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**Living Together: investigating student interaction in a  
multi-nationality postgraduate community**

**by Theresa McKinven**

**A thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Education**

**School of Education, Durham University**

**2011**

## Abstract

This thesis investigates the experiences of residents in a postgraduate multi-national residential college in a university in the UK, referred to by the pseudonym of Smith College, Kirkton University.

The use of an ethnographic interviewing approach (Spradley 1979) was adopted in order to understand from the residents' own perspective the experience of being resident in the multi-national college community. A total of 10 student residents and two members of staff were interviewed on between one and four occasions over a period of eighteen months, making a total of 28 interviews, in order to gain an insight into their experiences of interacting at such close quarters with large numbers of students from other cultures and nationalities, whether this experience had had an impact on them, and whether they felt they had learned anything about themselves or other cultures as a result.

Intercultural contact is thought to bring benefits in terms of understanding more about oneself as well as other cultures, though much research into intercultural contact casts doubt on the naïve version of the contact hypothesis (Allport 1954), while research into the experience of international students indicates a significant degree of dissatisfaction with the amount of contact with host country students and the tendency for many students to seek the relative safety of co-national friendships when encountering what can be a challenging reality of day-to-day contact with other cultures. This research is based within a context which seeks to achieve many of the conditions considered conducive to promoting integration and intercultural understanding, and which has been suggested in a number of campus-based studies (which have mainly considered the classroom environment) as most appropriate for fostering integration, and in which relatively little research has been carried out in spite of the significant amount of time students spend in the context, that of a residential college community. By investigating the experiences of residents in such a context, the aim is to gain a better understanding of the realities of multi-cultural living, whether this environment genuinely provides a basis for intercultural understanding, and, by better understanding community dynamics, consider ways of improving the experience for residents.

A number of positive outcomes occur, and one can summarise that the international residential experience gives students access to a number of intercultural learning experiences, and those experiences may be with students from countries nearby their home country or with students from a much wider ranges of cultures and countries,

although close experiences of this type appear to be rarer and may take more time to build sufficient networks to facilitate. On the other hand, both home and overseas students may attempt to isolate themselves from intercultural contact to some extent, possibly due to the closeness of the contact in the residential environment. Those students who make the most efforts to engage in intercultural contact may experience the highest rates of cultural dissonance, as fundamental differences in values, for example in terms of beliefs in democracy, freedom of speech, gender relations or individual human rights, become apparent in a way that may not occur in friendship relations.

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GSA	Graduate Student Association	
IA	The Intercultural Association	
CSSA	Chinese Scholars and Students Association	
UCLA	University of California Los Angeles	
PGCE	Postgraduate Certificate in Education	
MBA	Master of Business Administration	

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## **1. Introduction**

This first chapter provides an overview of the thesis, and is followed by a review and evaluation of the literature related to the thesis topic in chapter 2. Chapter 3 then considers the methodology adopted, with chapters 4 and 5 considering the findings of the study. Finally, chapter 6 discusses the significance of the study and considers the limitations of the research and provides suggestions for future research in this area.

### **1.1 The Research Problem**

The considerable interest in Higher Education internationalisation has been widely noted. Over the past 10 years a significant body of research has been built up considering the experiences of students going overseas to study, most often from the perspective of the overseas student. These include studies focusing on students' learning experience (e.g. Campbell & Li 2008), interaction between host country and overseas students (e.g. Barron 2006), conditions which can lead to integration of students from different cultures, and the potential benefits of interaction (e.g. Gill 2007, 2010). A number of studies have reported on the difficulties students face in developing relationships with students from other cultures (e.g. Brown 2009; Dunne 2009). The paucity of studies including the perspectives of host country students is noted (e.g. Halualani 2008), and studies focusing on the living experience of students living in multi-national halls of residence (Bochner 1985; Todd & Nesdale 1997) are particularly singled out for their absence (Ward 2006). This is surprising, given that students spend a considerable amount of time in their accommodation, but may be accounted for by the desire for academics to understand better the challenges they experience in teaching and supporting the learning of students in multi-cultural classrooms, while having little contact with students in a residential setting. Some studies have suggested that a university hall of residence provides an ideal opportunity to investigate whether intercultural contact leads to greater cultural awareness (Van Laar *et al.* 2005: 330; Kudo & Simkin 2003: 109) due to their nature as ready made communities with recognisable cultural differences in the membership (Todd & Nesdale 1997: 65).

## 1.2 Research Aims

The aim of the study was to understand as far as possible from the respondents' own perspective the experience of being resident in a multi-cultural college community. In order to achieve this, an ethnographic interview approach (Spradley 1979) was adopted, as providing the most appropriate methodology for accessing the interviewees' perspectives (Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 13) through their own words (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 2). This facilitated an open approach, with specific hypotheses or limitations not defined in advance, and for a trusting and honest relationship to develop with the interviewees (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 141). The rich data provided by the 28 interviews lasting almost 35 hours in total enabled themes to emerge, which were then fed into later interviews (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 28) for interviewees to provide their own validation (Pole & Morrison 2003: 102).

Relatively little research has been carried out either in the residential setting, or looking at the notion of residential community, or considering interaction both from the perspective of international and home students. In addition, most research has either focused on one nationality of student, talked about 'international students' in general, or referred to 'international' students' interaction with host country students. Little research has considered the interaction from a community perspective, including interaction in multi-cultural terms, i.e. interaction involving overseas students from different countries. Given the increase in the number of international students, particularly at postgraduate level, and the tendency for these students to be housed together due to accommodation guarantee schemes for overseas students, research into interaction in a residential environment is needed in order to gain a greater understanding of the challenges of multi-cultural residential communities to inform provision of an appropriate service and facilitate and encourage a positive environment.

