and humour as highlighted in the data, 'Language' constitutes a major challenge in intercultural contact from the perspective of host culture students. Furthermore, as can be seen from the students' concerns relating to the misinterpretation of humour, this category links in with 'Anxiety', as uncertainties and miscommunications resulting from diverging communication styles can cause anxiety for students on both sides.

Adapting Language for Intercultural Contact

Given the numerous challenges and risks host students associate with intercultural contact within the specific context of 'Language', it is not surprising that they adapt their speech to facilitate communication and reduce the risk of miscommunication. This mirrors Kudo and Simkin's (2003) concept of 'linguistic bridging' discussed in section 3.5.1. However, the students themselves make an evaluation at an early stage as to the extent of adaptation required. As Samantha comments:

> Yeah, you can kind of 'dumb down' for some people. Depending on who you are talking to, because they wouldn't be as good. You feel that they can't understand you as well, so you slow down, dumb down, don't use the slang … You kind of get if from the start of the conversation. Whatever you start talking about and whatever way it's going, whether or not you can go 'totally Irish' on them or would have to talk properly to them.

Table 8.4 provides a list of codes which highlight the degree and nature of changes to which host students refer.

Table 8.4 Codes indicating Host Students Adapting Language in Situations of Intercultural Contact

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Adapting conversation topics for CD students	4
Adapting speech based on competence of CD student	1
Avoiding slagging CD students	4
Avoiding slang when talking with CD students	6
Avoiding using bad language in front of CD students	1
Changing language and speech style talking with CD students	16
'Dumbing Down' when talking with CD students	2
Feeling obliged to be polite to CD students	1
Having to explain slang to CD students	3
Having to repeat everything due to language barrier	1
Interrupting conversations to explain use of language	2
Modifying accent when talking with CD students	2

Once again, the students' voices provide insights into their experiences of intercultural contact. Carol explains: "Most people would be aware that you need to change your phrases and can't use as much slang. That's probably a factor as well". Likewise, Noelle and Elaine also remark on the need to change their language during intercultural encounters:

> Well you might change the way you talk. Just tone it down a bit, or try and talk slower … you wouldn't be there, 'What's the craic?'. They wouldn't know what you're on about. (Noelle)

> I feel like I have to talk really slow. Well I talk fast anyway, but you feel like you have to talk really slowly to them so they understand what you are saying … I wouldn't use slang or anything like that because I would be afraid that they wouldn't understand, ya know. (Elaine)

The numerous references to adapting 'Language' are in stark contrast with the ease host students associate with intracultural contact, as discussed in section 6.2.3. Furthermore, there is the possibility that changing 'Language' may not necessarily improve the nature of the interaction for either party. As Claudine explains:

> You get like, you get tired and fed up with it. And I think sometimes they do as well, cos they feel that you are maybe trying to dumb things down or you are patronising them, which you are not doing intentionally.

Indeed, Fitzgerald (2003: 2) refers specifically to "the fine line between native speakers who modify aspects of their language in intercultural encounters being seen as patronising and rude rather than helpful".

The fact that host students adapt their language for intercultural contact links directly with the idea of 'Effort' discussed in section 8.2.2. However, such changes are also of importance in other ways. From host students' perspective, 'Accent', 'Slang' and 'Humour' may each serve certain functions. Accent, for example, may be used as a means of differentiating students – *'Differentiating students based on accent'* (7); Humour may play an important role in relational development – *'Humour being important to friendship'* (7), *'Irish friendship valuing slagging'* (4), *'Slagging being important to friendship in Ireland'* (2), *'Shared humour facilitating interaction'* (3);

and slang may be a marker of group identity – *'Using slang with friends'* (6). Therefore, adapting and changing these may be of greater significance than one might initially think. Furthermore, changing the way one speaks, in terms the of speed, the accent, the use of slang, the use of humour and even the topics discussed, raises the interesting question as to whether such changes at some level compromise the identity of the individual. This point is articulated particularly well by Carol:

> You can't talk to them like you would your Irish friends. Actually I didn't think of that, but that's definitely a major thing. Like I know with my friends at home we've practically our own language like. Like totally like words for like everything. Like you know...so that's probably a major thing as well. Like you don't feel like you are being totally yourself when you're speaking this proper English to them. It might be harder to convey your personality to them.

This idea in turn leads the analysis to the next category, 'Compromising Identity', and its relationship to intercultural contact.

8.2.4 Compromising Identity

"Yeah, like you don't feel you are able to communicate yourself or your thoughts as well to a French or German person as to an Irish person." (Carol)

In section 7.3.3, 'Communication', the importance of self-disclosure for relational development was highlighted. Specifically, it was argued that as relationships develop, self-disclosure increases in terms of depth and breadth; that is, people generally talk about more topics (breadth) at a more personal level (depth) as their relationship develops. This idea finds support within the data in such codes as *'Breaking down barriers through self-disclosure'* (4), *'Close friendships needing to be based on transparency'* (3), *'Deepening friendship through talking'* (4), and *'Using questions to develop relationship'* (4). As Daragh concisely puts it, "Talking is the key". However, in terms of host students' experiences of intercultural contact, the data suggest that self-disclosure may be an issue, which is subsumed under the category of 'Compromising Identity'.

‘Compromising Identity’ refers to host students altering what they talk about, the way they talk about it, and how openly and honestly they talk about it, during intercultural encounters. As such, the category is closely related to that of ‘Language’, but goes beyond the boundaries of ‘Language’ by incorporating issues relating to conversational subject matter and transparency of opinion. The data analysis suggests that during intercultural contact host students can find themselves diverging from what they feel is their ‘true’ identity, instead presenting a false or superficial ‘face’, or what Frank refers to as “a sort of image, maybe a façade”. Specifically, this may include changing various aspects of one’s regular communication style, as was discussed in the previous section, but can also involve dealing with subject matter in a manner different to how one would deal with it in intracultural encounters, including avoiding certain topics. In discussing her interaction with students from other cultures, Clodagh remarks, “we kind of hold back from them more”. As a result, host students may feel that their personal identity is compromised and therefore self-disclosure and relational development is hampered. Table 8.5 below lists some of the codes which support the category of ‘Compromising Identity’.

Table 8.5 Codes relating to ‘Compromising Identity’ within the Data

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Avoiding certain topics when talking with CD students	7
Avoiding certain topics with acquaintances	1
Being superficial with CD students	6
Feeling fake when talking with CD students	3
Feeling unable to be totally open with CD students	3
Not being able to communicate your identity to CD students	5
Putting on a face when first meeting	1
Self-checking hindering relational development with CD students	1
Talking to CD students only about coursework	6

The idea that host students may purposefully avoid certain topics and engage in heightened ‘self-checking’ during intercultural contact is an interesting one. At one level, avoiding certain topics or talking only about coursework may simply be an indication that the relationship has not developed beyond a superficial, or acquaintance level. David's comments provide an example of this, as he reflects on his decision to avoid discussing a certain topic with another student because their relationship was not a close one:

> I wouldn't be a very close friend. A bit more than an acquaintance, but not a very close friend. But I wouldn't want to jeopardise our relationship over a topic like that, which we don't really have a need to discuss. Because their view on a certain subject isn't really going to make any difference on how we interact, because we're mainly interacting in an educational environment. So, it's like, 'Ok, we differ on that subject', but for the sake of being civil to each other and getting along, I don't care! We'll skip pass the subject. You just let it be.

Given that David does not foresee the relationship developing to a more intimate level, avoidance of certain topics with this particular student is not an issue for him. However, in the comments below, Cara explains how the questions asked and topics discussed move away from coursework as the relationship develops:

> Like talking to them. 'Hi. How are ya?', 'How's the course going?', 'How do you find this lecture?', 'How do you find the tutorial work?' things like that. And then if you really get to know them you could ask them like, 'Are you going out at the weekend?', things like that. More personal questions than if you didn't really know them.

Apart from the possibility that a relationship has not developed sufficiently to allow the discussion of certain topics, in instances where the relationship may be developing, some host students still opt to avoid or withhold their honest opinion about certain topics. This may be particularly true if there is a conflict situation. In discussing an issue that arose between herself and an African student with whom she had become close friends, but from whom she had drifted following this incident, Orla recalls, "I never spoke to her about it, which is weird, and I think that if it was an Irish girl I probably would have". Similarly, Owen, when talking about arguing with a student from another culture, explains:

> I think especially somebody who is a black African person. I would be probably more hesitant because I would be afraid of looking like a racist. Yeah. I think it's something that actually…I mean I don't think I have to say it, but I absolutely hate racism, but I'd hate to be considered, or for people to think that I was.

In this case, it appears that concerns for the ‘Self’ and/or the ‘Other’ again emerge as a factor underlying host students’ strategy of avoiding certain topics, which highlights a link between ‘Compromising Identity’ and ‘Anxiety’.

Again raising the issue of compromising one’s identity in intercultural situations, Claudine remarks:

> From my own experience, when you are trying to make an effort with someone from another race it’s kind of that bit harder to work up a friendship like that because you’re constantly watching what you are saying, or you’re trying to say the right thing. And with an Irish student you can be yourself … you don’t want to come across as being insulting, but at the same time you’re not being yourself with the person at all like.

Analysis of the data suggests that the ‘right thing’ to which Claudine refers includes not using language which could be misconstrued by cultural outsiders and could lead to miscommunication, misrepresentation, or cause offence. Cara also reflects on the consequences of self-checking, which may ultimately lead to avoidance not simply of a specific topic, but of actual contact:

> It doesn’t make you yourself! You don’t feel that you are yourself talking to that person because you are always thinking ahead, ‘If I say this, will it offend them?’. So you don’t feel…like why should you start talking if you’re not going to be yourself!? Like why should…you should feel yourself when you are talking to someone. You shouldn’t have any barriers up.

Apart from the impact of self-checking in intercultural contexts, there is also an implication that avoiding certain topics in an intercultural relationship at a stage when the host student might feel such topics should be up for discussion, creates barriers to further relational development. David’s comments provide a cogent perspective on this:

> While you might get on fine with them while leaving that subject alone, it does leave something hanging over it, that you know you can’t be completely open with them if you need to. If you want to talk to them about something personal like that, you won’t be able to. So it probably does constrain the extent to which you are going to get emotionally involved with them.

Furthermore, for some students, comparing opinions and engaging in frank debate on polemical matters may constitute an important aspect of relational development. As Owen suggests:

> The whole point of interaction with other human beings is to learn from them and for them to learn from you, and you'll never do that by talking about the two things you agree on.

Overall, the use of phrases such as 'settling for', 'holding back', 'putting on a face', and 'not being yourself', which appear in the data, all emphasise the issue of 'Compromising Identity' in intercultural contact. This in turn contrasts with students' experiences of intracultural contact. As Kimberly explains:

> Once you do get to know the foreign person then you can try and be a bit more yourself, a bit more relaxed around them, but it's a slower process than when you meet an Irish person for the first time.

Finally, although host students refer very little to engaging in intercultural interaction through a medium other than their native tongue, the issue of compromising identity is, perhaps unsurprisingly, also mentioned in this context. As Laura puts it:

> You know that film 'Lost in Translation'…sometimes when you are trying to express yourself in a different language, and you can't think of the words, you might settle for words, and it's not exactly what you wanted to say, and it can maybe come across not that well I think.

8.2.5 Implications of Issues relating to Intercultural Contact

Data analysis has highlighted that host students' experiences of intercultural contact differ significantly from their experiences of intracultural contact. Specifically, intercultural interactions are defined by higher levels of anxiety and are perceived as an effort compared with the relatively 'effort-less' nature of intracultural contact.

In terms of the nature of this effort, the perceived requirement to adapt one's language and communication style not only in terms of speech (accent, slang, and humour) but also in terms of the actual topics discussed, constitutes a significant effort from the perspective of the host students. Furthermore, students' behaviour appears to be influenced by a 'cost-benefit' approach to interaction, with several students questioning whether or not making such an effort is 'worthwhile'.

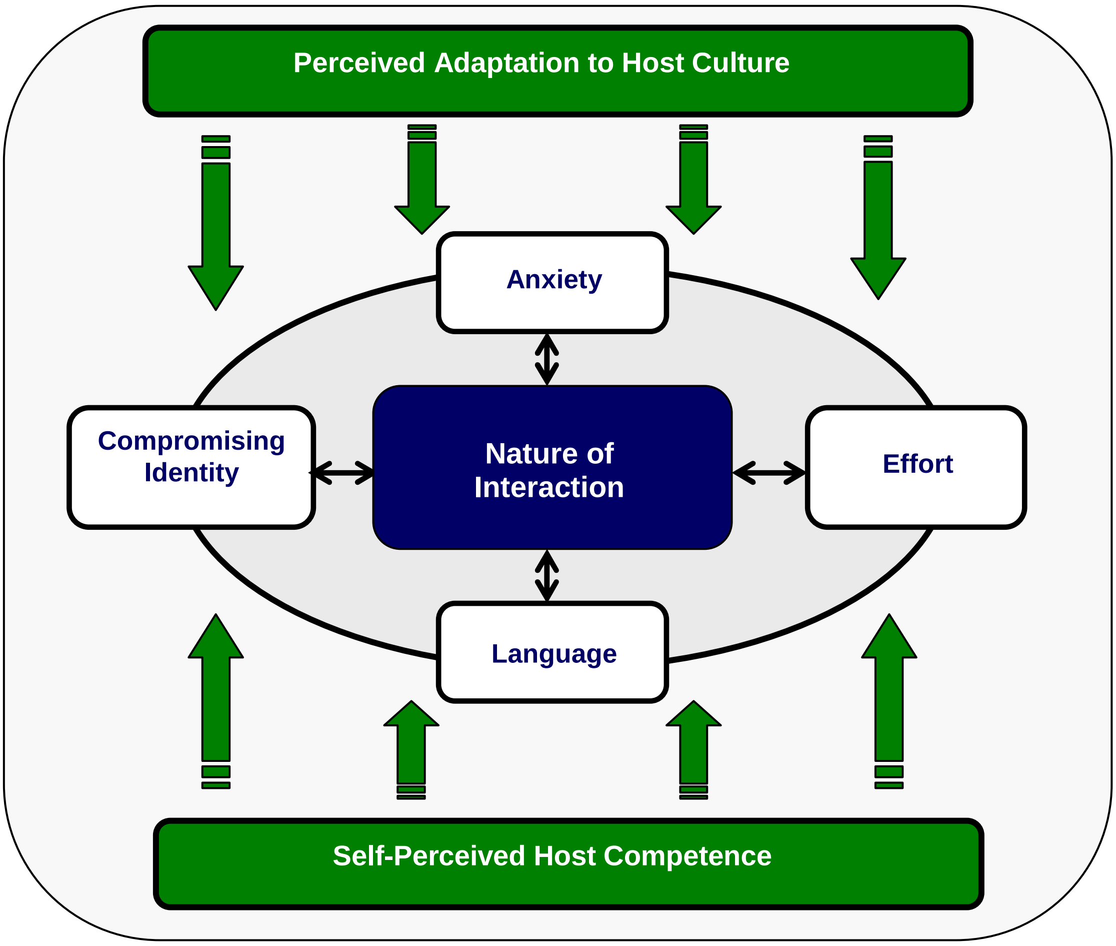
In addition to this, the adaptation of communication style, coupled with the self-checking and concern for the 'Self' and the 'Other', raises the issue that intercultural interaction may involve compromising one's identity at some level, which not only makes host students uncomfortable and frustrated, but also hampers self-disclosure, which has been posited as an important aspect of relational development. These are important points when considering intercultural relations on campus, and once again highlight the complexity of the phenomenon. With this in mind, attention now turns to two factors which may moderate these experiences.

8.3 Relative Competencies

In the previous section host students' experiences of intercultural contact were discussed, and the emerging issues of 'Anxiety', 'Effort', 'Language', and 'Compromising Identity' were elucidated and explored. In this section, two additional factors, 'Self-Perceived Host Competence' and 'Perceived Adaptation to Host Culture' are presented and examined. These are discussed separately as they are factors which appear to mediate the abovementioned issues.

Data analysis suggests that the degree to which a host student (i) perceives himself/herself to be interculturally competent, and (ii) perceives non-host students to be well-adapted to the host culture, conflate to inform the host student's experiences of the intercultural interaction. In situations where the host student feels equipped to communicate effectively with students from other cultures and s/he feels that the those students are well-adapted to the host culture, then logically the perceived effort and anxiety involved in the interaction is reduced, as the likelihood of cultural misunderstandings decreases. Furthermore, concerns relating to compromising identity are also lessened. Conversely, in situations where the host student perceives himself/herself to be relatively interculturally 'incompetent', and also perceives a student from another culture to be poorly adapted to host culture, the greater the likelihood that the interaction will be perceived to be an effort and anxiety-provoking. This concept is visually represented in Figure 8.2.

Figure 8.2 Factors Mediating the Nature of Intercultural Contact


Perceived Adaptation to Host Culture
Anxiety
Compromising Identity
Nature of Interaction
Effort
Language
Self-Perceived Host Competence

8.3.1 *'Self-Perceived Host Competence'*

The concept of intercultural competence has received substantial attention in terms of theories, studies and measurement instruments[58] (Stone 2006; Deardorff 2006, 2004a, 2004b; Wiseman 2002). Although some theories, research findings and instruments have received more attention than others, there is still a lack of consensus and clarity around what actually constitutes intercultural competence and, perhaps more importantly, how it might be measured. With this in mind, this section does not seek to present a definition of 'intercultural competence', but rather focuses on what host students suggest are the qualities and/or elements that make hosts more competent to interact with students from other cultures. Table 8.6 provides a list of some of the codes which relate to 'Self-Perceived Host Competence'.

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[58] There are numerous instruments or 'inventories' which are designed to 'assess' individuals' 'intercultural competence', which in each case is operationalised in discrete ways. These include the 'Intercultural Developmental Inventory' (Hammer 1999; Hammer and Bennett 2001), the 'Intercultural Sensitivity Inventory' (Bhawuk and Brislin 1992), the 'Cross-Cultural Adaptability Inventory' (Kelley and Myers 1999), the 'Multicultural Awareness-Knowledge-Skills Survey' (D'Andrea et al. 1991), the 'Cross-Cultural World-Mindedness Scale' (Der-Karabetian and Metzer 1993), and the 'Culture General Assimilator' (Cushner and Brislin 1996).

Table 8.6 Codes relating to 'Self-Perceived Host Competence'

Title of Code	Number of references within code
Acceptance of difference facilitating contact	4
Being comfortable with uncertainty helping interaction	2
Being empathetic facilitating contact	1
Being open-minded facilitating contact	8
Cultural knowledge facilitating communication	9
Increased awareness helping interaction	1
Needing patience for IC communication	3
Needing self-awareness for IC communication	2
Needing to be comfortable with difference	1
Needing to be mindful of cultural differences	3
Needing to be respectful of cultural differences	1
Recognition of possible misunderstandings facilitating contact	1
Trust and respect promoting IC relations	2

These codes suggest that host students perceive intercultural competence to be based on (i) specific personal qualities, which may be illustrative of an underlying value system, and (ii) cultural knowledge. These qualities include empathy, open-mindedness, trust, respect, and mindfulness. As Frank suggests, for successful intercultural contact, "you have to be willing to accept the differences that are intrinsic for different cultures". Similarly, Owen explains:

> There's lots of things Irish people will say that when you break them down into basic English, don't make a lot of sense. So you have to be very aware of that … I think awareness of how you express yourself is important. I think probably more of a motivation to actually really communicate, as opposed to kinda going through the same thing you go through with everybody.

Furthermore, Claudine, recalling an incident she had with an African student on work placement, highlights the need for reflection and the ability to adopt different perspectives in order to engage successfully with other cultures:

> When she thought I was rude, I got kind of very…a bit defensive about it at first like, and it's only after a while when you go, 'Well that wasn't her fault actually, and it was no one's fault!'. You kind of calm down. But when that first happened and she thought I was being rude, I went away going, 'Well screw that! I'm not going to bother with her', ya know that way. And then after the first or second day you kind of realise that [it] wasn't her, it was just her misunderstanding ya. You kind of calm down. But something like that can throw you off, definitely. And I didn't mean to like…then you kind of get snappy back. You kind of be like, 'Well!', you know that kind of way?. Kind of a bit hostile and stuff like that. But then after the second or third day of placement I realised that's just…it's not her fault, it's not anyone's fault. You kind of accept it and move on.

One of the challenges of understanding the nature of intercultural competence relates to the nebulous meaning of the term 'open-mindedness', which was proffered by several students. Where the term was used, students were asked to articulate what this meant from their perspective – '*Defining open-mindedness'* (7). The resulting explanations included references to not judging or pre-judging others on the grounds of culture; accepting different perspectives and opinions; accepting that one's own stance may not be the right one; and avoiding the tendency to stereotype. In terms of stereotyping, the subcategory 'Stereotypes' includes all codes referring to stereotyping, three of which are, *'Stereotypes hindering intercultural relations'* (10), *'Defaulting to stereotypes when lacking first hand knowledge'* (7), and *'Contact with different cultures challenging stereotypes'* (2). The implication is that in the absence of cultural knowledge, students are more likely to rely on stereotypical images – perhaps as a tactic to reduce uncertainty – when engaging with other cultures, even though such reliance may prove counterproductive. This in turn highlights the importance of having cultural knowledge as well as specific competence-related qualities or values – *'Cultural knowledge facilitating communication'* (9).

Having cultural knowledge appears to facilitate intercultural contact in various ways. By allowing comparisons, it may help students identify commonalities with students from other cultures, which in turn can promote relational development. As Ivan explains:

> [You] need to have some sort of knowledge of the country that they are dealing with, to actually…one of the first questions, 'Where are you actually from?'. If you have no idea of a German map and they said 'Munich', like that's a piece of information that means absolutely nothing to me. At least you can place it and go, 'Oh that's in southern Germany, that's near whatever', and you can talk about like, 'That's near the Alps. I like to climb mountains. Do you like to climb mountains?'. That kinda idea. So you need some sort of background of what the society is like. Like if you talk to a North Korean person, I have no idea what to say to them. All I know is that they're a Communist country and apparently they have nuclear weapons. So, you go, 'So, nuclear weapons eh?! How's that working out for ya?!' [laughs]. Like what could you talk to like? At least a South Korean person, you know Seoul, you know certain companies, 'So what's life in South Korea like?'. And I have some background from actually talking to people from South Korea who have lived in the house for a little while. Like that sort of stuff. You would need some sort of background.

In addition to this, cultural knowledge can offer guidelines for behaviour which help avoid possible miscommunication and intercultural conflict. As Frank explains, "it's no harm to familiarise ourselves with other cultures because it would help, ya know, as a deterrent to possible cultural misunderstanding". Furthermore, that fact that students have this cultural knowledge can facilitate intercultural contact by reducing the anxiety stemming from uncertainty, which host students often associate with intercultural contact. As Clodagh suggests:

> I suppose if I knew more about the person then I would strike up a conversation with them personally. Maybe if I felt more comfortable in myself about their country or if I have more confidence in myself knowledge-wise, whether it was about their schooling or their background.

As regards the qualities and cultural knowledge which students associate with being interculturally competent, students' personal experience appears to impact upon this. Data analysis suggests that students can develop competence through interaction with students from other cultures. Support for this is found in codes such as *'Developing intercultural competence through interaction'* (15). Discussing 'open-mindedness' for example, Kimberly remarks, "I think it's a huge benefit if you have it beforehand, but I think it can come about as a result of meeting people”. Analysis of the data, however, indicates that a significant number of the students interviewed had few intercultural experiences prior to college – *‘Having limited prior contact with other cultures’* (12). This creates a ‘Catch-22’ situation, given that host students who have experience of intercultural contact appear to develop skills as a result of the contact that will help improve their competence, thereby facilitating subsequent contact. However, host students who have little experience tend to perceive themselves to be relatively incompetent, which can lead to avoidance, which in turn reduces the chances of developing competence. Sorcha articulates this very simply: “Because I have never mixed, I wouldn’t know how”.

Indeed, there are a number of important codes which indicate that host students perceive themselves to be relatively interculturally ‘incompetent’, specifically in terms of cultural knowledge. These include; *‘Not knowing how to engage with CD students’* (14), *‘Lack of cultural knowledge hindering contact’* (5), *‘Having no knowledge of Asian cultures’* (3), *‘Feeling ignorant talking with Asian students’* (1), and *‘Not being able to interpret emotions of CD students’* (1). For Cara, one of the main difficulties she has with intercultural contact relates to gauging the feelings of the other students: “If they got upset or annoyed and you can’t really tell if they are getting annoyed or upset”. Similarly, Samantha’s comments clearly highlight a link between anxiety, cultural knowledge and barriers to intercultural contact;

> You just don’t know how to act, so you can be fearful. You don’t know how to act, you don’t know what to say. Yeah, it can be a big barrier.

Furthermore, although students do suggest some qualities or values which they would associate with intercultural ‘incompetence’ – *‘Narrow-mindedness hindering contact’* (1), *‘Negative assumptions hindering mixing’* (1), *‘Not allowing oneself to change inhibiting intercultural relations’* (1), *‘Not giving other people a chance hindering contact’* (1) – they do not assign these to themselves, but simply discuss them in general or with reference to third parties.

Finally, two particular codes are worthy of special note. The first is the code *‘Not knowing reasons for lack of mixing’* (10). As mentioned in section 4.6.2, on several occasions, having already referred to a lack of intercultural contact on campus, host students were unable to suggest any initial explanation for this. When asked why she is friends with Irish students and not with students from other cultures, for example, Jane replies, “That’s a good question. I don’t know!”. This does not imply ‘incompetence’, but does suggest that several students have not reflected on the lack of intercultural contact on campus prior to this point, and lack a certain awareness of the phenomenon. The second code is *‘Minimising Difference’* (17). This encapsulates instances of host students negating the relevance of cultural differences or assigning them little importance. Daragh, for example, remarks that “People are the same no matter where you’re from. I think there’s no real difference”, while David comments:

> Nothing is made of the fact that they are from a different cultural background. No one really minds. No one has any particular attachment to their cultural background anyway.

This code was particularly difficult to categorise yet its density suggested it was relevant. One possible way of interpreting it is by reference to Bennett’s developmental model of intercultural sensitivity (1986), which conceptualises intercultural competence as a six-stage development process moving from an ethnocentric to an ethnorelative perspective. The third stage in this model is labelled ‘Minimization’, and specifically encapsulates this idea of undermining the relevance of cultural differences. This stage is classified as ethnocentric, and as such it could be argued that this code reflects an ethnocentric perspective among students. However, it is not possible to make such generalisations on the basis of one code.

Overall, data analysis suggests that when host students perceive themselves to be competent to interact with students from other cultures, the potential obstacles associated with such contact are of less importance. Perceived competence is therefore a facilitator of intercultural contact from the perspective of the host students. However, the point should also be made that perceived competence may not mirror actual competence. Furthermore, the data suggest that among this cohort of students there are concerns about their intercultural competence, particularly in terms of knowledge of other cultures.

8.3.2 Adaptation to Host Culture

In addition to host students' self-perceived intercultural competence, the perceived level of adaptation of non-host students to the host culture, as defined by their competence in the host culture, also emerges as a factor mediating host students' experiences of intercultural contact.

Analysis of the data indicates that host students' definition of 'Adaptation to Host Culture' relates primarily to language, accent, slang, and humour. Referring to a Russian student she knows, Cara comments, "She has adapted well. Like her accent, and she has the craic, and she'd be messing and joking". Similarly, in reflecting on her interaction with a Spanish student, Eve associates his ability to correctly use Irish slang with his cultural adaptation:

> D'ya know the way we'd say 'craic', or anything like that. He doesn't understand it, but then he always makes the effort to use the word then, later in the conversation. He'd be there like 'Oh, you're having the 'craic'!?'. And we'd be there, 'Yeah!'. [laughs]. He's getting used to the culture.

Sorcha also refers to students' ability to understand Irish humour as an important marker of their adaptation to Irish culture; "I think at this stage, like after a year and a half, they have picked up on the slang and would even joke some stuff themselves". Frank's comments, meanwhile, suggest that adaptation to the host culture is evident in students' accents:

> [A] lot of them have been living in Ireland for a number of years and they would still only be 19 or 20, so they would be relatively 'Irish-ised'. Ya know what I mean? A lot of them, I can hear little bits of an accent coming through, a Dublin or an Irish or wherever they are from.

Based on this, it appears that 'Adaptation to Host Culture' links directly with the category of 'Language'. This relationship is understandable, as many of the issues and challenges which host students associate with intercultural contact are either directly or indirectly linked with 'Language'.

Within the category of ‘Adaptation to Host Culture’ a number of codes merit particular attention. Codes such as *‘Competency of CD students in host culture facilitating contact with hosts’* (7) and *‘Poor adaptation to Irish culture hindering mixing’* (2) support the idea that non-host students who are competent in the host culture have a greater likelihood of interacting well with host students. Once again, this is logical, as communication is facilitated by such competence. As Etain points out, “Do you ever notice that any foreign gang you do get on with, they always have really good English”. Likewise, comparing international students who have just arrived in Ireland and those who have been in Ireland for some time, Elaine suggests:

> They are so used to Irish culture and they have probably met Irish people, have spent more time with Irish people and understand the culture better and know how to get on more with Irish people like.

Furthermore, Etain’s comments below echo those of Ivan in the previous section, where he pointed out that cultural knowledge facilitates the identification of commonalities and creates opportunities for relational development:

> Interviewer: *And does it make a difference how well adapted the person is to Irish culture?*
>
> Etain: Yeah, I’d say it would. Because first of all you have more things to talk about, you have more in common. Say they like going out, you go out with them, you know what I mean. It gives you more opportunity. If you have more in common you’re gonna be spending more time with them or want to.

The idea that sojourner’s level of competence in the host culture facilitates communication with hosts finds support in existing studies. Kim (1988b) argues that language is the key aspect of communication competence in the host culture, while Redmond (2000) used host language competence as an indicator of intercultural communication competence. Furthermore, Gareis (2002, 1995) and Takai (1991) identified communicative competence as a key factor facilitating intercultural relational development and adaptation respectively, while Kudo and Simkin (2003) found language competence led to more rewarding intercultural encounters. Shim and Paprock (2002), meanwhile, concluded that host language competence reduced sojourners’ cross-cultural adaptation difficulties, while Tanaka et al. (1997) found that students with good host language competency had more relations with hosts. It is worth noting, however, that Pearson-Evans (2000) refers to research of international students in Japan which found that increased competence in the host language was actually associated with decreased satisfaction with these students' experiences.

In terms of the current study, although non-host students' competence in the host culture appears to facilitate intercultural contact, data analysis suggests that, from the host students' perspective, non-host students require an amount of time to adapt to the host culture and develop the competencies which facilitate their contact with host students. Support for this idea can be found in the relatively dense code, *'CD students adapting to host culture over time'* (15). This is illustrated in the following exchange with Elaine:

> Elaine: They have been living in Ireland since they were really young, so that could be another thing, yeah.
>
> Interviewer: *So does the amount of time that the person has spent living in Ireland…*
>
> Elaine: Oh yeah. Oh definitely. Because they are way more used to Irish culture and I think…like the young guy in my class, he has been living here for years like, and it's totally different from talking to the other people from his country.
>
> Interviewer: *How is it totally different?*
>
> Elaine: Because I think he has just been here for so long that he understands culture and he knows how to talk to Irish people and he is just really friendly like.

This time requirement has implications for intercultural contact. As was discussed in section 7.8, 'Time' plays an important role in intercultural acquaintance prospects. Therefore, if students are relatively poorly adapted to the host culture at the outset of college, the likelihood of host students interacting with them is reduced. It is important therefore that international students, for example, are as competent as possible in the host culture prior to commencing college. This could substantially increase their chances of interacting with local students at the start of college, and potentially avoid the construction of barriers, such as group cohesion, which further complicate intercultural relations on campus as time passes.

8.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter has been concerned with host students' experiences of intercultural contact. It has explored how this differs from intracultural contact, and identified some of the main challenges associated with it from the host students perspective; specifically, 'Anxiety', 'Effort', 'Language', and 'Compromising Identity'. Each of these is interrelated and their examination provides important insights for policy makers who are seeking to promote intercultural contact on campus, as policies will need to satisfactorily address such obstacles.

Among the many ideas which emerge from this chapter, the concept of host students evaluating intercultural contact according to an informal and possibly subconscious cost-benefit analysis is of particular interest and may represent a new perspective for analysing intercultural relations. This will be further discussed from a theoretical perspective in Chapter 9. As has been shown, 'Language' represents a very significant issue for intercultural contact from the host students' perspective. This finding is in keeping with that of Takeda and St. John-Ives (2005: 8), whose study on interaction between local and international students in an Australian university found that "local students see language as more of a barrier than do international students". Furthermore, the cultural stripping of language resulting from softening one's accent, modifying the speed of speech, simplifying language, avoiding slang and being more aware of humour, may result in frustration among host students. This, coupled with the perceived need to avoid certain topics or withhold opinions, may lead them to feel they are unable to communicate their true identities to other students, which in turn inhibits relational development and raises questions about the value and purpose of such interaction from their perspective.

While perceived competencies of both the host and the non-host students are identified as important mediating factors, and may be fostered by personal experiences of intercultural contact, the categories of 'Separation' and 'Homophily' discussed in Chapter 6 suggest that for many students intercultural contact is infrequent. This in turn can create a situation whereby feelings of incompetence lead to avoidance, despite the fact that competence is best fostered through interaction.

PART III DISCUSSION

CHAPTER 9: REVIEW OF FINDINGS & THEORETICAL DISCUSSION

9.1 Introduction

In the preceding four chapters the research findings have been presented. These findings have been grounded in empirical data and supported by students' voices, as well as conceptual codes and categories generated during the data analysis. The findings suggest that from the perspective of host students, intercultural contact in higher education is a complex phenomenon informed by multiple, interrelated factors. With this in mind, the current chapter has two primary functions. Firstly, given the large number of concepts and issues which have been identified in the research findings, it is necessary to concisely distil them and reflect on how they relate to the initial research questions. This is done in the first part of the chapter. The second function of this chapter is to examine how the research findings relate to existing theoretical concepts. This is a key part of the overall study, as engagement with relevant theories allows us to situate the research findings within a theoretical context. Furthermore, existing theoretical concepts may provide useful perspectives which facilitate a deeper understanding of the research findings. As stated in section 4.4.5, engagement with extant theoretical concepts at this stage is in keeping with grounded theory methodology.

9.2 Revisiting Research Questions

The current study has been driven by the research questions outlined in section 3.6. These questions have been addressed in the findings presented in chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8. The first research question sought to explore host students' perceptions of cultural difference among the student population within the educational environment. Accordingly, in Chapter 5 a grounded theory model of host students' construction of cultural difference within the student population was presented, discussed, and illustrated (Figure 5.1). Among the most important findings presented in Chapter 5 is the idea that *the context* within which individuals are asked to discuss culture can heavily inform their perception of culture and cultural difference. This in turn raises the idea that one's construction of culture may shift based upon the context within which it is discussed, indicating the fluidity of culture and, therefore, cultural boundaries.

By evoking ‘Nationality’ and ‘Age’ as markers of cultural difference, it is evident that national culture and generational (age) culture are important cultural constructs for the host students. In practical terms, this implies that younger host students tend to perceive international students and mature students – regardless of nationality – as culturally different. While the use of nationality as a cultural label was not surprising, the importance of age as a cultural construct was not foreseen at the outset of the study. However, based upon the conceptualisation of culture discussed in section 2.4, ‘Age’ is a legitimate cultural identifier.