Although the interviews were open, in keeping with the purpose of the study there were some aspects that were of particular interest, though the interviewing was not constrained by a focus on these aspects. Given that students were living in flats with students from other countries and had a number of opportunities to interact in their flats and elsewhere in college, how did students experience those interactions? Did students feel they learned anything about themselves, their cultures or other cultures through these interactions?

Given the espoused values of the college (the college motto is 'diversitate valemus') and the university strategy to internationalise its student body, to what extent did students feel these aims were valued and in evidence? Were students able to identify any impact the college had had on them as individuals and did the students feel any benefit from their time in college?

### **1.3 Context of the study**

The residential setting being considered is of particular interest, since it seeks to achieve many of the conditions which have been recommended as conducive to promoting integration and intercultural understanding, such as strong institutional support for interaction, numerous funded clubs and societies across a broad range of social, sporting, cultural and academic interest, including some with explicit multicultural or intercultural aims (discussion groups and seminars, cultural and intercultural organisations), a multinational student leadership, mixed nationality flats and a college tutor allocated to each flat to provide opportunities for flatmates to meet and socialise outside the flat, among a number of other initiatives (Allport 1954; Pettigrew 2008: 188). The smaller number of residents from the UK may limit the opportunities for interaction with host country students. However, these are available, as are opportunities for students to interact with native English speakers and other language speakers from other countries.

The college has approximately 1900-2000 members, with 550 resident on the college's main site, where the research was carried out. All the members are pursuing postgraduate study, the majority at Masters level (85% of residents), similarly the majority of residents (80%+) are from outside the UK, with Chinese students constituting the largest nationality (200 residents), many studying on one-year programmes at the Business School. Only a small number of residents (between 50 and 70), almost all PhD students, remain in residence for more than one year. The majority of one-year students are self-funding. Further details about the demographics of the college are provided in Appendix B. At the time of the study, the College accepted any postgraduate student and had no limit on numbers on any one programme or from any one country. The College is known as a 'hill' college, and is the last one in a wavy line of 8 colleges and other university buildings on a road leading south from the city centre.

#### 1.4 Intercultural contact

Universities are considered a key environment for investigating intercultural contact, given the contention that the 'experience of the sojourner is potentially more valuable than that of the tourist, both for societies and for individuals, since the state of the world is such that societies and individuals have no alternative but proximity, interaction and relationship as the conditions of existence' (Byram 1997: 2).

A comprehensive description of intercultural understanding is given by Bredella, who states that:

intercultural understanding means that we can reconstruct the context of the foreign, take the others' perspectives and see things through their eyes. This implies that we are able to distance ourselves from our own categories, values and interests. This, of course, does not imply that our own cultural contexts and our own perspectives do not play a role in understanding others. ... Understanding is a process of negotiation between the context in which something is said and done and the context in which it is perceived. It is also a process of negotiation between the inner perspective – we see things through the others' eyes – and the outer perspective – we see things through our own eyes. But such a process of negotiation can only begin if we possess the flexibility of mind to reconstruct the context of production and assume the inner perspective (Bredella 2003: 39).

These aspects of intercultural understanding, the need for distance to view own's own and other cultures, the role of context in communication, negotiating between the inside and outside perspective, and the flexibility to start on the journey, are common themes. In addition, the interaction should go 'beyond the passive and the observational ... the individual is actively engaged with cultural materials and systems' (Sen Gupta 2003: 159). Since encountering cultural difference need not be challenging in itself, it is this active engagement which makes the intercultural experience challenging, 'when the encounter forces us to evaluate our own fundamental beliefs and values systems' (Sen Gupta 2003: 160). The experience of living and studying abroad is particularly challenging, involving as it does the whole person:

this particular intercultural experience involves at first disorientation and loss, a confrontation with a foreign environment which may violently jolt individuals and perturb their taken-for-granted world. It places individuals in a situation where adaptation and transformation are necessary if they are to maximise life in their new conditions. In other words, life abroad represents an extensive natural learning situation which stimulates many more aspects of learners' personalities than are usually catered for in educational institutions. It can be understood broadly as an interaction between an individual and a new environment where the former is unsparingly put to the test as a whole person. (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 101-102)

The value that students put on the entire process of being overseas, not just their studies, and its influence on their intercultural learning, has been reported by Gill, who noted 'the qualitative changes in the returnees' sense of self, ways of seeing and perceiving the world, values and (work-related) ethics' (Gill 2010: 372). She concludes that intercultural identity is comprised of both an understanding of oneself as an individual and awareness of the cultures which influenced that sense of self (2010: 373).

## **1.5 Research Method**

It has been suggested that:

Within the context of study and residence abroad, ethnography can identify the individual, contextual and cultural factors that influence language and cultural learning by capturing the sojourners' view about their goals and experiences (e.g. their intercultural contact, attitudes towards members of the target culture). An ethnographic approach can monitor changes in the sojourners (e.g. their intercultural adjustment, the development of their intercultural communicative competence) and ascertain how the various elements of the study and residence abroad have or have not influenced their thinking and/or behaviour. (Jackson 2006: 137)

Although ethnographic interviewing has its limitations, discussed further in chapter 3, a qualitative, ethnographic interview approach was selected as most appropriate for

investigating a complex, changing society, addressing the potential for inequality in the relationship between researcher and participants, and to 'generate(s) or build(s) theories of cultures – or explanations of how people think, believe and behave – that are situated in local time and space' (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 8). In total 10 students and two members of staff were interviewed, between June 2008 and December 2009, with interviews lasting between 45 and 90 minutes recorded with a small digital voice recorder. Each interview was transcribed verbatim, and each person interviewed between 1 and a maximum of 4 times, making a total of 28 interviews, with a word count between 4800 and 15300 for each interview. Participants were interviewed on multiple occasions in order to provide an opportunity to further discuss ideas and consider findings, in an iterative approach of eliciting, noting, analysing, forming hypotheses, collecting further data, analysing, forming further hypotheses, etc, with the final stage being writing the ethnography (Spradley 1979: 93-94).