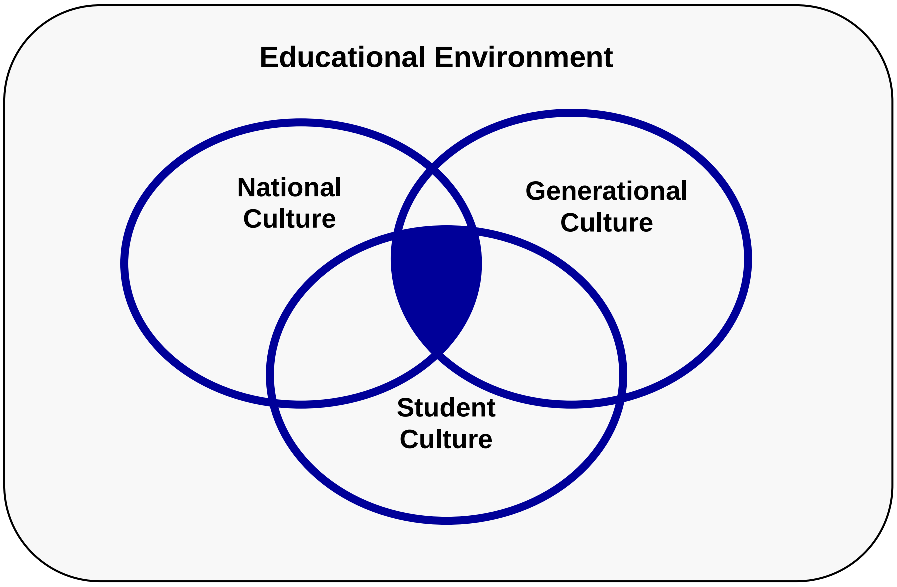
Furthermore, the findings posit that students’ construction of culture is fundamentally based upon a set of values and behaviours which relate to the specific university environment. As such, the idea of ‘student culture’ is of central importance to students’ construction of cultural difference. These values and behaviours are encompassed under the core concept of ‘Maturity’ (section 5.4), which appears to link international and mature students, yet differentiate them from younger host students. This concept is underpinned by (i) diverging academic motivations, (ii) different responsibilities, and (iii) a perceived level of authority over host students, each of which have been discussed in detail in section 5.5.

Reflecting on these findings, it is useful to draw upon Hofstede’s (1994) idea of multiple ‘levels of culture’ discussed in section 2.2. This proposes that individuals are simultaneously members of multiple cultural groups, and that the relevance of these groups may vary depending upon the situation. In the current study, the findings suggest that host students’ construction of culture is based upon three discrete ‘layers’ of culture:

(i) Student culture
(ii) National culture
(iii) Generational (age) culture

This idea is illustrated in Figure 9.1, in which the shaded area where these layers overlap can be taken to represent the primary boundaries of host students' cultural identity, beyond which contact is perceived to be intercultural.

Figure 9.1 Students' Multi-layered Construction of Culture within the Educational Environment



9.2.1 Barriers to Intercultural Contact identified in the Current Study

The two remaining research questions driving the study have explored the factors which impact upon host students' intercultural contact and their experiences of such contact. The findings presented in each of the four chapters are of relevance to these questions. Given the diversity of factors which have been identified, it is useful to divide them according to two classifications: (i) Barriers to Intercultural Contact, and (ii) Facilitators of Intercultural Contact. This is similar to the approach used by Ujitani (2006). Barriers to intercultural contact are listed in Table 9.1, and are divided between student-specific barriers and context-specific barriers. Student-specific barriers encompass factors which relate primarily to students, while context-specific barriers relate primarily to the context within which the student finds himself/herself. Furthermore, student-specific factors are presented under 'Psychological Factors' and 'Behavioural Factors'.

The fact that barriers to contact are more numerous than facilitators (see Table 9.2) is itself an indication that intercultural contact is problematic and relatively infrequent for these students. Furthermore, it is clear that students perceived to be culturally different play an important role in either hindering or facilitating the contact, which emphasises the importance of both parties' stance in intercultural encounters.

Each of these barriers has been identified and discussed in the preceding chapters. As in the case of many existing studies on intercultural contact among students, including several of those discussed in section 3.5.1, it is noteworthy that many of these barriers are not specifically 'cultural', even though they impact upon intercultural contact. Given that references to the findings of existing empirical studies have been made in the course of presenting the current research findings, a second comparison is not included at this point. However, Appendix L provides a comparison of the barriers identified in the current study with the specific barriers identified from existing studies presented in Table 3.3.

Table 9.1 Barriers to Intercultural Contact Identified in the Current Study

Student-Specific	**Context-Specific**
Psychological Factors	- Lack of proximity - *Within academic environment* - *Within social environment* - *Living arrangements* - Availability of cultural peers facilitating homophily - Lack of institutional interventions to support intercultural contact - Format of overall 'Curriculum' - *Structure & delivery of class* - *Class size* - *Timetable* - *Lack of engagement by academic staff* - Time
- Diverging values & priorities within academic environment - Age difference - Cultural Distance - *Perceived lack of commonalities* - Lack of motivation to interact - *Among host students* - *Among students from other cultures* - Perceived effort of intercultural contact - Communication difficulties - *Need to adapt language* - *Compromising identity* - Anxiety - *Concern for the 'Self'* - *Concern for the 'Other'* - *Adapting to new environment* - Host students feeling judged - *Regarding academic engagement* - *Regarding social behaviour* - Low self-esteem of host students - Perceived intercultural incompetence of host students	

Behavioural Factors	
- Diverging behaviours - *Within academic environment* - *Within social environment* - *(In)Ability to participate in college life* - Homophilic tendencies - *Hosts sticking with cultural peers* - *Culturally different students sticking with cultural peers* - Nature of Friendship - *Speed of friendship formation* - *Nature of friendship network* - *Group cohesion & Ingroup pressures*	

9.2.2 Factors Facilitating Intercultural Contact identified in the Current Study

Factors which have been identified as facilitating intercultural contact within the data are listed in Table 9.2 overleaf, and have been discussed in detail in Part II. Based on these, it is clear that students look to the educational institution to provide leadership, motivation, and support for intercultural contact. As such, one of the major findings of the study is the importance of institutional commitment in fostering intercultural relations among students. In shaping the institutional environment at both a curricular and extracurricular level, the institution can also impact upon the students themselves, thereby reducing student-specific barriers and increasing student-specific facilitators.

As discussed in Chapter 7, the role of ‘Curriculum’ in intercultural contact has been identified as enormously important. However, as has been stated, while this is an area of college life over which institutions have very significant control, the findings indicate that institutional commitment to developing a ‘Curriculum’ which actively fosters intercultural contact is largely absent from the host students’ perspective. Furthermore, while the findings suggest that intercultural contact is facilitated by host students’ intercultural competence and culturally different students’ level of adaptation to the host culture, they also indicate that hosts often feel they lack this competence.

Table 9.2 Facilitators of Intercultural Contact Identified in the Current Study

Student-Specific	Context-Specific
- Host Motivation - *Utility* - *Concern for Others* - *Interest & Curiosity* - *Shared Future* - Common interests - Efforts to interact made by students from other cultures - Intercultural competence - *Experience of intercultural contact* - *Cultural knowledge* - High level of adaptation to host culture - *Competence in host language & communication style* - *Acceptance of host value system within academic context* - Positive outcomes from intercultural encounters	- Institutional Interventions - *From Day 1* - *Oblige students to mix* - *Increase frequency of contact* - *Mediate interaction* - *Reduce anxiety* - *Identify and/or construct commonalities* - *Explore the potential benefits of intercultural contact* - Curricular modifications that promote intercultural contact within learning environment - *Academic staff more engaged with student diversity* - *Assigned work groups* - *Shared tasks* - *Cooperative learning* - Living arrangements - *Cohabitation*

9.2.3 Model of Intercultural Contact

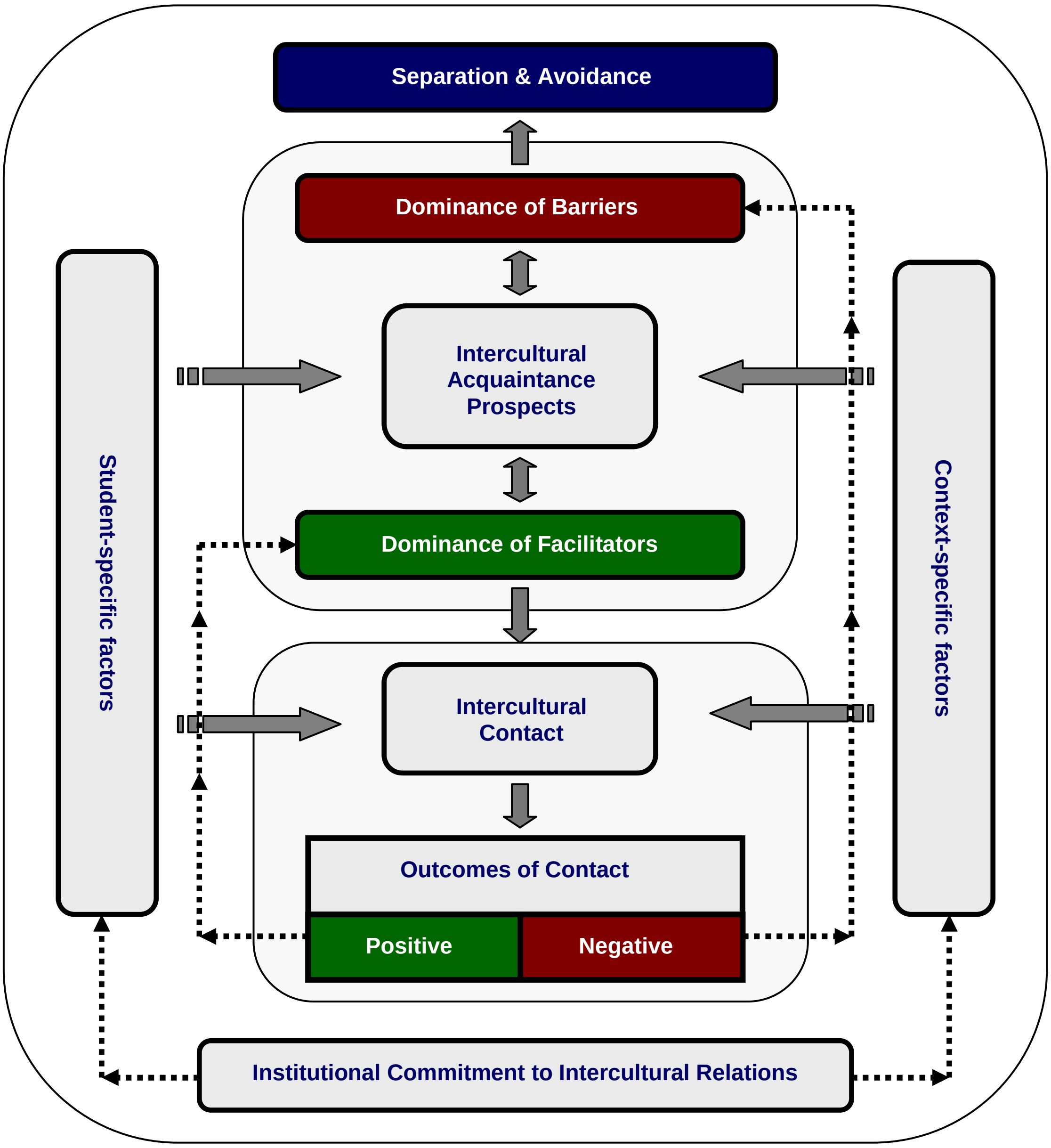
Having listed the factors which hinder or facilitate intercultural contact from host students' perspective, it is useful to reflect on how these relate to the overall phenomenon of intercultural contact on campus. To this end, Figure 9.2 represents a conceptual model of the overall process of intercultural contact based upon the research findings.

This model provides a holistic overview of host students' intercultural contact and highlights the dynamic nature of the phenomenon. In terms of a sequence underpinning the process, the model presents 'institutional commitment' as constituting the foundation for intercultural relations on campus, as this heavily informs both student- and context-specific factors. This commitment embodies Kuh and Umbach’s (2005: 21) concept of ‘institutional will’ referred to in section 7.9, and relates directly the categories of ‘Curriculum’ (section 7.4) and ‘Institutional Support’ (7.5). These student- and context-specific factors in turn inform both intercultural acquaintance prospects and students’ experiences of intercultural contact on campus. In addition to this, they underpin the ‘barriers’ and ‘facilitators’ shown in the model. These barriers and facilitators encompass the diverse and complex factors which have been listed in Tables 9.1 and 9.2. Where ‘barriers’ are dominant, this results in intercultural ‘separation and avoidance’. Conversely, the relative dominance of facilitators increases the prospects of intercultural encounters occurring.

The dynamic nature of the model is further highlighted by the manner in which the outcomes of intercultural contact feed back directly into either barriers or facilitators, and consequently influence subsequent intercultural acquaintance prospects, as well as the likelihood of intercultural relational development. In this respect the model is developmental and presents a variety of possibilities relating to how intercultural contact may unfold amongst students based upon the environment in which they find themselves and their previous experiences of intercultural contact.

In the case of the current findings, the apparent dominance of barriers to intercultural contact, coupled with the issues students associate with intercultural encounters, provides an explanation for the apparent dominance of ‘Separation’ and ‘Homophily’, as discussed in Chapter 6. As has been argued, a strong and visible institutional commitment is central to promoting healthy intercultural relations on campus, yet such commitment appears to be lacking from the perspective of the students interviewed in this study. Until such commitment is articulated and enacted, it is likely that significant barriers to both intercultural acquaintance prospects and positive intercultural contact will persist, and consequently, intercultural encounters will remain low.

Figure 9.2 Conceptual Model of Host Students' Intercultural Contact


Separation & Avoidance
Dominance of Barriers
Intercultural Acquaintance Prospects
Dominance of Facilitators
Intercultural Contact
Outcomes of Contact
Positive
Negative
Student-specific factors
Context-specific factors
Institutional Commitment to Intercultural Relations

9.3 Discussion of Research Findings with Reference to Existing Theories

In section 4.4.5 the relationship between existing theoretical concepts and grounded theory methodology was discussed. It was stated that in grounded theory, engagement with extant theories does not precede the presentation of findings, but rather is incorporated into, or follows, their presentation. In the current study, it was decided not to engage deeply with theoretical concepts during the presentation of findings, as it was felt that this could draw attention away from the empirical findings and result in excessively long chapters. Instead, a discussion on the relationship between existing theoretical concepts and the current research findings takes place at this point.

Although grounded theory privileges the collected empirical data, engaging with extant theoretical concepts is a crucial part of the overall research process. The term ‘theoretical concepts’ is used here to encompass formal theories, hypotheses and specific theoretical ideas which do not constitute formal theories. Relating research findings to existing theoretical concepts is necessary for a number of reasons. Firstly, given that research seeks to make a meaningful contribution to existing knowledge, it is important that researchers demonstrate an awareness of, and draw upon, existing theoretical concepts. Secondly, identifying theories which are relevant to the research findings allows the researcher to situate these findings within a broader theoretical terrain. Thirdly, engagement with existing theoretical concepts can enrich the validity and overall quality of the research by helping to explain the findings and elevate them to a more theoretical level (Eisenhardt 2002). The literature therefore constitutes an additional data source to contribute to the overall research (Coyne and Cowley 2006).

9.4 Theoretical Concepts identified as relevant to the Research Findings

In engaging with extant theoretical concepts in grounded theory research, the primary challenge is to identify which concepts are most relevant to the research findings. Given that grounded theory is a data-driven methodology, the findings may relate to theoretical concepts from a diversity of fields, some of which were not anticipated at the outset (Locke 2001). Indeed, the theoretical concepts identified as most relevant to the current research findings are taken from diverse fields, including intergroup relations, sociolinguistics, relational development and intercultural communication. This is perhaps not surprising given that Fitzgerald (2003: 9) argues that “there is no generally accepted, consistent framework for the analysis of intercultural communication”, but instead concepts from a broad diversity of disciplines are used to explore and explain the nature of intercultural encounters. This creates a further challenge of discussing concepts from diverse fields in a unified and coherent manner.

The theoretical concepts identified as particularly relevant to the current findings are:

- The Homophily Principle (Lazarsfeld and Merton 1954)
- Similarity-Attraction Hypothesis (Byrne 1961)
- Culture-Distance Hypothesis (Ward et al. 2001)
- Social Identity Theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986)
- The Contact Hypothesis (Allport 1954)
- Sources of Anxiety (Stephan and Stephan 1985)
- Anxiety/Uncertainty Management Theory Gudykunst (1988, 1993, 1995)
- Social Exchange Theory (Thibaut and Kelley 1959)
- Speech Accommodation Theory (Street and Giles 1982; Thakerar et al. 1982)
- Social Penetration Theory (Altman and Taylor 1973)
- Institutional Completeness (Breton 1964)

In the following sections each of these is presented and discussed with reference to the research findings.

9.4.1 The Homophily Principle

One of the most important concepts emerging from the research findings is that of ‘Homophily’. As stated in Chapter 6, this concept embodies the idea of ‘Gravitating towards Similarity’, which is very evident within the data in the form of students interacting with peers they perceive to be similar to themselves. The findings argue that ‘Homophily’ represents a major barrier to intercultural contact. In this section the concept is explored in greater detail from a theoretical perspective before being linked with Byrne’s (1961) ‘Similarity-Attraction Hypothesis’.

The term ‘homophily’ is attributed to the sociologists Lazarsfeld and Merton (1954), although Rogers and Bhowmik (1970) point out that homophilic behaviour was discussed long before this. According to Centola et al. (2007: 905-906):

> [H]omophily is the tendency of people with similar traits (including physical, cultural, and attitudinal characteristics) to interact with one another more than with people with dissimilar traits.

In terms of articulating this as a formal hypothesis, Rogers and Bhowmik (1970: 528) state:

> In a free-choice situation, when a source can interact with any one of a number of different receivers, there is a strong tendency for him [her] to select a receiver who is like himself [herself]. (author’s addition)

Within the context of the current study, this hypothesis predicts that students would interact more frequently with cultural peers than with students perceived to be culturally different due to the greater similarity that exists among cultural peers. This hypothesis finds strong support within the findings, as highlighted by the discussion in Chapter 6 and the diversity and density of codes listed in Table 6.2.