The initial interviews were open, encouraging participants to discuss at length general topics about the students' experience in college, where they lived in college, what activities they took part in and how they made friends. The second interviews drew on elements from the first interview, from transcripts and from analysis of the transcripts (all interviewees asked to have a copy of the entire transcript of at least their first interview), and to explore in further depth any items of interest that occurred in the first interview. Where third interviews took place, these considered items from the previous two interviews which merited further exploration, and from interviews with other interviewees. Participants were invited to comment on ideas reported by other participants; in this way interviewees were able to take a more active part in the research process, and emerging trends could be exposed to a degree of scrutiny as to their reliability. Later rounds of interviews focused on participants' response to hypotheses that had emerged. Not all respondents participated in all the rounds. Although general themes emerged, a striking element of the findings was the extent to which students' experiences differed, indicating that social experience operates at both societal and individual level. In general, while participants reported satisfaction with their time in College, there was evidence of conflict at individual level and due to ascribed cultural identity.

## 2. Literature Review

In order to provide background for the study, an initial literature search was carried out before a specific methodology was chosen, and the interviews carried out. At this point the focus on interaction and integration was chosen. However, encouraging 'interaction among students from different races, religions, ethnicities, nationalities and other key markers of identity' has been noted as 'one of the most difficult tasks of any university in today's multicultural reality', based on the belief that exposure to other cultures can lead students' 'thinking and perceptions [to] become more flexible, and they gain a greater understanding of and sensitivity for other cultures; they gain skills in communication, open mindedness, empathy and respect when meeting and interacting with people with different norms, values and lifestyles (Engelbert, 2004)' (Brunner 2006: 315-316).

A specific direction was kept to a minimum, in order to permit the respondents to share their experiences without unnecessary limits being imposed by the researcher. Subsequent literature searches were undertaken after the interviews were coded and a first draft of findings drawn up. These later literature searches were intended to provide further contextual grounding and to assist in focusing on the most salient points from the research. An interesting feature of the literature reviews carried out at earlier stages of the thesis and that carried out in 2010 was the significant increase in research articles considering the experience of being an international student, and a small, but noticeable, increase in research including host student perspectives (e.g. Peacock & Harrison 2009), reflecting the realisation that in increasing international student numbers, institutions need to understand the impact on the whole student body. The literature also tends to focus on 'international' students and interaction with 'host' country students, with little research considering features of international students' interaction with other international students.

Another feature was the difference in approach taken in research studies in the USA and the UK and Australia. Research carried out in the USA tended to take one feature, for example anxiety or risk-taking (e.g. Samochowiec & Florack 2010; Wang 2009), and investigate how that particular aspect influenced intercultural interaction, and/or was primarily quantitative or large scale (e.g. Van Laar *et al.* 2005), while research carried out in the UK or Australia & New Zealand was more likely to adopt a qualitative approach (e.g. Brown 2009), often with interviews and some surveys, and/or focus on a particular

nationality of overseas students (e.g. Turner 2006). Intercultural interaction or competence was considered by UK studies, including mention of the contact hypothesis, with differences in group interaction focusing mainly on collectivist and individualistic society perspective, rather than adopting a social identity theory perspective. In addition, while some key issues recurred, such as the difficulties encountered by many overseas students, which may have been in part prompted by research either investigating what was considered an existing 'problem' or problematising the situation for the purpose of carrying out research, the difficulty in generalising outcomes was also apparent.

The literature surveyed includes topics such as factors influencing interaction and integration, with friendship formation, perceptions of cultural difference and acculturation, and intercultural interaction forming the main focus. A number of ways of organising the literature review and findings are possible, but the organisation chosen reflects the two main themes which emerged in the findings, which are how students try to make sense of and live their lives in college, and the specific influences of cultural backgrounds on their college experience. We start by considering the contact hypothesis (Allport 1954), then move on to look at intergroup encounters in general, and research which has been carried out in educational settings, including residential settings, which provides insight into intergroup encounters. This leads us on to consider friendship and friendship formation, socialising, and involvement in student organisations. In response to one of the themes which emerged in data analysis, the particular situation regarding interaction with Chinese students is also covered. In the second part of the literature review, acculturation and intercultural interaction are focused on.

## **2.1 Interaction & Cultural Awareness**

### **2.1.1 The Contact Hypothesis & Social Identity Theory**

The view that intercultural contact may lead to greater cultural awareness can be attributed to the 'contact hypothesis' (Allport 1954). In order for greater cultural awareness to occur, contact between groups should be sustained, of equal status, interdependent and have institutional support.

However, rather than increased cultural awareness, it has also been reported that contact may lead to 'increase[d] friction and hostility' (Greenholtz 2003: 123), or 'simply reinforce



stereotypes and encourage hostility rather than fostering comprehension and mutual respect' (De Nooy & Hanna 2003: 65). For example, in their research on Australian students' understanding of information dissemination strategies in France, De Nooy & Hanna (2003) found that for the students 'the most likely outcome [of their residence abroad] is a lasting stereotype of French inefficiency/chaos' (2003: 64) with no shift in cultural perspective, the students were largely unable to identify that a high context communication approach was being utilised, distrusting its use in a formal setting, and assuming the techniques they used at 'home' were 'generic, universal, or at least culturally neutral' (2003: 76-77).

Pettigrew & Tropp's meta-analysis of 516 studies (2006, in Pettigrew 2008) found 'solid' support for the contact hypothesis, i.e. that contact reduced prejudice, in particular among members of majority groups. They consider that friendship with people from other groups covers all of Allport's conditions, and report studies which suggest that friendship with a member of one outgroup may have some effect in reducing prejudice towards other outgroups, even when selection bias is removed. "Mere exposure" (see Zajonc 1986) can produce positive feelings, partly due to uncertainty reduction and the reduction of threat and anxiety, with contact leading to greater understanding of the differences within the outgroup, and greater empathy and lower anxiety.