While the homophily principle is a simple one, the ambiguous nature of the term ‘similar’ leaves it open to many interpretations. As Rogers and Bhowmik (ibid.: 531) query, “Homophily with respect to what?”. Lazarsfeld & Merton (1954) differentiated between ‘status homophily’ – based on categories such as age, sex, race, ethnicity, religion, and education – and ‘value homophily’, which encompasses values, attitudes and beliefs which influence our orientation toward behaviours. Indeed, McPherson et al. (2001: 424) point out that in terms of friendship “homophily on age can be stronger that any other dimension”. Within the current research findings both ‘status homophily’ and ‘value homophily’ are evident. Indeed, it appears that they are intertwined. ‘Status homophily’ is clearly apparent in students’ tendency to interact with students of the same nationality and age group. However, the data analysis indicates that this is largely based on students’ belief that nationality and age are linked with a specific value system within the educational environment. Therefore, it may be argued that ‘value homophily’ actually underpins ‘status homophily’ in the current findings.

Rogers and Bhowmik (1970) make a further distinction by proposing the ideas of ‘subjective homophily’ and ‘objective homophily’. ‘Subjective homophily’ refers to the degree to which individuals *perceive* themselves to be similar (ibid.). Indeed, McCroskey et al. (1975) argued that perceived (subjective) homophily may be more influential than objective homophily. ‘Objective homophily’, meanwhile, refers to the degree of observable similarity between individuals (ibid.). Applying these concepts to the research findings, it is again clear that both are relevant. While ‘objective homophily’ essentially encompasses the concepts of ‘status’ and ‘value’ homophily discussed above, ‘subjective homophily’ is evident in students’ perceptions that they share broader commonalities with students of the same nationality and age (section 6.3.1). The findings indicate this to be particularly powerful at the start of college, when students are seeking to form friendships and gravitate towards students whom they perceive to be similar based on certain characteristics. Like the relationship between ‘status’ and ‘value’ homophily, the findings suggest a symbiotic relationship between ‘objective’ and ‘subjective’ homophily, insofar as students gravitate towards other students of the same nationality and/or age – objective homophily – given that they perceive these students to be similar to them across dimensions beyond merely nationality and age – subjective homophily.

In general, the homophily principle is discussed from the perspective that similarity, whether objective or subjective, *leads* to interaction. This implies a linear, causal relationship between similarity and interaction. This type of homophily is actually termed ‘choice homophily’ (Centola et al. 2007: 906), whereby interaction patterns are informed by individuals’ preferences for similarity, assuming interaction is voluntary. In such situations, homophilc behaviour is underpinned by the positive cognitive and affective outcomes it produces. By interacting with similar others, individuals receive validation of their opinions, beliefs, and behaviours, and experience more comfortable interaction (ibid.). This links with Rogers and Bhowmik’s (1970) proposition that homophily facilitates more effective communication, whereas:

> Heterophilic[59] interaction is likely to cause message distortion, delayed transmissions, restriction of communication channels, and may cause cognitive dissonance, an uncomfortable psychological state, as the receiver is exposed to messages that may be inconsistent with his existing beliefs and attitudes. (ibid.: 529)

Evidence of ‘choice homophily’ pervades the research findings, ranging from students’ friendship networks, to their seating positions in lectures, to their work groups for academic projects. Furthermore, many host students openly express their preference for interacting with students similar to themselves. In addition to this, the hypothesis that homophily facilitates communication is supported within the research findings, as the two primary benefits associated with ‘Homophily’ were found to be ‘Perceived Ease of Communication’ (section 6.3.3) and ‘Security’ (section 6.3.4).

This linear causality between homophily and interaction, however, does not always hold. Instead, the idea of ‘induced homophily’ (Centola et al. 2007) posits that homophily can *result* from interaction. As Kandel (1978) explains:

> Alternatively, homophily could result from a socialization process in which individuals who associated with each other, irrespective of their prior similarity, influence one another.

This point is supported by Chen (2002: 244), who suggests that the relationship between similarity and friendship formation is an interactive one:

> Greater perceived similarity facilitates a communicative relationship; interactions, once started, may lead to perception of greater similarity or convergence of partners’ behavior, or both.

According to the concept of ‘induced homophily’, therefore, the causality relationship may be reversed, whereby interaction *precipitates* homophily rather than resulting from it. This proposition is termed ‘homophilization’ by Rogers and Bhowmik (1970: 530).

Within the findings, instances of ‘induced homophily’ are less apparent. Certainly, ‘Curriculum’ represents a vehicle for ‘induced homophily’, as evidenced by the fact that students' course of study was found to be central to their interaction patterns, social networks and friendship group (section 7.4). This may be partly explained by the fact that proximity and propinquity – both of which relate to 'Curriculum' – have been suggested as agents that foster homophily (Kudo and Simkin 2003; McPherson et al. 2001). However, *within* the course of study, 'choice homophily' based on nationality and age still appears to dominate, largely because students are generally not encouraged or obliged to interact with culturally different students. This is a crucial point; *in situations where interaction with dissimilar others occurs due to personal motivation, encouragement, or externally imposed measures – for example, assigning students to project groups instead of allowing them to form their own – the opportunity for 'induced homophily' is created*. That is, the interaction and shared experience derived from a common task can help create or identify similarities which may foster further interaction. Examples of this can be seen among the students from AC, who discuss how the process of being assigned lab partners facilitates the creation of commonalities. However, according to 'choice homophily', where behaviour is voluntary, the likelihood of interaction with students perceived to be culturally different is reduced.

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[59] Rogers (1999: 65) define heterophily as “communication between two or more individuals who are unalike”.

In theory, the idea of 'induced homophily' represents an attractive opportunity to promote intercultural relations on campus. Indeed, students' calls for forced mixing (section 7.5.1) as a way to promote intercultural relations is an example of this. However, in the absence of institutional support in the form of curricular and extracurricular interventions, the likelihood of 'induced homophily' developing is low, as students' natural gravitation towards similarity – 'choice homophily' – will most likely prevail.

Kandel (1978) argues that 'choice homophily' and 'induced homophily' may both be germane to a relationship. This point is supported by Centola et al. (2007: 909):

> [A]ctors who are similar are more likely to interact. Interaction makes actors who are similar become even more similar, increasing the weight of their tie and the likelihood of future interaction.

This in turn leads to the idea that homophily is solidified in the form of group cohesion. According to Brown (2000: 45), cohesion is "the 'cement' binding together group members and maintaining their relationships to one another. (Schachter et al., 1951, p.229)”. This cohesion is influenced by factors such as proximity, frequency of interaction, similarity among members, and members’ commitment to the group’s goals (Brown ibid.: 64). However, with reference to culturally diverse groups, Adler (1986: 106) points out that “Because they begin with a less substantial base of similarity, multicultural groups are initially less cohesive than homogeneous groups”. Furthermore, the idea that homophily is based on similarity across multiple variables suggests that it may be conceptualised as existing along a continuum of similarity/dissimilarity. This idea, which links with the culture-distance hypothesis (section 9.4.3), is supported by McPherson et al. (2001: 418), who contend that the degree of homophily is informed by the multiplicity of relationships and similarities between individuals:

> [T]he patterns of homophily tend to get stronger as more types of relationships exist between two people, indicating that homophily on each type of relation cumulates to generate greater homophily for multiplex than simple ties.

Given that Rogers and Hart (2002: 2) posit that intercultural communication constitutes “heterophilous interpersonal communication”, and Lee and Boster (1991: 191) argue that “intercultural initial interaction takes place in the matrix of the perceived dissimilarity between interactants”, it is clear that the homophily principle has profound implications for intercultural contact. As McPherson et al. (2001: 415) explain:

> Homophily limits people’s social worlds in a way that has powerful implications for the information they receive, the attitudes they form, *and the interactions they experience*. [author’s emphasis]

Accepting the assumption that intercultural contact does indeed take place within a framework of perceived dissimilarity, and the proposition that homophily fosters the formation, maintenance and cohesion of homogeneous groups, it can therefore be argued that homophily represents a very significant *a priori* barrier to intercultural contact, which therefore warrants focused attention in the field of intercultural research. It is curious, however, that homophily appears to have been given little formal attention in the field of intercultural studies to date. In their recent examination of the reliability and validity of tools for measuring attraction and homophily, which cites numerous studies on homophily across different fields ranging from education, to voting tendencies, to advertising effectiveness, McCroskey et al. (2006) identify only one study from the intercultural field which relates to homophily. That study was conducted by Gudykunst et al. (1985) and examined the influence of cultural similarity and relationship type across various dimensions, one of which was attitudinal homophily. Indeed, it appears that Gareis' (2000) study is the only study which has formally identified homophily as a major factor in intercultural relations among students in higher education. This may be partly because the principle of homophily is broadly accepted as an *a priori* factor in intercultural relations. However, the need to explore the actual constituents of homophily is crucial in order to overcome the barriers it presents.

9.4.2 Similarity-Attraction Hypothesis

Closely linked with the homophily principle is Byrne's (1961) similarity-attraction hypothesis. While homophily posits a positive correlation between similarity and interaction, Byrne's hypothesis proposes that this can be explained by the idea that individuals perceived to be similar are also perceived to be more attractive, which in turn leads to interaction. Several authors refer to the substantial empirical support for the similar-attraction hypothesis (Goto et al. 2002; Michinov and Monteil 2002; Kim 1991; Lee and Boster 1991). Furthermore, the hypothesis is also associated with several established theories, such as speech accommodation theory which will be discussed in section 9.4.8. As Osbeck et al. (1997: 114) comment:

> An impressive array of psychological theory and empirical research evidence provides support for the similarity-attraction hypothesis at the interpersonal and intergroup levels (Byrne, 1971; Traindis, 1971; Levine & Campbell, 1972; Brown & Abrams, 1986; Byrne, Clore & Smeaton, 1986; Grant, 1993; Roccas & Schwartz, 1993).

Prior to formally presenting the hypothesis, Bryne (1961) himself pointed to earlier studies supporting the idea of a relationship between attitudinal similarity and interpersonal attraction. The importance of perception in this process is emphasised by Gudykunst (1998: 284):

> The extent to which we perceive similarity of self-concepts with strangers influences our attraction to them. Actual similarities in our self-concepts and strangers' is *not* related to our attraction to them (Wylie, 1979). Rather, we are attracted to strangers we perceive to be similar to ourselves. (original italics)

In terms of identifying specific factors underpinning individuals' attraction to similar others, van Oudenhoven and Eisses (1998: 295) explain:

> Humans are more attracted to similar others than to dissimilar others since similar others confirm that our attitudes, opinions or behaviors are right. This validation constitutes a rewarding element in forming a relationship. Dissimilar others do not validate our ideas and, consequently, offer a less rewarding relationship.

This links with the idea that we are cognitively consistent if we are attracted to people like ourselves (Lee and Boster 1991). Within the findings, evidence for this can be found by students reporting feeling comfortable and relaxed interacting with cultural peers, while sometimes feeling judged or inferior when interacting with students perceived to be culturally different (section 5.5.3). Such feelings invalidate one's self-concept. Furthermore, Sunnafrank (1991) and Lee and Gudykunst (2001) propose that similarity in communication styles is also an extremely important factor underpinning similarity-attraction. This is supported by Burlson et al. (1992), who posited that close friends typically display similar approaches to five key communication activities; conflict management, comforting, persuading, supporting each others' self-concept, and ways of telling stories and jokes. In the current study, this point is of particular relevance, particularly as 'Language', emerges as a significant issue in intercultural contact (section 8.2.3).

Combined, these arguments imply that attraction to similarity is primarily explained by the validation it provides for one's self-concept – and the resulting psychological rewards – as well as the perceived ease of communication it affords. More recently van Oudenhoven et al. (2006: 643) have proposed that interactants' similarity serves not only to validate and confirm value and belief systems, but also "may reduce insecurity in interpersonal and intergroup relations". As stated above, the categories of 'Perceived Ease of Communication' (6.3.3) and 'Security' (6.3.4) provide direct support for this. Coupled with this, Lee and Gudykunst (2001) and Berger and

Calabrese (1975) have drawn attention to the link between perceived similarity and uncertainty reduction. This in turn can be compared with students' reported feelings of uncertainty and anxiety when interacting with culturally different students, which will be discussed in section 9.4.6.

Like the homophily principle, the similarity-attraction hypothesis is extremely relevant to the current study. Both are strongly supported by the research findings and, perhaps more importantly, provide a theoretical explanation for host students' comments and reported behaviours. Furthermore, both concepts have important implications for intercultural relations, as they posit that individuals will be less attracted to those they perceive to be culturally different, which will in turn inform their behaviour and prospects of intercultural contact. In terms of promoting intercultural relations on campus, therefore, strategies which focus specifically on creating or identifying similarities between culturally different students may be particularly relevant.

9.3.3 Culture-Distance Hypothesis

Given that the homophily principle and the similarity-attraction hypothesis have been shown to be salient to the research findings, it is logical that the *degree* of perceived similarity (or dissimilarity) is also of importance. In Chapter 5 this idea was introduced when presenting the category of 'Cultural Distance', and is now discussed at a more theoretical level with reference to the 'culture-distance hypothesis' (Ward et al. 2001).

Like 'culture', the concept of 'culture distance' – also referred to as 'cultural distance'[60] – is subject to numerous definitions and interpretations within existing literature[61]. The concept was introduced by Babiker et al. (1980) to explain the distress experienced by sojourners during their acculturation process[62]. Cultural distance is concerned primarily with the *degree* to which groups are culturally different, which is commonly determined by comparison across specific dimensions. Where the level of difference is relatively low, cultures are deemed to be relatively 'proximate'. Conversely, a high degree of difference indicates cultures are more 'distant'. According to Gorgorió and Planas (2005: 65), cultural distance can be defined as:

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[60] For the current discussion the term 'cultural distance' is used unless referring specifically to the 'culture distance hypothesis'.

[61] Ambiguity regarding the conceptualisation of cultural distance is accentuated by the existence of several similar concepts, such as 'social distance' (Bogardus 1959), 'cultural-emotional connectedness' (Volet and Ang 1998), and 'psychic distance' (Johanson and Vahlne 1977). Furthermore, it contrasts with the concepts of 'cultural fit' (Babiker et al. 1980) and 'ethnic proximity' (Kim 2002)

> [T]he distance between how different individuals interpret the same fact, situations, person, event or norm, resulting from living and experiencing them from the perspectives of the different cultures to which they belong.

Like homophily, the culture-distance hypothesis is a simple one: "The culture-distance hypothesis predicts that the greater the cultural gap between participants, the more difficulties they will experience" (Ward et al. 2001: 9). The hypothesis is evoked in theories on cross-cultural adaptation, such as that developed by Kim (1988a), which conceptualise cultural distance *from the perspective of the sojourner* and define it as "the extent to which the culture of the originating region differs from that of the host region" (McKercher and So-Ming 2001: 23). The hypothesis predicts that the degree of cultural distance influences sojourners' adaptation to the host culture, whereby sojourners from cultures which are relatively similar to the host culture tend to have a less turbulent transition and integrate better with the host community. As Redmond (2000: 153) suggests:

> The greater the [cultural] difference, the more one might expect problems in developing and maintaining relationships, meeting social needs, communicating effectively , and in general adapting to the culture. (author's addition)

Indeed, in discussing their own empirical findings on the adaptation experiences of exchange students in Russia, Galchenko and van de Vijver (2007: 195) remark:

> The central role of Perceived Cultural Distance is in line with earlier studies (e.g. Abe & Wiserman, 1983; Furukawa, 1997a; Ingman, Ollendick, & Akande, 1999; Nesdale & Mak, 2000; Waxin, 2004) in which it was found that Perceived Cultural Distance is an important antecedent variable in sojourner adjustment.

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[62] References to cultural distance can be found prior to Babiker et al. (1980). For example, Stening (1979) refers to cultural distance as an issue in cross-cultural contact.

Pearson-Evans (2000) also found cultural distance to be an important factor influencing cross-cultural adjustment, while Mehdizadeh and Scott (2005: 489) argue that "the greater the similarity between characteristics of students and the host community, the easier the interaction". Conversely, it is hypothesised that the greater the perceived cultural distance, the more problematic the interaction:

> Although overseas students generally want and need intercultural contact, the ability and willingness to interact meaningfully with host culture peers are largely dependent upon cultural distance. (Ward et al. 2001: 148)

Within the context of the current study, however, the primary concern does not relate to the role of cultural distance in sojourner's adaptation to the host culture. Instead, it relates to the role of cultural distance, *as perceived by the host students*, in their experiences of intercultural contact on campus. Therefore, for the purposes of the current research, 'cultural distance' refers to the level of difference *a host student* perceives exists between themselves and a student they identify as culturally different. Regardless of the perspective, however, the fundamental principle of the culture-distance hypothesis is still germane; the degree of perceived cultural difference is predicted to impact upon intercultural relations. As discussed in section 5.7, perceived cultural distance was shown to be relevant to host students' intercultural contact. Specifically, host students reported less problematic and more frequent interaction with students perceived to be relatively culturally proximate, while interaction with students perceived to be very culturally distant was reported to be more difficult and infrequent. In particular, Asian students were identified as culturally distant and a group with which host students have little contact. Indeed, it was shown that large perceived cultural distance can lead host students to avoid contact altogether. As such, the research findings support the culture-distance hypothesis despite conceptualising it from the host perspective.

While the culture-distance hypothesis has received support in empirical studies (Ward et al. 2001: 9; Redmond 2000: 152-153), it is worthwhile discussing some of the issues relating to the concept. Firstly, like 'culture', attempting to objectively measure cultural distance is problematic. Although Babiker et al. (1980) developed a Cultural Distance Index (CDI), which sought to measure cultural distance based on differences in the social and physical aspects of specific cultures, such scales are based on the assumption that the measured constructs are always pertinent, which may not necessarily be the case. Furthermore, the imposition of predetermined constructs precludes respondents from articulating other aspects of cultural difference which from their perspective may by more relevant, such as language differences. This is also the case with tools which measure cultural distance using 'cultural dimensions' discussed in section 2.4.2[63]. Indeed, employing cultural dimensions to develop tools to measure cultural distance leaves these tools exposed to the same criticisms as the dimensional models themselves.