A key conclusion from the meta-analysis is that prejudice is reduced by affective mediators, such as being able to empathise and take the outgroup perspective, reductions in feelings in intergroup anxiety prompted by 'feelings of threat and uncertainty ... [which] grow out of concerns about how they should act, how they might be perceived, and whether they will be accepted (Stephan & Stephan, 1985)' (2008: 190), rather than by increased knowledge (cognitive mediator) about the outgroup (Byram 1997: 35).

In addition to the contact hypothesis, various models can be used to help understand interactions between people from different cultures. One such model, which is increasingly used to gain a perspective on intercultural encounters (Byram, 2003; Van Oord, 2008), is social identity theory (Tajfel 1974), defined as an individual's efforts to 'achieve a satisfactory concept or image of himself', with social identity defined as 'that part of an individual's self-concept which derives from his knowledge of his membership of

a social group (or groups) together with the emotional significance attached to that membership' (Tajfel 1974: 69).

According to Van Oord 'intercultural encounters hardly differ from what social psychologists call 'intergroup encounters'' (2008: 131). It can be helpful to consider intercultural encounters from this more general perspective, since some cultural commentators, for example Kwame Athony Appia (2005: 117) and Amartya Sen (2006: 122), claim the influence of culture is often overstated, and is one among many issues influencing people's lives and identities (Van Oord 2008: 132; Byram 1997: 21).

Furthermore, Van Oord argues that by adopting the social identity theory perspective, the tendency to view cultural differences as 'fundamentally problematic ... cultural differences are a nuisance at best and often a disaster' (Hofstede 1986: 303 in Van Oord 2008: 144), which can then become 'a self-fulfilling prophecy, in which we confirm existing prejudice more than we counter it' (Van Oord 2008: 144) can be avoided.

From the social identity theory perspective, interaction is both on an interpersonal and intergroup level. Interpersonal differences concern how we view people as individuals (how 'like me' someone is), intergroup differences concern how we view people according to the groups they belong to, and how those groups (outgroups) differ from the group or groups I belong to (the ingroup), with some groups appearing more different than others (Van Oord 2008: 136). Individuals aim for a positive self-image, related to positive feelings towards their individual as well as their group or social identity.

In addition to the presence of other groups highlighting group identity (Sen Gupta 2003: 166), individuals are more likely to act as group members when 'conditions ... increase the salience of group membership' (Tajfel 1974: 88). Relevant to the current research, intergroup interaction becomes most salient when faced with obvious markers of group identity, such as the use of a different language, which emphasises difference, and the lack of native speaker command of one group's language marking an individual out as a member of another group (Byram 2003: 56). That such differences might lead to difficulties in intergroup interaction is supported by the tendency to view the norms which govern group behaviour to be 'natural' rather than cultural artefacts (Alred *et al.* 2003: 4) and by the notion of 'cultural security', which 'relates to being "one of us" and differences

relating to “physical appearance, language, religion, [and] cultural practices” can often create mistrust’ (Graham 2000: 197 in Forbes-Mewett & Nyland 2008: 184).

Some of the strategies that encourage a strong group identity, such as competition between groups and ‘holding negative feelings against other groups (Van Oord 2008: 137), which can enhance ‘self-esteem as well as maintaining adherence to the group’ (Sen Gupta 2003: 166) can serve to discourage positive relations with individuals from outgroups, with experimental research indicating that people prefer those who are more ‘like’ them, even when these similarities are fairly trivial (Tajfel 1974: 72). Indeed, some would argue that identity politics’ prime concern is expressing the inferiority or superiority of certain groups and therefore members of those groups, which can lead to damage to an individual or a group’s self-image (see Bredella 2003: 41). The process of creating and labelling out-groups has been termed ‘Othering ... It can be defined as constructing, or imagining, a demonized image of ‘them’, or the Other, which supports an idealized image of ‘us’, or the Self’ (Holliday 2011: 69). In addition, there is a well-cited ‘positivity bias’, which leads to favourable distinctions between in-groups and other groups (Sen Gupta 2003: 166), including a tendency to ‘attribute positive characteristics to the in-group’ and ‘to attribute positive factors about oneself to personal factors, but about people from the other group, or culture, to situational factors, and vice versa in the case of negative factors’ (Allan 2003: 97), and in-groups may also be considered to be morally superior and more trustworthy (Brewer, 1986 in Sen Gupta 2003: 166). Due to lower levels of knowledge of out-groups, interaction prompts greater anxiety, which according to integrated threat theory ‘is seen as the fundamental cause for negative coalition between ‘in’ and ‘out’ groups. As threats are experienced, individuals tend to rely more heavily on stereotypes, and express more negative emotions and evaluations (Stephan, Stephan & Gudykunst, 1999)’ (Fritz *et al.* 2008: 245), as a result, outgroups are subject to more superficial and stereotyped assessment, and considered more homogenous (Sen Gupta 2003: 165-166).

In the intercultural experience, in trying to understand how a culture works and how individuals fit collectively in that culture, there is a risk of downplaying social and interpersonal differences. In a social encounter, ‘participants attribute characteristics and identities to each other (Tajfel, 1981). In an encounter between people from different countries, one of the initial attributions is usually, though not always, that of national identity’ (Byram 1997: 40). As a result, there may be a temptation to view an individual ‘as

a *representative* of his/her culture and as such become interchangeable ... there may be developed a 'general national portrait, a national 'temperament', a dominant 'character' culturally defined.' (Papatsiba 2006: 112-113), students may find themselves stereotyping others, even though they try not to (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 495-496). Indeed, overseas students themselves may find their own culture being brought into focus, being viewed by others as representatives of their cultures, and this can lead to their own national identity being reinforced, particularly stereotyped and generalised images of their culture. Students may feel they have to defend their home country and culture, and possibly even their government and act as 'an ambassador' for it (Papatsiba 2006: 126-127).