In addition to this, even if we were to entertain the idea that dimensions and scales were universally accepted as valid measurement tools encompassing all possible perspectives on cultural distance, the fact that cultures are dynamic and constantly changing would rapidly render any measurement of cultural distance redundant as a form of reliable current data. This point is supported by Shenkar (2001: 523), who comments that cultural distance is "implicitly argued to be constant", yet measurement scales do not incorporate this fact. Furthermore, given that cultural distance is typically measured across national cultures, this assumes there is a high degree of cultural uniformity within a given national culture[64]. However, as discussed in section 2.3, given the increases in human mobility globally and the resulting changes in cultural demographics within nations, it can be argued that the idea of cultural homogeneity within nations is no longer applicable. The alternative, therefore, is to use what Drogendijk and Slangen (2006: 364) term "individual-level perceptual measures" to explore and assess cultural distance. This implies allowing individuals to articulate for themselves what they perceive to be cultural distance and how it applies in specific contexts. This presupposes that a strict definition of culture has not been imposed upon the individual, but rather that they have been permitted to articulate their own perception of culture. This is precisely the approach used in the current study.

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[63] An example of one such tool is that developed by Kogut and Singh (1988), which is based on Hofstede's dimensions.

[64] The aforementioned definition of cultural distance proposed by McKercher and So-Ming (2001), which not only implies that geographic mobility is central to experiencing cultural distance, but also suggests cultural homogeneity within a given region, reflects this perspective.

9.4.4 Social Identity Theory

Given that this study is concerned with students' perceptions of culture and cultural difference, the concepts of 'social identity' and 'social categorisation' are of central importance. 'Social identity' can be understood as those elements of an "individual's self-concept which derive from his [her] knowledge of his [her] membership in a social group (or groups) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1978: 63). Social categorisation, meanwhile, refers to "the way we order our social environments (i.e., the people with whom we come in contact) by grouping people in a way that makes sense to us" (Gudykunst 1998: 16). Gallois and Callan (1997) posit that social categorisation is an automatic behaviour involving a process of both 'self-categorisation' and 'other-categorisation'.

In the current study students were asked to actively engage in social categorisation based on their perceptions of culture. These processes are evident in Chapter 5, specifically in section 5.5 'Deconstructing Maturity' – 'other-categorisation' – and section 5.6 'Host Approach' – 'self-categorisation'. Although social categorisation is often based on demographic categories such as age, gender, and nationality, it can also be heavily subjective (Abrams et al. 2003). Huddy (2002: 826), for example, points out that social identities can be argued to be "highly situational and contextually fluid". In the current study host students' social categorisation of culturally different students reflects both objective and subjective perspectives. In particular, the social context – in this case a university environment – plays an integral role in this process of social categorisation.

'Social identity' and 'social categorisation' are central concepts of social identity theory (Tajfel 1978; Tajfel and Turner 1979, 1986). According to Brown and Capozza (2000), social identity theory, which offers a psychological explanation for intergroup discrimination, has come to dominate the field of intergroup relations since its introduction. The theory is underpinned by the idea that an individual's self-concept is comprised of their personal identity and social identity, with the latter heavily informed by one's membership of different groups (van Oudenhoven et al. 2006; Tajfel and Turner 1986). As Abrams et al. (2003: 210) explain: "The central tenet of SIT [social identity theory] is that the groups with which individuals identify (and there are usually a myriad of them) determine their social identities" (author's addition). This links directly with the idea that the diverse cultural groups to which individuals belong determine their overall cultural identity (section 2.2).

Given that one's self-concept influences their sense of self-worth and self-esteem, social identity theory assumes that people prefer to have a positive rather than a negative self-concept. Because self-concept is directly influenced by social identity, which is in turn informed by our group membership, this desire for a positive self-concept has direct implications for the way individuals evaluate and compare groups. Specifically, the theory argues that one's 'ingroups' must compare favourably with 'outgroups' in order for them to contribute positively to our social identities. 'Ingroups' are those groups to which we belong, and are defined by Triandis (1988: 75; quoted in Gudykunst 1998: 71) as "group of people about whose welfare [we are] concerned, with whom [we are] willing to cooperate without demanding equitable returns, and separation from whom leads to discomfort or even pain". 'Outgroups' meanwhile are defined as "groups of people about whose welfare we are not concerned, and groups with whom we require an equitable return in order to cooperate" (ibid.: 71). In the current study, even though 'host culture' was initially operationalised according to nationality, the findings suggest that host students' ingroup is actually demarcated by a value system specific to the university environment, as well as students' age and nationality (see Figure 9.1).

Social identity theory posits that our desire to maintain or achieve a positive self-concept will lead us to favourably evaluate our ingroup. This creates a situation of 'social competition' between groups (Rubin and Hewstone 2004). Given that group evaluation is based on comparisons with other groups, this means that our desire to achieve a positive social identity may cause us to negatively evaluate groups to which we do not belong – outgroups. This process of biased social comparison of groups is termed "the establishment of positive distinctiveness" (Tajfel 1978: 83). As such, social identity theory offers a psychological explanation for ethnocentrism, ingroup favouritism, intergroup discrimination and outgroup derogation, even in the absence of scarce resources or realistic competition (van Oudenhoven et al. 2006; Rubin and Hewstone 2004; Brown 2000; Capozza and Brown 2000). As Stephan and Stephan (2002: 132) explain:

> Social identity theorists have argued that the desire to maintain a positive self-image motivates people to favourably evaluate the groups to which they belong and, in the process of doing so, disparage outgroups (Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Tajfel & Turner, 1986).

Applying the propositions of this theory to the current study, one would expect host students to negatively evaluate students they perceive to be culturally different, as this would enhance their social identity by elevating the status of their ingroup. However, the findings do not appear to support this hypothesis. Despite articulating issues associated with intercultural contact, host students do not tend to negatively evaluate culturally different students. Instances of them criticising or displaying prejudicial attitudes towards these students are infrequent, although it can equally be argued that students may avoid making prejudicial comments in an interview situation. Instead, as has been highlighted in section 5.6, ‘Host Approach’, host students appear to evaluate *themselves* in relatively negative terms in comparison with students they identify as culturally different. That is, they appear to be displaying outgroup favouritism rather than the predicted ingroup favouritism. This is particularly apparent when comparing their work ethic and academic motivations with those of mature and international students.

Do these findings highlight a shortcoming in social identity theory or can this apparent outgroup favouritism be theoretically explained? Rubin and Hewstone (2004) point out that social identity theory does not simply provide a reason for intergroup discrimination, but also suggests which conditions may produce discrimination. Central to this is the idea of ‘consensual discrimination’. Consensual discrimination refers to situations where members of the ingroup accept the superior status of an outgroup as legitimate and therefore do not tend to engage in ingroup favouritism. As Rubin and Hewstone (ibid.: 826) comment:

> According to social identity theory, most cases of outgroup favouritism represent instances of consensual discrimination shown by members of low-status groups when intergroup status is stable and legitimate. Consensual discrimination is most likely to occur when intergroup status is stable and legitimate because these conditions indicate a high degree of intergroup consensus about each group’s status.

Returning to the data, we find support for this in section 5.5.3, ‘Authority’, where host students appear to view themselves as academically inferior and subordinate to students they identify as culturally different. Furthermore, they appear to accept this because they prioritise other aspects of college life. In addition to this, it can be argued that this negative ingroup evaluation is reflected in host students’ self-esteem. As stated above, social identity theory suggests that positively evaluating one’s ingroup may enhance one’s overall self-concept and, consequently, self-esteem. As discussed when explicating the categories of ‘Host Approach’, ‘Perceived Stance of the Other’ and, in particular, ‘Anxiety’, host students appear to have low levels of self-esteem. It can be argued that this may be due to the fact that host students do not tend to establish ‘positive distinctiveness’ vis-à-vis international and mature students within the specific academic environment. Furthermore, in section 8.2.1 it was argued that intercultural encounters may actually impact negatively upon host students’ self-esteem. This in turn implies such encounters will be avoided in order to protect one’s self-concept.

Overall, social identity theory provides further theoretical insights into the dynamics of intercultural relations from host students’ perspectives. It introduces the issue of status and power into intercultural contact and facilitates reflection on how perceptions of unequal status may complicate intercultural relations.

9.4.5 The Contact Hypothesis – Conditions Influencing Outcomes of Contact

Like much of the research discussed in Chapter 3, the current findings strongly indicate that ‘structural diversity’ within the student population does not ensure intercultural contact. Furthermore, the findings also indicate that contact, when it does occur, does not necessarily lead to positive outcomes. Indeed, in Chapter 3 it was highlighted that contact can precipitate negative outcomes. As Bochner (1982: 16) explains:

> [C]ontrary to popular belief, inter-group contact does not necessarily reduce inter-group tension, prejudice, hostility and discriminatory behaviour … Indeed, at times inter-group contact may increase tension, hostility and suspicion.

This implies that certain conditions are needed for positive intergroup contact to occur. This idea is now discussed from a theoretical perspective by reference to the 'contact hypothesis'.

The 'contact hypothesis'[65] was formally proposed by Allport in his 1954 book, *The Nature of Prejudice*, which focused on reducing intergroup prejudice between racial groups in the United States. According to Brown (2000: 342) this book was "not only a seminal analysis of the origins of intergroup prejudice, but also a series of influential policy recommendations for its elimination"[66]. Indeed, contemporary initiatives aimed at promoting contact between diverse student groups often employ Allport's propositions as their theoretical framework (Gurin and Nagda 2005; Nesdale and Todd 1998). According to Allport's original hypothesis, although contact can constitute a catalyst to improve intergroup relations, there are several prerequisite conditions needed to facilitate positive contact and reduce the potential for negative intergroup outcomes. These prerequisites were identified as: (i) 'cooperation across groups', (ii) 'equal status', (iii) 'common goals', and (iv) 'support of authorities'[67]. Importantly, as Stephan and Stephan (2003: 113) remark, the identification of these four prerequisite conditions automatically implies that "competition, unequal status, conflicting goals, and a lack of support by relevant authorities lead to negative intergroup relations".

Comparing these prerequisite conditions with the research findings highlights crucial discrepancies which may further explain host students' reported lack of intercultural contact. Firstly, with regard to 'cooperation across groups', it can be argued that the university environment is fundamentally a competitive one, in which students compete with each other for academic grades. Although group work may constitute part of students' assessment, the Irish model for assessment is still primarily focused on the individual examinations. Indeed, as stated in section 3.5, Flavin (2000) found that international students highlighted Irish universities' emphasis on independent learning as one of the barriers to contact with hosts. In addition to this, the findings highlight that in situations where cooperation is prioritised, such as group work, students tend to stick within their cultural groups. As such, it can be argued that the condition of ‘cooperation across groups’ is often not satisfied within the university environment. Secondly, despite all students sharing the status of ‘student’, host students’ *perception* that international and mature students are academically superior and represent figures of authority, suggests that the condition of ‘equal status’ is actually not satisfied. This relates directly to the concept of ‘consensual discrimination’ discussed as part of social identity theory (section 9.4.4), which offered an explanation for outgroup favouritism. This was specifically evidenced by the category of ‘Authority’ (section 5.5.3) and again highlights the importance of perceptions in intercultural relations. Furthermore, in terms of ‘common goals’, the findings strongly indicate that host and non-host students espouse fundamentally distinct goals. In fact, the findings argue that host students’ construction of cultural difference is based largely on perceptions of diverging values and goals within the specific educational environment. This was discussed in detail in section 5.5.1, ‘Academic Motivations’, and section 5.6, ‘Host Approach’. Indeed, it was suggested that diverging academic goals was one reason why project groups tended not to be culturally mixed. The implication, therefore, is that the condition of ‘common goals’ is also not satisfactorily met. Lastly, with regard to ‘support of authorities’, the findings robustly indicate that host students perceive an acute *lack* of support for intercultural contact from relevant authorities, be it lecturers, or at an overall institutional level. This is clearly highlighted in the categories of ‘Curriculum’ – particularly sections 7.4.2, ‘Teaching Approaches’, and 7.4.3., ‘Teaching Staff’ – and ‘Institutional Support’ (section 7.5), and has been discussed during the presentation of the conceptual model in section 9.2.3.

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[65] Chang et al. (2006) refer to the contact hypothesis as the 'Intergroup Contact Theory'.
[66] Although Allport (ibid.) is credited with the contact hypothesis, Dovidio et al. (2003) refer to extensive theoretical and empirical work relating to the topic which predates Allport's publication.
[67] These conditions form the basis of Slavin's (1985) 'cooperative learning' approach and Aronson and Patnoe's (1997; cited in Williams 2004) 'jigsaw classroom' concept.

Collectively, therefore, *the research findings suggest that from the perspective of host students, the four conditions theoretically proposed as prerequisites for positive intergroup contact appear to be at best deficient and at worst absent on campus*. This has major implications for intercultural contact insofar as it suggests that, when it does occur, contact between groups may be negative, which will create further barriers to contact and impact upon ‘Acquaintance Prospects’, as illustrated in Figure 9.2. Indeed, Tables 8.1 and 8.2 highlighted various negative outcomes which host students associate with intercultural contact. Coupled with the principle of homophily and the similarity-attraction hypothesis, it is therefore not surprising that these students report infrequent intercultural contact. It is also worth noting that in instances where students report positive intercultural contact, several of the conditions proposed by the contact hypothesis appear to be present. Specifically, AC students' references to the nature of laboratory work suggest that 'common goals', 'cooperative learning' and 'support of authorities' are broadly satisfied.

Since its introduction, the 'contact hypothesis' has been the subject of substantial research, much of which has sought to test the four original conditions and elaborate on them (Amir 1969, 1976; Hewstone and Brown 1986; Pettigrew 1998)[68]. Volet and Karabenick (2006) point out that much of this research has specifically used international students. While many of these studies provide support for the hypothesis, some are ambiguous in their results (see Todd and Nesdale1997b: 63-64 for details). With regard to research which has sought to test the original conditions and suggest additional conditions, Stephan (1985: 643; cited in Gudykunst 1998: 136) identified thirteen contact conditions – extended from the original four – which have been suggested to promote intergroup contact. These are listed in Table 9.3.

Table 9.3 Conditions that promote Positive Outcomes from Intergroup Contact

1. A context which maximises cooperation and minimises competition
2. Equal status between groups
3. Similarity of group members on nonstatus dimensions, such as beliefs and values is desirable
4. Differences in competence should be avoided
5. The contact should result in positive outcomes
6. Institutional support for the contact should be provided
7. The contact should be extendable beyond the immediate context
8. Individuation of group members should be promoted
9. Non-superficial contact should be encouraged
10. Contact should be voluntary
11. Positive effects are likely to correlate with the duration of the contact
12. The contact should occur in a variety of contexts with a variety of ingroup and outgroup members
13. There should be equal numbers of people from ingroups and outgroups

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[68] One of the more interesting recent publications on the topic is by Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna (2006), which explores the contact hypothesis from the perspective of interaction via the Internet and the ability of online contact to improve intergroup relations.

In terms of this elaborated list of conditions, it is useful to compare them with students' suggestions for the preferred nature of interventions to promote intercultural contact (section 7.5.1); that is, interventions which bring students together in a relaxed atmosphere, take place early, involve third-party facilitation, focus on commonalities, and prioritise cooperative learning. One important point of comparison relates to the contact being voluntary or involuntary (forced). While the list proffered by Stephan and Stephan (ibid.) prioritises voluntary contact, the research findings suggest that many host students advocate *forced* contact on the grounds that voluntary contact will simply not occur, due in part to students' homophilic tendencies and the level of perceived effort involved in the contact. Furthermore, although some students do identify instances of curricular interventions that promoted contact within a certain context – such as the classroom – the findings highlight that intercultural contact does not tend to transfer beyond that immediate context. This relates to point (7) in Table 9.3, and again highlights the need for institutional commitment for intercultural contact to pervade both curricular and extracurricular contexts.

While this growing list of conditions is theoretically useful, not all researchers welcome it. As Pettigrew (1998: 69) warns:

> Allport's hypothesis risks being an open-ended laundry list of conditions – ever expandable and thus eluding falsification … This growing list of limiting conditions threatens to remove all interest in the hypothesis.

Furthermore, as the number of conditions increases, the likelihood of real instances of contact satisfying all conditions is reduced, and so the practicality of the hypothesis is also undermined (Amichai-Hamburger and McKenna 2006). Given this ever-increasing list of conditions and the limitations it imposes, Dovidio et al. (2003) have chosen to prioritise six prerequisite conditions; (i) equal status, (ii) cooperative interdependence, (iii) common goals, (iv) supportive norms, (v) personal interaction, and (vi) friendship opportunity. While points (i), (ii), (iii) and (iv) have already been discussed, 'personal interaction' is a condition which also appears to be lacking within the findings, as exemplified by the categories of 'Separation' and 'Homophily' (Chapter 6). Furthermore, the findings also suggest that intergroup ‘friendship opportunity’ is problematic given the nature of students’ friendship formation as discussed in the category of ‘Friendship’ (Section 7.3).

In sum, a comparison of the research findings with the theoretical conditions proposed to promote positive intergroup contact indicates that these conditions are seriously deficient from host students’ perspective. This can help explain the reported lack of intercultural contact taking place among students and the reported negative outcomes. On a more positive note, however, the conditions proposed by the contact hypothesis, coupled with host students’ recommendations on the nature of effective interventions, provide useful guidelines for developing such interventions should institutions decide to invest in the promotion of intercultural relations on campus.

9.4.6 Theoretical Concepts relating to Uncertainty and Anxiety

In Chapter 8, ‘Anxiety’ was identified as a major factor informing host students’ experience of intercultural contact and the likelihood of them engaging in such contact. This is now discussed in greater detail by reference to theoretical concepts relating to uncertainty and anxiety.

To begin, it is useful to differentiate the ideas of ‘uncertainty’ and ‘anxiety’. Stephen et al. (1999) point out that uncertainty is a cognitive phenomenon. It is defined by Berger and Calabrese (1975: 100), as “the inability to predict and explain others’ behavior, beliefs, attitudes or values”. A differentiation can therefore be made between ‘predictive uncertainty’ – the uncertainty associated with *predicting* the attitudes, values, feelings and behaviours of others – and ‘explanatory uncertainty’ – uncertainty associated with *explaining* the attitudes, values, feelings and behaviours of others (ibid.). In the research findings host students report much greater uncertainty associated with intercultural contact compared with intracultural contact. It appears that this uncertainty is primarily ‘predictive’, whereby students report being unsure about how intercultural encounters will unfold and how other students will react to them. Instances of ‘explanatory’ uncertainty, however, are less common within the data. Rarely do host students report uncertainty with regard to explaining the way culturally different students behave. This may be partly due to the fact that their experiences of intercultural contact are relatively infrequent and superficial.