In order to overcome this tendency 'intimate rather than casual contact for attitudinal change (Gudykunst, 1979) and change of cognitive maps (Yum, 1988)' has been emphasised, and supported by empirical research (Papatsiba 2006: 117; Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 112), and indeed this intimate contact can lead students to go past stereotyping and treat friends as individuals, 'not as *a representative of one's culture*. The interaction became first and foremost interindividual and interpersonal' (Papatsiba 2006: 126, emphasis in original). Referring back to integrated threat theory, as individuals get to know each other better, anxiety decreases.

The potential positive impact of stereotyping is reported by Bond (1986), who suggests that for the Chinese and American exchange students studied in Hong Kong, stereotyping helped these groups in negotiating relations with each other (Ward 2005: 24). However, even in these circumstances previously held stereotypes can influence relationship development, positive stereotypes serving to encourage, negative stereotypes to limit (Papatsiba 2006: 126; Ryan 2003: 133), and even positive stereotypes can lead to misunderstandings (Byram 1997: 34). The use of theory generation about culture as a coping strategy to deal with uncertainty and the challenge of new environments or interacting with people from other cultures has been noted, albeit that it can be potentially counter-productive if it leads to erroneous generalisations based on limited evidence (Holliday 2011: 65).

According to Gurin and Nagda, Tajfel argues that being a member of a group which is viewed positively leads to remaining in that group, although they may not be aware of their

group identity, whereas those who find themselves in groups which are less powerful or are viewed more negatively, can lead to the desire to leave the group or develop “group consciousness” or “solidarity”, reinforcing group bonds, and potentially ‘reinterpreting negative stereotypes as positive’ (2006: 21). This can result in organisations focusing on ethnic identities, such as cultural societies, which it is argued ‘help the students support each other’.

Individuals remain group members when group membership contributes to their positive self-image, and may seek to change or add group membership in order to increase positive self-esteem (Tajfel 1974: 69). Individuals may wish to move between groups, or be members of several groups. In terms of leaving a group, for those who are members of so-called ‘inferior’ groups, this may be problematic if this leads to a conflict of values and/or fear of sanctions from group members. In addition to ascribing to the values and cultures of a group, others also have to recognise an individual as a member of the group (Byram 2003: 51).

In terms of positive interpersonal relations, ‘respect, a sense of perspective and humour are often the ingredients that will reduce existing tensions and will make interpersonal interaction work’ (Van Oord 2008: 136), although we will see later how ‘humour’ can also cause cultural misunderstanding.

An advantage of utilising a social identity perspective is that this approach focuses both on the individual and the group level, so can assist in considering how individuals perceive their experience from both perspectives. In the next section we will consider the research which has been carried out using social identity theory in higher education.

### **2.1.2 Investigating student interaction**

Much of the research which has considered intercultural interaction according to a social identity theory perspective has been carried out in the United States, which contributes to the difficulties in generalising findings. Sidanius *et al.* (2004) report a large scale telephone and questionnaire interview research project carried out at UCLA in the late 90s which found that in terms of student organisations, fraternities and sororities ‘appeared to produce even more ethnocentric, conflict-inducing, and exclusionary effects than

membership in ethnic student organisations produced among minority students', while having a slightly positive effect for ethnic minority students (2004: 107).

The applicability of these results to the UK context is unclear, since the main categorisation made is by ethnicity rather than national origin, and also given the significantly different situation regarding race relations in both countries. Nor are fraternities and sororities the same as residential colleges, though similarities may occur through the sense of community and belonging and common identity.

An 'intergroup dialogue' perspective was adopted to address intergroup prejudice by Gurin & Nagda (2006), involving facilitating individual contact with out-group members through such means as arranging seating alphabetically and assigning flatmates randomly (2006: 20). This assumes a reasonably equal alphabetical distribution of surnames, and would therefore be difficult to replicate with a large group of students who have a small number of surnames (e.g. Li, Wang, Yang, Zhang). Gurin & Nagda also suggest, based on the work of Gaertner & Dovidio (2000) the creation of a 'common in-group identity' for example by creating common symbols for the new group (T-shirts, group name, common sports teams), thus de-emphasising different cultural backgrounds, though note this could be viewed by minority groups as assimilation to another majority (2006: 21). In the current research, this creation of a single identity can be seen by the notion of community associated with college membership, the 'naming' of college members, the wearing of college 'stash' (shirts, and other identifying symbols), and membership of various clubs, societies and sports teams. Gurin & Nagda claim that by these means group members view themselves 'as individuals or as part of a newly formed deracialized in-group' (2006: 21). Whether it is possible to 'only' view themselves as members of the new group or as individuals is questionable, which Gurin & Nagda acknowledge, suggesting retention of the original group identity in addition to membership of the new group, which they term a *dual identity model* (Gaertner & Dovidio 2000).

'Acquaintance potential (Cook, 1962, 1978)' (Van Laar *et al.* 2005: 330) has been found to be a significant factor in reducing prejudice, and consists of 'two elements: affective ties and the opportunity to learn about outgroup members', in other words contact reduces prejudice 'when it generates positive affect, empathy, and/or friendship', shows 'previously unnoticed similarities' and 'counter-stereotypic characteristics and behaviours', with the

greatest effect found on individuals from high status majority groups (see Pettigrew and Tropp in Van Laar *et al.* 2005: 330). Thus Van Laar *et al.* suggest that a university hall of residence provides an ideal opportunity to assess the contact hypothesis, since it fulfils many of the necessary conditions, including equal status, the need to cooperate to live harmoniously, living together and taking part in activities. These contribute to *high acquaintance potential*, and institutional support for intercultural interaction is likely to be available (see also Kudo & Simkin 2003: 109). Therefore research carried out in the residential context is the next topic covered.