As regards anxiety, Turner (1988: 61) defines this as a "generalized or unspecified sense of disequilibrium". Gudykunst (1998: 272), meanwhile, highlights the intimate, positively correlated link between anxiety and uncertainty:

> Anxiety is the affective equivalent of uncertainty. It stems from feelings uneasy, tense, worried, or apprehensive about what might happen and is based on a fear of potential negative consequences.

It is important to note that any contact, be it intracultural or intercultural, with an unknown individual, a 'stranger', is associated with a degree of uncertainty and anxiety. As Duronto et al. (2005: 552) explain, "communication with strangers is one type of situation that is potentially replete with novelty, unfamiliarity, anxiety, and uncertainty". However, they (ibid.) also emphasise that the level of uncertainty and anxiety in intercultural contact is typically greater than in intracultural contact. Accepting the idea that intercultural contact constitutes a form of intergroup contact, the heightened uncertainty and anxiety associated with intercultural contact may be partly explained by Gudykunst and Shapiro's (1996) findings that anxiety tends to be higher in intergroup, rather than interpersonal, contact situations. In addition to this, further explanations are proffered by Smith and Bond (1998: 234):

> [P]eople from the same culture have been socialized to share similar role expectations (e.g. Tyler, 1995), situational understandings (Forgas and Bond, 1985), implicit theories of personality (Yang and Bond, 1990) and communication scripts (Wierzbicka, 1994) … If strangers come from the same cultural system, then their capacity to anticipate the other's response will be greatly increased. When interactants are from different cultures, the normal uncertainty at meeting strangers is exacerbated (Gudykunst and Shaprio, 1996). The culturally socialized guidelines for relationship development are no longer shared.

The fact that intercultural contact is associated with greater levels of uncertainty and anxiety is an issue for several reasons. Firstly, as Gudykunst (1998: 288) points out, "Uncertainty is associated negatively with positive expectations, communication satisfaction, and quality of communication". Indeed, the findings reveal host students' negative expectations regarding intercultural contact. As Burgoon and Hubbard (2003: 161) explain, "expectancies exert significant influence on people's interaction patterns, on their impressions of one another, and on the outcomes of their interaction". Accordingly, these negative expectations stemming from uncertainty and anxiety constitute a barrier to intercultural contact from a very early stage.

Furthermore, according to Lee and Boster (1991), the imbalance between the perceived costs (large) and rewards (small) involved in reducing uncertainty in intercultural situations, coupled with the anxiety of intercultural contact, implies that individuals' motivation to reduce uncertainty in these situations is lowered. They (ibid.) also suggest that this motivation is further reduced by the fact that most intercultural contact situations do not satisfy the conditions for positive intergroup contact proposed by the 'contact hypothesis' (section 9.4.5). Without such motivation to reduce uncertainty, the prospects of intercultural acquaintance and relational development are also reduced, given that lower levels of uncertainty, stemming from knowledge acquisition and shared understanding, are argued to facilitate relational development (Sheridan 2005; Gudykunst et al. 1985; cited in Smith and Bond 1998). This implies that intercultural relational development is more problematic than intracultural relational development, a thesis which is supported by the research findings in section 6.3.3, 'Perceived Ease of Communication', section 7.3.3, 'Communication', and section 8.2.4, 'Compromising Identity'.

Coupled with the issues around uncertainty, high levels of anxiety can undermine the potential for contact to generate positive outcomes (Pettigrew 1998). According to Greenland and Brown (2000: 171) anxiety uses up "attentional resources", which may be needed for successful interaction. Furthermore, anxiety prompts individuals to stereotype others (ibid.). Duronto et al. (2005), meanwhile, theorise that anxiety may lead to avoidance of contact. As Gudykunst (1998: 286) comments, "Managing anxiety is necessary to decrease our tendencies to avoid interacting with strangers and to motivate us to want to communicate with them".

According to Stephan and Stephan (1985, 2003) anxiety relating to an actual or anticipated intergroup – and therefore intercultural – encounter stems from the fear of negative consequences resulting from the contact. Specifically, they (ibid.) posit that individuals fear four discrete types of negative consequences from intergroup contact; (i) negative psychological consequences, such as feeling incompetent, frustrated, or guilty about offending others, (ii) negative behavioural consequences, such as being harmed or exploited, (iii) negative evaluations by members of outgroups, such as being rejected, ridiculed, or negatively stereotyped, and (iv) negative evaluations by members of ingroups, such as being rejected or admonished for engaging in the contact with outgroup members. It is useful to reflect on the research findings through the lens of these four proposed theoretical sources of anxiety.

In terms of anxiety stemming from ‘negative psychological consequences’, this is certainly evident within the findings, primarily in the form of host students’ feelings of inferiority (section 5.5.3), and concerns for ‘Self’ and the ‘Other’ (section 8.2.1). In particular, host students appear to be extremely anxious about being perceived as prejudiced (e.g. being viewed as racist). In her study of contact between majority and minority groups, Shelton (2003: 173) points out that “individuals may experience anxiety in trying to monitor the extent to which they are not being prejudiced”. That is, the process of self-checking – the aim of which is to avoid behaviour that may lead to negative outgroup evaluations – can increase anxiety levels. Furthermore, she found that this anxiety resulted in individuals, particularly from the majority group, reporting negative experiences from the interaction (ibid.). This again is evident within the research findings (section 8.2.1). Coupled with this, Greenland (1999; cited in Greenland and Brown 2000), in her study on intergroup anxiety among students, found that a large proportion (33%) of participants experienced anxiety due to their concerns about not appearing to be prejudiced. Furthermore, Hyers and Swim (1998) found that dominant, majority group members experienced greater anxiety than minority group members during intergroup encounters.

As regards anxiety relating to ‘negative behavioural consequences’, instances of this are not evident within the findings. Host students’ reported no instances of physical violence, threat, or any similar issues associated with contact with culturally different students. However, a number of students – particularly EB students – suggested that doing group work with these students meant they were forced to work harder and engage more in the project, which caused them anxiety as they felt under pressure to perform well. In terms of anxiety arising from ‘negative evaluations by members of outgroups’, this is identifiable in the research findings. In fact, it is related to the negative psychological consequences discussed above, given that part of hosts’ anxiety stems from being misrepresented by students who may misunderstand their humour or other aspects of their communication style. Furthermore, the findings suggest that host students feel judged by international and mature students, particularly for their social behaviour and alcohol consumption (section 5.5.3). Consequently, this can provoke anxiety in their interactions with these students.

Lastly, in terms of ‘negative evaluations by ingroup members’, the findings indicate that this is also a source of anxiety for host students. This is highlighted in the category of ‘Group Cohesion’ (section 7.3.4), when host students report feeling anxious about how their ingroup might react were they to introduce an outgroup member into the group. Smith and Bond (1998: 233) remark that individuals “often worry that their own groups members may interpret interacting with an out-group stranger as disloyalty to their own group”. Furthermore, Gudykunst (1998: 282) remarks:

> We may, however, expect that we have something to lose when interacting with strangers since the rewards may be negligible and the costs high. Specifically, we may expect that if we interact with strangers, we may be looked down on by members of our ingroups.

Overall then, host students’ experiences of anxiety as presented in the research findings fit well within Stephan and Stephan’s (1985, 2003) theoretical framework and provide further theoretical explanation for their experiences and behaviours. Furthermore, these diverse anxieties can be exacerbated by previous negative experiences of contact with outgroups (Blair et al. 2003). Within the findings this is highlighted in the relationship between ‘Nature of Contact’ and ‘Acquaintance Prospects’, whereby negative experience of intercultural contact impact negatively upon the prospect of further contact (see Figure 9.2). Anxiety is also fuelled by situational factors, such as being in a numerical minority (Greenland and Brown 2000: 170). Indeed, the findings highlight that host students experience greater anxiety approaching or interacting with a large group of culturally different students, than with individuals. Therefore, taking into consideration the substantial potential for negative outcomes of intercultural contact, Smith and Bond (ibid.: 233) conclude that "for most people, it is generally too effortful and dangerous to construct a bridge from the known to the unknown".

Perhaps the most popular theory relating to uncertainty and anxiety in contact situations is Berger and Calabrese's (1975) uncertainty reduction theory. This theory argues that the fundamental function of communication is to reduce uncertainty[69], and therefore implies that individuals reduce uncertainty by gathering information through communication with others. Based on this theory, Gudykunst (1988) developed his anxiety/uncertainty management theory, and applied it to intergroup and interpersonal contact. The key concepts central to this theory are 'anxiety', 'uncertainty', and 'effective communication'. The theory has been updated several times (1993, 1995), with the label 'AUM' being first used in the 1993 version, and is among the most widely discussed in the field of intercultural relations (Pearson-Evans 2000). AUM is a very complex theory, and the very large number of axioms it incorporates[70] is one the main criticisms levelled at it by Ward et al. (2001: 40). However, it is relevant to the current study because, as Guirdham (1999: 206) points out, it is "particularly focused on initial interactions and the early stages of acquaintanceship". It is these initial interactions, and the factors which inform them, which have constituted a major focus of the current study.

As Stephen et al. (1999: 614) explain, "AUM theory assumes that managing uncertainty and anxiety are central processes influencing the effectiveness of our communication with others". This means that our ability to communicate effectively is informed by our ability to manage our anxiety and uncertainty. AUM posits that people have 'maximum' and 'minimum' thresholds for uncertainty and anxiety, and in instances where uncertainty and anxiety is either above the maximum or below the minimum threshold, effective communication becomes difficult. Beyond the maximum threshold effective communication may become problematic due to excessive stress, while below the minimum threshold boredom and/or overconfidence regarding the communication may result, which in turn reduces communication effectiveness. Duronto et al. (2005) have explored the relationship between anxiety, uncertainty and avoidance of contact and found a positive correlation. However, as Smith and Bond (1998) point out, very often the 'role constraints', such as a teacher-student or co-worker relationship, mean that avoidance is not an option.

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[69] Sheridan (2005) points out that Weaver (1966) first introduced the principle of uncertainty into communication, referring to desirable and undesirable uncertainty in communication contexts.
[70] The 1988 version included 13 axioms, which were increased to 49 in the 1993 version.

AUM posits that successful management of uncertainty and anxiety involves ensuring levels are kept within the maximum and minimum thresholds. Berger (1987) posits that this is done by means of passive or active 'knowledge acquisition strategies'. Also, the 1993 version of the AUM theory incorporated Langer's (1989) concept of 'mindfulness' as a moderating process between the management of anxiety/uncertainty and effective communication. This concept of mindfulness incorporates three qualities: (i) openness to new ideas, (ii) awareness of multiple, alternative perspectives, and (iii) the active creation of new categories (Gudykunst 2002: 198). Once again, this is supported by the research findings, as host students identify 'cultural knowledge' as central to their ability to communicate effectively with culturally different students on the basis that it identifies commonalities – which reduce uncertainty and anxiety – and offers guidelines for appropriate behaviour (section 8.3.1).

Reflecting on the findings by reference to the concepts of 'maximum' and 'minimum' thresholds, the implication is that many host students appear to be approaching or exceeding their 'maximum' threshold, as exemplified by host students avoiding contact due to the anxiety associated with it. This in turn implies that to improve intercultural relations, host students' levels of uncertainty and anxiety need to be reduced. This is something which should be kept in mind when planning and implementing interventions to promote contact. However, when exploring the factors underpinning 'Anxiety' (section 8.2.1) it was also pointed out that some students appear to have little anxiety around intercultural contact, and consequently make no attempt to adapt behaviour, such as communication style. This was shown to have potentially negative consequences for the quality of the encounter, particularly in terms of it causing possible offence. This implies that some students may actually be *below* the minimum anxiety and uncertainty level suggested for effective intercultural communication. This further complicates the objective of developing interventions to promote contact, given that anxiety levels within the target group may vary greatly, and interventions must be mindful of this.

While Gudykunst and Hammer (1998) explained cross-cultural adjustment from the perspective of uncertainty and anxiety management, the current findings highlight that uncertainty and anxiety can also be a major issue for members of the dominant host community and can heavily impact upon their experiences of intercultural contact. Indeed, Ujitani (2006) refers to Yokota's (1991) research which found that members of the host culture (Japanese) experienced anxiety in intercultural relations. As such, these students' uncertainties and anxieties must be managed in order for intercultural relations to improve on campus.

9.4.7 Social Exchange Theory

In presenting the research findings it was argued that host students often view intercultural contact in terms of a 'cost-benefit' analysis, whereby the 'costs' and 'rewards' of intercultural interaction are evaluated, with the outcome of this evaluation informing behaviour (section 7.6.1 and section 8.2.2). This hypothesis is now discussed in greater detail with regard to social exchange theory (Thibaut and Kelley 1959)[71].

Social exchange theory applies economic principles to social contexts by positing that human interaction is fundamentally an exchange process. It argues that individuals weigh up the expected or actual costs and rewards associated with social interactions and attempt to maximise the rewards relative to the costs. This implies that individuals' social interactions will be informed by the underlying objective of achieving the best results. As Fitzpatrick (1987: 579; quoted in Hoppe et al. 1996: 65) explains, social exchange theory predicts that individuals will seek relationships that are "the most rewarding, the least costly, and the best value relative to other relationships". These costs and rewards are socially determined and include intangible, emotional aspects (Cook and Rice 2003). Furthermore, the theory implies that the outcomes of these exchanges will inform future behaviour. From a social exchange perspective, behaviour that produces positive outcomes (rewards) is more likely to be repeated than behaviour which does not, given that the 'exchange' is deemed to have been a rewarding one.

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[71] Emerson (1976) argues that Social Exchange Theory emerged from the combined work of Homans (1958), Thibaut and Kelley (1959) and Blau (1964).

Although social exchange theory is not commonly applied to intercultural contexts and theories, Guirdham (1999: 136) posits:

> Social exchange theory provides an explanation for the tendency of people in mixed culture groups to form 'cliques' with people from their own culture: the perceived costs of interaction with people from different cultures outweigh the perceived benefits and/or the perceived balance of benefit over cost from such interaction is lower than from own-culture interactions.

This is a key point, as the research findings appear to support this precise hypothesis. Indeed, social exchange theory raises our understanding of host students' intercultural contact to a more abstract level. As highlighted in the findings, host students report intercultural contact to be much more 'effortful' than intracultural contact, which they view as relatively 'effortless'. Reflecting on the findings from a social exchange perspective, it is evident that despite the potential benefits of student diversity discussed in section 3.3, and the benefits which host students associate with intercultural contact in section 7.6.1, 'Perceived Utility', and section 8.2.2, 'Effort', the perceived 'costs' of intercultural contact appear to eclipse the 'rewards'. These 'costs' are mainly articulated in section 8.2 under the categories of 'Anxiety', 'Effort', 'Language', and 'Compromising Identity'. This mirrors Gudykunst's (1998: 103) arguments that:

> Strangers with whom we communicate usually are not viewed as potential sources of rewards. Rather, we tend to see the costs as outweighing the rewards when we communicate with strangers.

As discussed in section 9.4.6, host students typically anticipate or experience high levels of anxiety in intercultural encounters, which constitutes a negative affective 'cost'. Furthermore, students speak in detail about intercultural contact requiring extra effort and regularly refer to it 'not being worth the effort'. This mirrors the point made by Kim (1986: 62; cited in Sheridan 2005: 76):

> [T]here is a greater chance for individuals to *perceive* that developing a personal relationship with members of different social/cultural groups is too difficult or undesirable, which is likely to hinder exerting further effort to develop a relationship.

In terms of 'Language', the findings highlight that host students' perceived need to adapt their communication style in intercultural encounters also constitutes a 'cost'. Coupled with this, the negative impact of such adaptation on their identity, as discussed under the category 'Compromising Identity', constitutes a further 'cost' from host students' perspective. Furthermore, in Chapter 6 it was argued that 'Homophily' provides host students with 'rewards' in the form of secure and ease of communication.

Weighing up the 'costs' and 'rewards' within the findings, it is apparent that from host students' perspective the 'costs' are dominant. According to social exchange theory, this will result in a negative overall evaluation of the intercultural encounter and lead to avoidance of future exchanges with that individual or group. As Volet and Ang (1998: 20) explain:

> Unless the benefits of cultural mix are perceived as outweighing any potential drawbacks, students will spontaneously choose the less emotionally straining option of forming teams with peers from the same cultural background.

This again is evident in the findings, as several host students refer to simply avoiding contact given the effort they perceive it to involve. Indeed, Sarbaugh's (1998: 30) comments link the idea of effort with the degree of cultural distance between individuals, arguing that "as the level of interculturalness increases, the energy required to communicate increases, and the likelihood of achieving the intended outcomes decreases".

As such, *social exchange theory provides further explanation for the low reported level of intercultural contact among students and constitutes a useful lens through which to explore intercultural relations*. Furthermore, although interventions to promote positive intercultural contact among students have traditionally been based on the propositions of the 'contact hypothesis', it may also be useful to develop and implement such interventions based on the propositions of social exchange theory. Such interventions would aim to identify and minimise the perceived ‘costs’, while simultaneously attempting to identify and maximise the real and potential ‘rewards’ of intercultural contact. Developing interventions based upon the combined principles of the ‘contact hypothesis’ and social exchange theory would not be contradictory. Indeed, one of the thirteen conditions proposed by the ‘contact hypothesis’ is that outcomes of the contact should be mutually beneficial, which is directly linked with social exchange theory.