### **2.1.3 Student residences**

Accommodation has two facets, 'as a personal refuge offering security and as the locus of interpersonal relationships, a basis for social relations' (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 105). For some students, one or other of these considerations may prove primary; for some students, choosing residential accommodation with co-nationals students may be an effective strategy for dealing with feelings of loneliness (Sawir *et al.* 2009: 167). In terms of intercultural interaction, the tendency for many institutions to accommodate international students separately from host country students is noted by some as a barrier to interaction and friendship formation (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 503; Dunne 2009: 229; Papatsiba 2006: 122), and can lead to social isolation (Robertson *et al.* 2000: 94).

Where host country and international students have been accommodated together, there is some evidence of increased interaction. The need for students to be proactive in seeking out intercultural interaction is noted by Kudo & Simkin, who found that the Japanese students studying in Melbourne they interviewed relied on casual encounters in residence or class to try to build friendships (2003: 98). They recommend taking advantage of the opportunities presented by the residential environment to overcome stereotypical views of each other by learning about each other, finding out if they shared hobbies or interests and mixing with each others' friendship network.

Other residential research carried out in the USA, concentrating on the first 15 days of shared residence, found that effort involved in 'interracial interactions' was 'cognitively exhausting' and 'often strained and awkward' and that as a result intimacy-building behaviour with someone from another race or culture might not be sustained, in particular for Whites, who may be less used to interaction with ethnic minorities, and therefore more

anxious, with evidence cited from several US studies (Phelps *et al.*, 1998, Van Laar *et al.*, 2005 and Towles-Schwen & Fazio, 2006) to support this view (Trail *et al.* 2009: 673). Trail *et al.* also suggest that 'ethnic minorities may be more accurate about their White roommates' behaviors because low-status people are interpersonally more sensitive and attentive to high-status people during interactions (Fribley, Blackstone, & Scherbaum, 1990)'.

In the study carried out at UCLA mentioned previously, Van Laar *et al.* found that living with members of out-groups had a greater impact for some ethnic groups than others in reducing prejudice and increasing affective mediators and perceptions of intercultural communication ability, with the effect strongest for black and Latino students (2005: 341-342). On the other hand, some pairings actually appeared to increase prejudice to other out-groups (White and Black students paired with Asian American roommates), suggesting a difference between how closely groups meet the conditions of the contact hypothesis (2005: 342). As was reported in Pettigrew & Tropps' meta-analysis, Van Laar *et al.* found that feelings (affective mediators) were more likely to change than cognitive or behavioural factors, suggesting this may be because students become close to their roommates, so view their characteristics as individual, or see them as atypical of their ethnic group, thus are not prompted to reflect on their view of the community or culture as a whole (2005: 342). Van Laar *et al.* acknowledge the possibility that respondents are trying to create a favourable impression in their responses, but contend that the consistency of findings, and the possible effects of cognitive dissonance leading to genuine change, suggest otherwise.

The study with most in common with the current research concerns a questionnaire study of an intervention programme carried out in Australia with Australian and international (mainly Chinese) students, reported on by Todd & Nesdale (1997). They investigated the effect of living in a mixed residential college, although it should be noted the current research did not include any interventions adopted solely for the purpose of the research, focusing instead on activities and features already in place, and was carried out with students who were older than those in the Todd & Nesdale study, who were first year undergraduates. Todd & Nesdale express concerns that previous research on the contact hypothesis is artificial and of questionable validity and contend that a residential college most closely meets the demands of external validity in assessing the contact hypothesis, and is a relevant way of assessing the contact hypothesis. They give three reasons; that



residential colleges constitute 'mini-societies', students in residence for one year and with yearly turnover, little prior contact among the student body; existing membership of social groups (Australian host country and mostly Chinese overseas), permitting the 'opportunity to examine the interaction (or not) of two broad groups of people that are culturally, linguistically and physically dissimilar, with the members of one group being part of the cultural majority', noting that

Considerably less support for the contact hypothesis has been revealed when the group members belong to culturally dissimilar groups, especially when the members of one group belonged to the cultural majority (e.g. Mitchell, 1968; Amir, 1976; Ray, 1980, 1983; O'Driscoll *et al.*, 1983). Indeed overseas research has revealed that the members of such groups feel threatened by the presence of minority cultural group members, and are reluctant to engage in contact with them (e.g. Fossett & Kiecolt, 1969; Wellman, 1977). Consistent with this finding are Australian data indicating that Australian students express considerably less interest in interacting with international students, than vice versa (Nesdale & Todd, 1993).

Finally, it is asserted that contact outside the residential college can give an indication of how contact within the college setting influences behaviour in other settings (Todd & Nesdale 1997: 64-65).

Todd & Nesdale compared the attitudes of international and host country students to intercultural contact and awareness in the intervention college with the control college. The intervention took place within the induction programme, college tutorials and in floor groups, the students having been equally mixed on each floor. Floor group activities were organised by the resident leaders on each floor, who were briefed on the importance of activities which would be of interest to international and Home students, and would involve cooperation and interaction. Resident tutors also received training in the aims of the project. Floor group leaders in the intervention college shared with residents the importance of developing intercultural contact and received their support (1997: 66-67).

Results indicated that the Home students in the intervention college believed they had experienced a substantially higher amount of intercultural contact in the residence and in

the university in general than either Australian students in the control college or international students in either college, and claimed a higher level of intercultural knowledge. Similarly, Australian students in the intervention college gave a higher importance to having intercultural friendships and claimed greater success in doing so, with no difference for international students in either college. International students in both colleges showed more interest in taking part in activities which would promote intercultural contact than Australian students in each college, though Australian students in the intervention college showed more interest than Australian students in the control college (1997: 68-69).