Although social exchange theory is based on the assumption that people are driven primarily by self-interest (Zafirovski 2005), the findings point to other factors which inform host students’ motivation to engage in intercultural contact, one of which is ‘Concern for Others’ (section 7.6.1). Behaviour which is driven by concern for others appears to contradict the propositions of social exchange theory, as the costs may outweigh the rewards. How can this be explained? This is a question which is commonly raised in relation to volunteerism, and others behaviours which appear to involve an absolute cost to the individual (Clary and Snyder 1999). However, it can be argued that behaviour based on ‘Concern for Others’ provides ‘egotistic rewards’ to students – such as feeling good about themselves – which outweigh the costs of intercultural contact (Winniford et al. 1997: 139). As such, their behaviour would not contradict social exchange theory. Furthermore, it may be that the student perceives little cost associated with intercultural contact and has an empathetic outlook. Alternatively, it can be argued that such behaviour simply highlights the shortcomings of this theory, and that theorising social behaviour purely in terms of an exchange reflects a simplistic ‘economic-style reductionism’ (Zafirovski 2005). Indeed, Wood (1995, cited in Ujitani 2006) argues that people do not constantly weigh up costs and rewards when engaging with others. Despite these criticisms, however, the current research findings provide strong support for the idea that intercultural contact is evaluated on this basis from host students’ perspective.

9.4.8 Speech Accommodation Theory

Another important finding regarding host students' experiences of intercultural contact relates to their perceived need to adapt their 'Language' when communicating with students perceived to be culturally different (section 8.2.3). This was shown to constitute an important barrier to intercultural contact and relational development, and underpins the issue of 'Compromising Identity' (section 8.2.4). This is now explored from a theoretical perspective by reference to speech accommodation theory (Street and Giles 1982; Thakerar et al. 1982).

Speech accommodation theory (SAT) is concerned with explaining and describing linguistic variations in social contexts, including motivations for adapting speech style. SAT was later relabelled communication accommodation theory (CAT) (Giles et al. 1987; Coupland et al. 1988; Gallois et al. 1988[72], 1995; Gallois et al. 2005), but discussion here focuses on SAT. Both are communication theories and do not focus exclusively on intercultural contact. However, Gallois et al. (2005: 122) argue that "intercultural encounters provide perhaps the richest basis" for discussing and exploring these theories.

Central to SAT are the ideas of 'convergence' and 'divergence'. Convergence is defined as "a strategy through which individuals adapt their communicative behavior in such a way as to become more similar to their interlocutor's behavior" (Gallois et al. 2005: 123). This involves adapting speech to mirror the communicative behaviour of the other party. Divergence, meanwhile, refers to strategies which accentuate the differences between both parties. An additional strategy, which falls under the umbrella of divergence, is 'maintenance' whereby an individual persists with his/her original style irrespective of the strategy adopted by the other party. According to Gallois et al. (ibid.: 123), a central idea of SAT is that "speakers adjust (or accommodate) their speech styles in order to create and maintain positive personal and social identities". This implies that SAT does not focus specifically on speech accommodation as a means of facilitating mutual understanding, although this may be the by-product of a convergent strategy. However, the version of SAT proposed by Thakerar et al. (1982) introduced a cognitive element, whereby an individual adapts speech style *based on the abilities of the interlocutor*[73]. In this scenario, speech accommodation is underpinned by the goal of facilitating comprehension, or "attaining communicational efficiency" (Gallois et al. 2005: 126). This idea links directly with the "virtuosity maxim" of code-switching (Gudykunst 1998: 198), which posits that individuals base their choice of communicative code on the abilities of the person with whom they are communicating.

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[72] Intercultural communication was first incorporated into CAT in the 1988 version of the theory proposed by Gallois et al.

It is this notion of adapting one's communication style to facilitate understanding which is of particular relevance to the current study, as host students' report adapting their language not to seek approval or emphasise social identities, but rather to facilitate understanding and communication with culturally different students. Therefore, in the context of the current study 'convergence' takes the form of adapting speech to match the linguistic competencies of the interlocutor.

The need to adapt communication styles in intercultural situations is not surprising given that communication styles, including language, are heavily culturally bound. Ried and Giles (2005), for example, argue that language and communication processes are key markers of group identities and boundaries. Indeed, propositions 1 and 3 of 'speech codes theory' (Philipsen et al. 2005: 58-61) state that "*Wherever there is a distinctive culture, there is to be found a distinctive speech code*", and "*A speech code implicates a culturally distinctive psychology, sociology and rhetoric*" (original italics). In terms of a speech code, this can be understood as "a system of socially-constructed symbols and meanings, premises, and rules, pertaining to communicative conduct" (ibid.: 57). In reflecting on the research findings, it is useful to draw on Bernstein's (1966) sociolinguistic concepts of 'elaborated' and 'restricted' codes, which he argues are the two basic speech categories. 'Restricted' code is based on shared, implicit meanings between communicators, and is typically used when communicating with cultural peers. As such, it can be viewed as an 'ingroup dialect' specific to those who use and understand it (Gudykunst 1998: 108). This serves to maintain and solidify group cohesion because group identity, including culture, is transmitted in the speech act (Wuthnow et al. 1984). As Smith and Bond (1998: 245) explain, "language casts a net of mutual intelligibility around those who use it and becomes a unifying force for group cohesion". Within the data, 'restricted code' is evident in host students' references to specific styles of accent, slang, humour and 'slagging' when interacting with ingroup members.

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[73] It may be argued, however, that this cognitive goal may lead to affective benefits such as reduced uncertainty and anxiety stemming from improved communication between parties.

For outgroup members, including students perceived to be culturally different, their unfamiliarity with ingroup values, assumptions and experiences mean that decoding 'restricted code' is often not possible. Therefore, in order to facilitate communication when interacting with culturally different students, host students adapt their speech to an 'elaborated code'. This code makes explicit that which was implicit in the 'restricted code'. This is evident among host students who report simplifying language, speaking more slowly, softening accent and avoiding slang in order to achieve effective communication with culturally different students. Therefore, the theme of 'Adapting Language for Intercultural Contact' discussed in section 8.2.3 actually reflects host students' shift between 'restricted' and 'elaborated' codes.

This code-shifting facilitates immediate intercultural communication. In exploring factors which influence intercultural attraction, for example, Kim (1991) identified native partner's speech accommodation as one of three main factors, positing that such accommodation is positively received by the non-native (out-group) partner. She also pointed to a lack of research into how hosts adapt their speech in intercultural communication. However, while speech accommodation may be positively perceived by outgroup members, the shift from 'restricted' to 'elaborated' may be perceived differently by ingroup members. Because 'restricted' code signifies and foments group identity, the perceived need to abandon it may be unwelcome. Indeed, given that Gudykunst (1998: 192) argues that "How we speak is tied closely to how we define ourselves", it is understandable that the research findings linked speech accommodation with 'Compromising Identity'. Host students' unease with adapting language is also evident in research by Lee and Boster (1991: 226) who found: "the native partner's self-report of greater speech accommodation led to the native partner's *decreased* attraction to the nonnative partner" (author's emphasis).

In addition to this, Guirdham (ibid.: 173) argues that the use of 'elaborated' code "can mean that intercultural encounters are marked by a tone of formality which slows the pace at which relationships develop”. Furthermore, the need to adapt speech style can cause discomfort for the host student. As Barna (1998: 184) suggests: “The host national is uncomfortable when talking with a foreigner because he or she cannot maintain the normal flow of verbal and nonverbal interaction”. This implies that the short-term communicative benefits of speech accommodation afforded by adopting an ‘elaborated’ code may be countered by negative outcomes. Once again, evidence of this can be found in the research findings. In section 7.3.3, ‘Communication’, host students refer to relationships developing faster with cultural peers who share the same communication style, while in 6.3.3, ‘Perceived Ease of Communication’, a shared communication style is identified as one of the main benefits of ‘Homophily’.

As well as highlighting students’ tendency to adapt speech style, the findings also indicate that host students avoid certain topics during intercultural encounters based on a concern about not offending the other student (section 8.2.1). This links with Kim’s (1995) ‘conversational constraints theory’, which posits that the conversations are goal-oriented, yet bound by two possible constraints; (i) social relational, and (ii) task oriented. Social relational constraints “emphasise concern for others that focus on avoiding hurting hearers’ feelings and minimizing imposition on hearers” (Gudykunst and Lee 2003: 23), and are evident within the research findings. Task oriented constraints, meanwhile, are concerned primarily with the clarity of a message. These constraints are also evident in the data among certain students who link message clarity with self-disclosure and relational development (section 7.3.3). Indeed, the idea of self-disclosure will now be explored in greater detail with reference to social penetration theory.

9.4.9 Social Penetration Theory

In section 7.3.3, ‘Communication’, it was argued that ‘self-disclosure’ constitutes an important aspect of relational development. However, in section 8.2.4, ‘Compromising Identity’, it was suggested that host students find self-disclosure to be problematic during intercultural encounters. It is useful to reflect on these findings by reference to existing theoretical concepts.

‘Self-disclosure’ can be defined as “the extent to which a person reveals things about oneself to others” (Asai and Barnlund 1998: 432). This includes the breadth of topics discussed as well as the depth at which they are discussed (Ujitani 2006). Strong theoretical support for the relationship between self-disclosure and relational development can be found by reference to ‘social penetration theory’ (Altman and Taylor 1973). This theory focuses on the formation, maintenance and dissolution of close relationships and proposes four stages of relationship development; (i) orientation, (ii) exploratory affective exchange, (iii) affective exchange, and (iv) stable exchange. The theory argues that progress through these stages is based on increasing levels of self-disclosure, which creates greater intimacy between parties. Indeed, Chen (2006: 44) argues that social penetration theory “serves as the bridge between the discussions on relationship development and the process of self-disclosure”. Empirical support for the link between self-disclosure and relational development is also strong. As stated in section 7.3.3, Ujitani (2006), Lee (2006) and Kudo and Simkin (2003), each found self-disclosure to be an important factor informing students’ intercultural contact and relational development. Furthermore, Matsushima and Shiomi (2002), Hubbert et al. (1999), and Smith and Bond (1998) have argued that self-disclosure is a key factor influencing relational development.

Social penetration theory is heavily informed by social exchange theory (section 9.4.7) insofar as it argues that a relationship will progress based on the individual’s perceptions of the costs and rewards associated with that relationship. This implies that if the costs outweigh the rewards, self-disclosure will be withheld or occur more slowly and the relationship may be dissolved. This is relevant to the current findings given that host students perceive intercultural contact to be relatively more ‘costly’ than rewarding.

As regards the reasons why self-disclosure is important to relational development, Chen (2006: 44) remarks that “self-disclosure is one of the major interactive uncertainty reduction techniques commonly utilized to develop relationships”, while Gudykunst (1998: 283) explains that self-disclosure facilitates relational development on the basis that “the more partners self-disclose to each other, the more they are attracted to each other, the more similarities they perceive, and the more uncertainty they reduce about each other, the more satisfied they are”. These arguments link self-disclosure with both AUM theory (section 9.4.6) and the ‘similarity-attraction’ hypothesis (section 9.4.2). Self-disclosure, therefore, produces positive cognitive and affective outcomes which can help overcome several of the barriers, such as perceived dissimilarity, uncertainty and anxiety, which can hinder intercultural contact. Somewhat ironically, however, high levels of anxiety – which have been shown to be an issue in the current study – may actually hinder individuals’ proclivity to self-disclose (Renfro-Fernandez and Stephan; in press). This creates a ‘Catch-22’ situation: self-disclosure is argued to reduce uncertainty and consequently anxiety, yet anxiety constitutes a barrier to self-disclosure.

Lee and Boster (1991) also found that the process of social penetration was more problematic in intercultural relationships than in intracultural relationships due to lower levels of self-disclosure. Research also indicates that self-disclosure strategies may vary across cultures in terms of the preferred speed and level of information disclosed (Chen 2002). Furthermore, given that age emerged as an important factor in the current research, it is useful to point out that Giles et al. (1992; cited in Gudykunst 1998) found intergenerational self-disclosure to differ from self-disclosure among members of the same generation. Overall, however, Chen (2006: 44) points to a lack of knowledge relating to self-disclosure in intercultural relationships:

> However, despite self-disclosure being one of the most important factors in the development of close friendships, little is known about how people communicate and monitor self-disclosure during the course of developing intercultural friendships, and little has been done to investigate the relationships between self-disclosure and culture.

In the current study it may be argued that there are two discrete issues relating to self-disclosure. Firstly, the findings suggest that communication difficulties create a barrier to students’ self-disclosure, whereby adapting speech is associated with compromising identity and therefore hinders self-disclosure. Given that one’s ability to self-disclose is dependent upon their communicative ability, there is clearly a link between communication competence and relationship development. This in turn links with the categories of ‘Self-perceived Host Competence’ (section 8.3.1) and

‘Adaptation to Host Culture’ (section 8.3.2). Secondly, in accordance with social penetration theory and social exchange theory, the relative perceived dominance of costs in intercultural encounters may leave host students less inclined to self-disclose and progress to more intimate stages of relational development. This is evident throughout the findings where students express their tendency to avoid contact or withhold information. Furthermore, there are specific instances of students withholding information due to anxieties about how the other students may react. This is particularly evident in host students’ concerns about telling culturally different students about their social habits, particularly information relating to their alcohol consumption.

9.4.10 Institutional Completeness

In section 6.3.2, ‘Availability of Cultural Peers’, it was argued that having significant numbers of students from similar backgrounds can solidify group boundaries and hinder intercultural contact. In particular, host students spoke about how having large numbers of international students from one country hindered intercultural contact as the *need* for these students to interact with hosts was reduced. That is, it was felt that their motivation to interact with host students decreased on the basis that the perceived utility associated with such contact could be satisfied by cultural peers[74]. This idea relates directly to the theoretical concept of ‘institutional completeness’ (Breton 1964), which is often used to explore the integration of immigrants within host societies.

‘Institutional completeness’ refers to the degree to which the needs of a sojourner can be satisfied by the network of cultural peers within a host society. At a societal level, these ‘needs’ can be conceptualised as “institutional services (e.g. religious, educational, political, national, professional, welfare and mutual aid, communication)” (Goldenberg and Haines 1993: 304). Breton (ibid.) theorised that integration into the host society was a function of the level of ‘institutional completeness’ of the immigrant community, whereby low levels of institutional completeness would require immigrants to integrate into the host community in order to access necessary services and satisfy needs, while a high level of institutional completeness would allow them to stick within their cultural ingroup and therefore reduce the level of integration into the host community. As such, the concept relates to Berry's (1980; 1997; 2008) four acculturation strategies – 'assimilation', 'separation', 'integration', and 'marginalization' – and implies that immigrant communities with high levels of institutional completeness will have a higher likelihood of adopting a 'separation' strategy. Importantly, this strategy represents a barrier to contact and integration with the host culture.

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[74] This was particularly relevant among students in EB, as this course had large numbers of German students.

Applying the concept of 'institutional completeness' to the research findings, we can argue that the growing representation of international students from certain nationalities or ethnic groups within the student population is creating higher levels of institutional completeness which results in these students requiring less contact with host students. This point is also raised by Otten (2000: 17):

> Foreign students often purely rely on the social network of members of their own cultural background, almost without contact with either other foreigners or host culture members. If early ties are not made, there is the danger of an irreversible isolated retreat into students' own cultural colonies.

In the university context, 'institutional completeness' may encompass a discrete set of 'services' to those conceptualised in Breton's societal-level model, yet the basic principle remains. As the need to interact with hosts declines, so too does their motivation to engage in intercultural contact. Consequently, group boundaries are further solidified. Indeed, institutional completeness evokes Reuman's (1966; cited in Chen and Starosta 2004: 5) concept of a 'wall mentality' arising from the formation of a community. For those universities actively seeking to increase the number of international students on campus, 'institutional completeness' may, therefore, become a bigger issue hindering intercultural relations on campus in the future, particularly if recruitment strategies focus on specific countries or regions. Indeed, the concept of 'institutional completeness' offers insights into the reasons why significant levels of 'structural diversity' may actually hinder intercultural relations on campus. This in turn links with the question raised in section 6.3.2

relating to whether or not ‘structural diversity’, although a prerequisite for contact, may actually constitute a barrier to intercultural contact beyond a certain point.

In addition to this, as the size – and level of institutional completeness – of the outgroup increases, this may deter host students from engaging with them. As Nesdale and Todd (2000: 354) suggest:

> [M]embers of the dominant (and, typically, numerically larger) group feel threatened by the presence of cultural minority groups, especially as the size of the cultural minority groups increases. As might be expected, the result is that there are systematic negative effects on the extent and quality of intercultural contact.

With this in mind, the concept of ‘institutional completeness’ constitutes a useful lens through which to consider the current findings, as well as the findings of studies discussed in section 3.5, which argued that simply creating diverse student bodies is no assurance that intercultural interaction will take place.

9.5 Relationship between Theoretical Concepts

The diverse theoretical concepts discussed in this chapter have provided different perspectives on, as well as possible theoretical explanations for, the current research findings. As such, they add significantly to the overall study. Furthermore, many of these concepts, such as ‘induced homophily’, the ‘contact hypothesis’ and ‘social exchange theory’, offer theoretical suggestions for addressing several important issues which appear to be hindering intercultural relations from host students’ perspective.

Although many of the theoretical concepts have been discussed in relative isolation, in reality many of them are interrelated. Homophily and the similarity-attraction hypothesis, for example, can be linked with social exchange theory on the basis that interacting with similar others offers specific ‘rewards’, such as self-validation, which increase the likelihood of continuing interaction. Likewise, social penetration theory is derived specifically from social exchange theory insofar as relational development will progress once both parties perceive the derived rewards to outweigh the costs associated with the relationship (Baack et al. 2000). In addition to this, Gudykunst (1998), and Greenland and Brown (2000) link anxiety with social categorisation, arguing that the basic process of social categorisation is associated with increased anxiety. Furthermore, the concept of ‘institutional completeness’ can be linked with ‘homophily’ via the ‘availability of cultural peers’.

Lee and Gudykunst (2001), meanwhile, argue that there is a direct link between uncertainty and perceived similarity, whereby greater uncertainty is linked with lower perceived similarity. This in turn relates to the similarity-attraction hypothesis and implies that greater uncertainty will lead to reduced attraction. This is relevant to intercultural contact, given that “When we relate with people from other cultures, our interactions tend to involve the highest degree of strangeness and the lowest degree of familiarity” (Duronto et al. 2005: p550).

Combined, these theoretical concepts form the theoretical terrain within which the current research findings can be discussed and analysed. The fact they are taken from diverse fields is not an issue, given that intercultural studies as a discipline draws upon concepts from a wide variety of fields.

9.6 Chapter Summary

This chapter has reflected on the research findings with reference to the original questions guiding the research. By presenting both barriers and facilitators informing intercultural contact from host students’ perspective, it has identified concrete issues which may stimulate further research. It has also presented a holistic and dynamic conceptual model of intercultural contact based on the research findings. Central to this model is the idea that institutional commitment is paramount to promoting intercultural relations among students on campus.

In addition to this, the chapter has presented and discussed theoretical concepts identified as relevant to the findings. Engagement with these theoretical concepts has framed the findings within a theoretical context, raised them to a more abstract level, and also provided specific theoretical explanations for host students’ comments, reported behaviours and experiences. This in turn has provided theoretical direction for addressing some of the important issues which have been identified as hindering intercultural contact in the current study. Despite being drawn from a variety of disciplines, it has been shown that many of these theoretical concepts relate to one another. With this in mind, attention turns of the final chapter, which reflects on the overall study.

Chapter 10: CONCLUSIONS

> *"One of the most difficult tasks of any university in today's multicultural reality, whether in the US, Europe or elsewhere, is how to build a university culture that fosters interaction among students from different races, religions, ethnicities, nationalities and other key markers of identity."* (Brunner 2006: 315)

> *"Campuses can no longer speak about changes in the number of diverse students without recognizing how this change affects the psychological climate or opportunities for interaction across different groups on campus – and ultimately changes in educational outcomes for students."* (Hurtado et al. 1999: iv)

10.1 Introduction

This final chapter reflects on the overall study. It reviews each of the preceding chapters, discusses the contribution of the study to existing knowledge, and evaluates the research according to a set of externally-imposed criteria. Following this, specific recommendations for future research are made before drawing some final conclusions.

10.2 Review of Chapters

This study has qualitatively explored intercultural contact among students in an Irish university. It has focused specifically on host culture students given the relative lack of attention afforded to this group in existing studies. Qualitative interviews have been used to collect data, and the overall research process, including the final thesis, has been heavily informed by the use of a grounded theory research framework.

Chapter 1 introduced the study and outlined the overall structure of the thesis. Following this, Chapter 2 focused on the problematic concept of culture and the diverse approaches to conceptualising and researching culture and related phenomena, such as intercultural contact. This included an explanation and justification of the operationalisation of culture used in the current study. Chapter 3 contextualised the study by highlighting the changing student demographics within the Irish higher education system and the relative lack of research conducted to date in the Irish context. It also discussed the potential of student diversity to constitute an educational resource subject to the condition of positive intergroup interaction, and extensively reviewed existing studies on intercultural relations between students in higher education. This review highlighted a compelling body of research indicating that intercultural contact between students is often infrequent and superficial, and also elucidated an historical lack of engagement with host culture students. Chapter 3 concluded with the formulation and presentation of the primary research questions guiding the study. In Chapter 4 the methodological approach was discussed in detail. This included an in-depth examination of the nature of grounded theory methodology and the implications of such an approach for conducting research, presenting findings and engaging with existing theoretical knowledge. Furthermore, the chapter outlined and justified the procedure for identifying and recruiting participants, as well as detailing the non-linear process of data collection and analysis.

Chapters 5, 6, 7, and 8 presented the findings of the research. These findings were grounded in the raw data and articulated using categories and concepts emerging from the data analysis. In each chapter analytical codes and students' comments were used to frame and provide support for the findings and the relationships between categories. The findings relate to students' personal perceptions of cultural difference within the student body and their experiences of contact with students perceived to be culturally different, as well as the factors which inform such contact. These findings suggest that nationality and age are central to students' perceptions of cultural difference within the student population, and that both are associated with values and behaviours which relate specifically to the educational environment. The findings also suggest that intercultural contact is highly complex and multi-dimensional from host students' perspective. Furthermore, they mirror the findings of many existing studies which indicate that intercultural contact is infrequent and that intercultural relational development is problematic.

Chapter 9 reviewed the original research questions with reference to the research findings presented in the preceding chapters. It reflected on the construction of culture presented in Chapter 5 and distilled the findings according to a barriers/facilitators framework. It also presented a dynamic conceptual model of the process of intercultural contact from the perspective of host culture students. This model places institutional commitment at the heart of promoting intercultural relations on campus. Coupled with this, Chapter 9 engaged with extant theoretical concepts from diverse disciplines in order to examine and discuss the research findings at a more theoretical level. This process offered valuable insights which help to explain many of the research findings and also locates the study within a theoretical context. Although the aim was not to test any of these theoretical concepts, the research findings provide empirical support for many of them.

10.3 Contribution to Knowledge

This study makes a significant contribution to existing research on intercultural relations among students in higher education. Firstly, it is one of the few studies exploring intercultural contact specifically from the perspective of the host culture student cohort. As such, it constitutes a response to calls for greater engagement with host culture students when researching intercultural relations on campus (Ujitani 2006; Asmar 2005: Ward 2005; Kudo and Simkin 2003). Furthermore, it represents one of the very few studies exploring intercultural relations among students in the Irish higher education system. Given the rapid and increasing diversification of student bodies in Irish HEIs, such research is both timely and highly relevant.

Secondly, the study highlights the value of qualitative inquiry for exploring individuals' perceptions and lived experiences, as well as researching phenomena which have been relatively under-explored to date. In particular the study has highlighted the usefulness of grounded theory as a rigorous qualitative research methodology which builds concepts grounded in empirical data while seeking to understand how these relate to extant theoretical concepts. This is reflected in the presentation of the research findings, where students' own words have been used to support the presentation of theoretical categories.

Thirdly, instead of imposing strict *a priori* assumptions on the nature of cultural identity, the study has encouraged students to articulate their own perceptions of cultural difference within the student body. This process has produced rich, original findings, and has identified age as an unexpected yet important cultural differentiator among students. Furthermore, by asking students to discuss cultural difference specifically within the educational environment, the study has highlighted the role of ‘student culture’ and drawn attention to the importance which diverging priorities regarding the overall educational experience may have on students’ intercultural relations. This approach has also highlighted the crucial role of perceptions in students’ behaviour. As Singer (1998: 48) argues: “reality may be less important, in both determining and understanding human behaviour, than are perceptions of reality”.

Fourthly, in terms of the specific research findings, the study has identified important factors – cultural, situational, and institutional – which impact upon host students’ intercultural encounters on campus, including factors which influence the likelihood of contact taking place. Among these, it has identified numerous barriers which hinder host students’ intercultural contact and relational development, with the concept of ‘homophily’ constituting a particularly salient issue. Coupled with these barriers, a number of important factors which appear to facilitate intercultural contact have been identified and have been summarised in section 9.2.2. Furthermore, section 7.5.1 discussed the specific features of interventions as suggested by students, as well as providing examples of interventions developed in other educational environments. These facilitators incorporate specific conditions for improving intercultural contact, and accordingly offer practical guidelines for the development of interventions aimed at promoting intercultural relations on campus. In particular, the integral role of the institution, including academic staff, in providing leadership and creating a curricular and extracurricular environment which promotes healthy intercultural contact has been highlighted. As le Roux (2001: 273) remarks, “Intercultural relations in the classroom may be a source of knowledge and mutual enrichment between culturally diverse learners if managed proactively by teachers”. Such institutional commitment is imperative in order to harness the potential of student diversity as an educational resource and minimise the potential pitfalls of a culturally diverse student body. Finally, a further contribution to knowledge stemming from the current study resides in its identification of numerous areas and ideas which warrant further research. Prior to discussing these, however, attention turns to evaluating the study.

10.4 Evaluation of the Study

In section 4.4.7 the criteria for evaluating grounded theory research studies were discussed. Given that Charmaz' (2006) version of grounded theory was adopted in the current study it is logical that her evaluative criteria be applied. These four criteria were (i) Credibility, (ii) Originality, (iii) Resonance, and (iv) Usefulness. In Table 4.1 specific questions underpinning each of these criteria were listed. It is useful to now reflect on the findings according to these criteria.

As regards 'Credibility', the research process has been rigorous, detailed and thorough. Throughout the presentation of the research findings specific concepts and categories have been proposed and defined. Support for these has been provided in a consistent fashion, using both codes and students' comments. Connections between categories have been identified based upon logical argumentation and visual models have been used to illustrate important concepts and relationships. Furthermore, the information provided in Appendices C, D, E, F, G, H, I, J and K adds further transparency to the research process. In addition to this, the breadth and depth of the research findings reveal an in-depth engagement with students and an intimate familiarity with the phenomenon being explored.

In terms of 'Originality', this is one of the few studies internationally to engage in-depth with host culture students, and is among the first in the Irish context to explore intercultural relations among students in higher education. Many of the categories, concepts and arguments presented in the study – such as 'Cultural Gravity', 'Compromising Identity', and 'Effort' – are novel and innovative, and offer a new perspective on the dynamics of intercultural contact among students in higher education. As discussed above, the identification of barriers and facilitators which inform intercultural contact marks a significant contribution to the field and offers practical guidelines for developing initiatives aimed at promoting intercultural relations on campus. Furthermore, the findings challenge the dominant approach of strictly operationalising culture according to students' nationality and examining intercultural relations through a predetermined theoretical lens. In particular, the argument that younger students may perceive mature students as culturally different is an interesting one, as is the concept of 'Maturity' as a marker of cultural difference.

Indeed, by arguing that students' perceptions of cultural difference are heavily informed by diverging value systems and behaviours within the specific educational environment, the study has highlighted the importance of the 'context' within which culture and cultural difference are conceptualised.

Turning attention to 'Resonance', the diversity of categories presented and explored in the findings indicates a solid and broad understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. Furthermore, the findings are presented and discussed in a format which makes them accessible to those individuals central to the phenomenon. As was noted in section 4.6.2, one of the issues in the research process was the difficulty some students experienced in explaining their lack of intercultural contact. The findings outlined in the study provide both practical and theoretical explanations for their reported behaviour and experiences. Finally, in terms of 'Usefulness', as discussed above, not only is there potential for the findings to be practically applied to promote intercultural relations within educational environments, they also make a valuable contribution to knowledge within the broader field of intercultural studies.

10.4.1 Reflexivity

In section 4.8.2 the need for reflexivity in research was discussed. With this in mind, from an evaluative perspective it is useful to reflect on how the research process impacted upon me and how it may have impacted upon those students who were interviewed. Indeed, Etherington (2006) points out that the researcher and research participants are not separate entities, but are each intertwined in the research process.

From a personal perspective, the self-awareness needed for reflexivity is not always easy to achieve. From a skills-development perspective, I would certainly like to think that the process of conducting this study has improved me as a researcher in terms of planning research projects, collecting and rigorously analysing data, and communicating findings in an accessible manner. In particular, I feel that my interviewing skills improved in the course of the data collection and resulted in students being more open, reflective and expressive. In addition to this, during the research process, to draw on Trahar (2005: 165), "I made connections with many of my own experiences as a learner". In particular, on hearing the students' stories, opinions and concerns, I also reflected both on my time as an international student in

Spain – during which I interacted regularly with other international students but rarely with Spanish students – and my years as a host student in DCU. This included a realisation that my own level of contact with international students in DCU was very low, although like some of the students interviewed, it was difficult to pinpoint specific reasons for this. Certainly, the numbers of international students were much lower when I was an undergraduate, and the vast majority – to my recollection – were from France, Germany and Spain. However, I also think I can now say that anxiety relating to possible rejection and misinterpretation, including the prospect of a subsequent awkwardness, were important factors in my lack of contact with international students. Similarly, I think I had a concern that befriending international students, particularly in my final year, could result in them becoming overly reliant upon me, which was something I did not want as I faced into my final examinations.

Coupled with this, the process of discussing the key issues with students has caused me to reflect on my role as a lecturer, a figure of authority, and how this role should include facilitating student interaction. To this end, I have implemented into my own lecturers some of the suggestions to promote interaction which the students made, such as using exercises to create a positive learning environment from the outset, assigning students to project groups, acting as a third-party mediator where possible, encouraging students to identify commonalities between them, valuing the perspectives of international and host students, arranging seating positions that encourage interaction, and discussing the challenges and advantages of completing projects as part of a multicultural team. I believe that these changes have successfully fostered a more inclusive ethos within the classroom, although no doubt I have ample room for improvement.

In terms of reflecting upon the impact the research may have had upon the students, it is clear from many of the student quotations used in chapters 5-8 that the process of discussing these issues caused a number of students to reflect upon their own lack of contact with international students and the different reasons for this. Whether or not this prompted subsequent changes in behaviour, or even discussions with friends, I cannot say. However, in asking students to articulate specific reasons for their behaviours, attitudes or beliefs, I am confident that their awareness of intercultural dynamics within the learning environment was heightened.

10.5 Recommendations for Further Research

Given the diversity of issues which have arisen in the current study, the potential for further research is great. Implicit in this research agenda is the idea that such research is ultimately seeking to promote intercultural relations among students on campus.

As stated, this study has focused primarily on host culture students' self-reported perspectives, opinions, experiences and behaviours using a qualitative research framework. Among the research findings, students have ascribed certain characteristics, values and behaviours to students identified as culturally different, which may or may not be accurate. Accordingly, it is advisable to conduct further research which engages with both international and mature students in order to support or contradict the perceptions of students articulated in this study. Such research may involve asking these students to respond directly to the current research findings, or encourage them to independently reflect on their own identity within the educational environment. Furthermore, given that one of the limitations mentioned in section 4.8.1 relates to the possible discrepancy between students' reported and actual behaviour, observational research focusing on their behavioural patterns, either inside our outside the formal learning environment, would be complementary. In addition to this, the numerous factors identified in the current study offer a structure for developing research instruments appropriate for quantitative research, which may then be used to produce findings that can be extended to broader populations.

Given that homophily has emerged as a major theme in the current study and appears to constitute a factor which informs intercultural contact at a very fundamental level, further research into the nature of homophily and the factors which underpin individuals' gravitation towards perceived similarity is recommended. Indeed, it can be argued that the biggest challenge in promoting intercultural contact is countering students' proclivity towards 'choice homophily', and that this may be best addressed by encouraging 'induced homophily', as discussed in section 9.4.1. Furthermore, research into individuals' motivations for engaging in intercultural contact is also needed, particularly as increasing levels of structural diversity may offer more students the opportunity of interacting primarily with cultural peers. In addition to this, given the apparent need for specific interventions to promote intercultural contact and the recommendations regarding the nature of such interventions, research into the development, implementation and assessment of interventions is advisable. In particular, research into curricula which foster or hinder intercultural contact is needed given the central importance of this category within the findings.

Stemming from the research findings, numerous other avenues of research emerge. For example, research into the role of self-esteem, self-disclosure, anxiety, speech adaptation and humour – including teasing/slagging – in intercultural contact is warranted. Similarly, additional studies into the dynamics of intercultural relational development are also needed. As Lee (2006: 20) contends: “In essence, the scholarship of intercultural friendship is still an on-going journey, deserving researchers’ endeavors and dedication”. Furthermore, given that several of the theoretical concepts discussed in Chapter 9 offer enlightening perspectives on the dynamics of students’ intercultural contact, further research which explores intercultural relations by reference to these concepts is recommended. In particular, although not commonly used to study intercultural relations, social exchange theory may offer a useful lens through which to explore this phenomenon.

Keeping in mind the many possible research avenues and the fact that students – primarily international students – have historically represented an attractive and easily accessible research focus for many academics, it is important, however, that we avoid the ‘guineapigisation’ of students as research targets. As such, it is imperative that the research conducted should ultimately be aimed at improving students’ lived experiences.

10.6 Conclusion

The goal of this study has been to explore host students’ perceptions of cultural difference within the student body and their experiences of intercultural contact on campus, including the factors which inform such contact. Implicit in this is the aim of identifying strategies which can promote healthy intercultural relations between students on campus.

According to Duderstadt (2000: 3), “The most predictable feature of modern society is its unpredictability”. Faced with a constantly changing world defined by rapid technological advancements, revolutionary innovations in global communications and unprecedented human mobility within and across national boundaries, higher education institutions of the 21st century are faced with the challenge of educating students in a manner which allows them to live and work effectively within an increasingly globalised world. Central to this is the need to instil in graduates the skills, competencies and values necessary to successfully manage and negotiate unscripted contexts shaped by cultural diversity. A student population which is itself culturally diverse therefore represents a valuable resource through which this challenge can be met. However, as has been discussed, a culturally diverse student body alone is insufficient. Although offering theoretical benefits to the student body, the overall institution, and broader society, increasing student diversity does not necessarily lead to greater intercultural contact, and intercultural contact does not necessarily result in positive outcomes. As Worchel (2005: 755) argues: “Contact between cultural groups can serve as the spark that ignites violent conflict or the water that can cool the flames of conflict”. As such, student diversity must be conceptualised as a ‘resource’ for institutions of higher education, the potential of which can be realised only through active management.

The research findings have highlighted the highly complex and problematic nature of students’ intercultural contact. It is apparent that the educational institution itself plays a crucial role in promoting and facilitating intercultural contact among students, although the current findings indicate a perceived lack of institutional support on this front. Meaningful commitment and investment from top leadership is therefore needed to harness the potential of culturally diverse student bodies. As Todd and Nesdale (1997: 12) comment:

> …the starting point must be the acceptance by senior university administrators that the goal of promoting intercultural awareness, understanding and acceptance in *all* university students is important and worthwhile. [original italics]

Central to this is the development of curricula which encourage students to interact in a secure and rewarding manner, and which creates a context of ‘constructive diversity', defined as "an environment in which its members are enhanced by the experiences, cultures, and backgrounds or one another" (Eaton 2004: 1). Indeed, with regard to the internationalisation of higher education, there is urgent need to explore and articulate the potential benefits of student diversity beyond the blinkered boundaries of the economic rationale which currently dominates.

Although educational institutions exert large control over the delivery of education, it must be acknowledged that adapting curricula is not without its challenges. Indeed, van Damme (2001: 423) refers to Woodrow Wilson's comment, made in his capacity as President of Princeton University, that "it is easier to move cemeteries than to change the curriculum". However, if universities are serious about effectively managing diverse student populations in a manner which allows them to meet the emerging and disparate challenges of a globalised world, it is imperative that the issue of student diversity and the promotion of intercultural relations on campus move from the periphery to the centre of the university's educational mission.

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