Todd & Nesdale claim support for the contact hypothesis among students in the intervention college, and in particular note the effect of the intervention on Home students, stating this 'represents a considerable achievement since, as noted above, facilitating intercultural contact, knowledge and acceptance in members of the dominant cultural group is notoriously difficult' (1997: 71). The success of the intervention with home students is ascribed to the close connection to the students' everyday life and the commitment of students and staff to going beyond the simpler option of developing solely co-national friends. Concerning the control college, they note the need for 'more proactive interventions' in addition to the conditions usually cited in order for the contact hypothesis to have any success.

Regarding international students, they suggest three reasons why little effect was evident, all of which they dismiss: lower commitment to intercultural interaction; that 'contact' was interpreted differently; and there was a problem with the intervention, for example the lack of overseas students among college tutors and floor group leaders meaning a lack of role models for international students. They conclude that facilitating intercultural interaction is extremely difficult, and that international students are often reluctant to adopt leadership positions in a mixed group.

However, it is unclear why Todd & Nesdale dismiss the above explanations. It is entirely possible that international students expected a higher level of interaction and friendship from their Australian peers than the Australian students expected, and were disappointed with the extent of the relationships that developed, whereas the Australian students may have had very limited expectations of intercultural friendship. In addition, it may be that

the Australian students were equating their awareness of the presence of international students in their residence with intercultural contact (see Halualani 2008, section 2.3.3), and were providing the answers that were thought desirable. As to the lack of role models for international students, the interventions designed by the Australian leaders may have represented a 'western' view of international and intercultural activities (see Allan 2002: 75). Furthermore, the Australian students in the study are likely to have experienced less cultural dissonance in adjusting to their environment (Allan 2002: 75; Allan 2003: 98).

Having considered interaction in residences, going beyond interaction to friendship is the next topic to be considered.

## **2.2 Friendship**

Friendships among home and international students has been the subject of research for some time. Bochner, McLeod & Lin (1977) conducted research on students in Hawaii, asking about their 5 best friends and the 5 people they spent most time with. Bochner *et al.* note that overseas students 'are under considerable pressure to maintain and rehearse their national and cultural identity', and that this pressure comes from the student themselves adopting this as a coping strategy to deal with a lack of security, other students of the same nationality exerting pressure not to become "too westernized", i.e. from becoming too involved in the life of the host country', and the expectations of home students, who may view overseas students 'as representatives of their culture (Bochner, 1972)'. They note that the absence of rewards or sanctions would most likely lead to the prevalence of co-national friendships, and suggest the influence of 'primary socialization' can be seen in the draw towards co-national friendships over multicultural, summarising that 'This model can reconcile the often made observation that overseas students "stick to their own kind" (Miller, Yeh, Alexander, Klein, Tseng, Workneh and Chu, 1971)' (1977: 280). Similar research was carried out in Oxford (reported in Bochner, Hutnik & Furnham 1985) which produced comparable results, reporting the prevalence of co-national friendships among host country and overseas students, the latter creating 'a vicious circle because the lack of English friends reduced the sojourner's opportunities for learning those cultural skills that might facilitate entry into local society thus rendering it even more inaccessible (Bochner, 1982)' (1985: 692-693). An acknowledged limitation of both research projects is the small number of students surveyed (30/23 overseas and 6 US, 9 UK students).

Bochner *et al.* conclude that

The functional model of the social psychology of the academic sojourn states that foreign students will be members of three distinct interpersonal networks. Their primary network is mono-cultural, and consists of bonds between compatriots. The main function of the co-national network is to provide a setting in which ethnic and cultural values can be rehearsed and *expressed*. The secondary network of foreign students is bi-cultural, and consists of bonds with host nationals. The main function of this network is to *instrumentally* facilitate the academic and professional aspirations of the sojourner. A third and much less salient network is the foreign student's multicultural circle of friends and acquaintances. The main function of this network is to provide companionship for *recreational*, non-culture and non-task oriented activities. (1977: 291-292, emphasis in original)

Bochner *et al.* conclude that co-national friendships are very important to overseas students, and should not be 'sneered at', instead utilised as a means to develop more host country or other country friends. Further research, discussed below, which has been carried out into overseas students' friendship patterns tends to support Bochner *et al.*'s findings.

### **2.2.1 Co-national friendships**

Co-national friendship, both in the host culture and through continued contact back home, has been found to have a number of functions: the provision of support and emotional stability (Ayano 2006: 22; Brown 2009a: 447; Gill 2007: 174; Yen & Stevens 2004: 304; Pearson-Evans 2006: 43; Katsara 2004: 84), support in dealing with feelings of loneliness (Sawir *et al.* 2008: 155), 'reassurance of sameness in a diverse community (Brown 2009b: 187; Papatsiba 2008: 120), to 'replace the social capital' overseas students have lost in moving to a new culture, by providing 'psychological encouragement', and by sharing a similar experience can lead to closer friendships (Gu *et al.* 2010: 16). International students may use the co-national network to counteract culture shock, to feel a sense of belonging and security (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland 2008: 186), and in order to assuage 'cultural loneliness', 'triggered by the absence of the preferred cultural and/or linguistic environment' (Sawir *et al.* 2008: 171). As regards language, the co-national network can provide a break from the demands and exhaustion of communicating in the host language,

helping students feel more at home, particularly through the familiarity created by the use of shared language (Brown 2009b: 188; Sawir *et al.* 2009: 165). Indeed 'communication with co-nationals, resting on the identity of language and culture, provided a basis for emotional closeness and support' (Papatsiba 2006: 123). In addition, friendship with co-nationals can provide information on and orientation to the new culture (Gill 2007: 174; Pearson-Evans 2006: 44; Major 2005: 92), and may be particularly important initially by providing a secure base for interaction with others (Katsara 2004: 87; Alred & Byram 2006: 217; Pearson-Evans 2006: 42), by providing 'confidence for encounters and interactions that are less reassuring and require more initiative and personal effort' (Papatsiba 2006: 123). Co-national friends can also provide academic support, which may not occur to the same degree with host country students (Montgomery & McDowell 2009: 458-463; Gill 2007: 174; also reported by host students, Dunne 2009: 226).

Some research suggests that students may ascribe their reliance on co-national friends to factors which are linked to their home culture. Brown (2009) and Ayano (2006) both report that the 'collectivist' cultures of the Asian students investigated put pressure on them to conform to group norms. The students reported that they were aware they were only temporarily outside of their home culture, and of sanctions for non-conformist behaviour (Brown 2009b: 191). Ayano similarly reports that Japanese students with British friends in the UK were considered to have broken a 'taboo', which could lead to jealousy and exclusion (2006: 25-26). However, close friendships when overseas also occur between students from western cultures. Pearson-Evans analysed the diaries of Irish exchange students in Japan, and found that through the co-national network:

exploring the new culture together turned a potentially threatening experience into an adventure; when homesick it helped to know others felt the same. When overwhelmed by difference, they could create a familiar social life within a more exotic setting, and had no need to deal with the real Japan. The danger inherent in this group was that its reinforcement of Irish values and pressure to spend time together discouraged adjustment to Japan. The Irish 'in-group' encouraged superior and negative attitudes towards their host 'out-group' (Barth 1994). (2006: 44)

Similar to Brown (2009) and Ayano (2006), the Irish students sought and found support within their co-national network, in the *gaijin* (foreigner) community, with only a limited number attempting to enter host networks. Pressure to conform to stereotypes had the potential to limit the possibilities for interaction and acceptance within the Japanese host community (2006: 45), and they reported that interacting with Japanese could lead to negative reactions from the Irish network (2006: 44). Considering these findings from the social identity theory perspective could shed some light on the intergroup interaction perspective – rather than co-national friendship being a function of collectivist cultures, it may be a reaction to intergroup differences being sharply brought into focus by residence overseas, as well as seeking security from in-group members.

Among co-nationals, common activities provide an opportunity for reinforcing cultural identity. Bochner *et al.* found the most common shared activity with co-nationals was cooking (70% preference), followed by shopping (mainly for food), then emotional support, then sport, particularly sport most associated with an ethnic group. The importance of food has been suggested to reach ‘far beyond the merely nutritional aspect of eating. Particularly in an alien environment, cooking ethnic food provides the social setting for the rehearsal and affirmation of cultural identity and national loyalties’ (1977: 290), ‘food has been shown to be of central importance in creating and maintaining social relations, both within and between cultures, and food preferences to be intimately connected with individual, group and national identity (Bourdieu, 1986; Fischler, 1988)’ (Pearson-Evans 2006: 46). Pearson-Evans found that Irish students in Japan used food as a way of controlling their sense of alienation from the environment, and that their changing food preferences indicated degrees of adjustment and adaptation to the host culture (see Bourdieu 1986) (see also Jackson 2006: 143).

The disadvantages of co-national friendships have also been reported. Students with a higher number of host national friends have been found to have higher satisfaction levels, to be better adjusted (Snow Andrade 2006: 136) and suffer less from homesickness, with students with higher numbers of co-national friends having lower satisfaction levels and feeling less socially connected. This may indicate that students who are ‘more satisfied, content, less homesick, and connected ... are better at making host national friends’ (Henrickson, Rosen & Aune 2010: 10-11). Other negative aspects to co-national friendship include the feeling of obligation to co-nationals, or a focus on ‘gossip ... and degrees of

undesirable assimilation (Tijoe, 1972)' (Gareis 2000: 70), and concern over potential for exclusion from the co-national group (Ayana 2006: 25), and possibly a reluctance to speak English to others in the group in case of being labelled a 'show-off' (Jackson 2006: 147). As noted above, the co-national network has the potential to limit interaction with host nationals and adjustment to the new culture, and can become 'an end in itself' (Pearson-Evans 2006: 42-3). Some students may also worry that if they become too adjusted to the new environment, they will be faced with readjusting once they return home (Pearson-Evans 2006: 43; Murphy-Lejeune 2009: 112).

### **2.2.2 Challenges in friendship across cultures**

Difficulties in engaging and developing friendships cross culturally can have a number of causes. As Murphy-Lejeune comments 'The sheer force of an unmediated holistic contact, particularly with linguistic otherness, must not be underestimated' (2003: 101). In addition to factors such as loneliness through being removed from existing social networks, age, being away from home for the first time, and a lack of institutional support for PhD students (Sawir *et al.* 2008: 160, 163), these difficulties can be summarised as revolving around language and culture, looking for and making assumptions about similarity, and perceived and actual attitudes of host country students.

In a vicious circle, an actual or perceived lack of English language ability, or confidence in its use, has been found to limit the opportunities for interaction, which then limits the opportunity for language development, and opportunities to make friends with host country students – something overseas students are aware of, but find difficult to avoid (Brown 2009b: 184; Campbell & Li 2008: 380; Snow Andrade 2006: 131; Gill 2007: 172; Katsara 2004: 85; Yen & Stevens 2004: 302; Novera 2004: 479; Ayano 2006: 20; see Trice 2007: 112 for teaching staff's similar views). What may be attributed to 'cultural reticence', may in fact reflect uncertainty over language ability and the effort of listening in another language (Robertson *et al.* 2000: 99), or simply not knowing what to say (Yen & Stevens 2004: 306). While 'a different language can lead to a different way of expressing oneself, and indeed experiencing oneself', (Alred 2003: 24), second language learners may feel a threat to their identity through their lack of ability to express themselves clearly, and consequently difficulty in speaking at all (Harder 1980: 269, in Alred 2003: 22).

The effect of language problems may be to cast non-native speakers in the position of lacking power and status and therefore marginalised (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 104), due to the lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu 1991 in Pearson-Evans 2006: 49) which language ability confers. Language ability has also been found to be used by UK students as an indication of cultural similarity, with students with better English language skills, who tended to be from other English speaking countries, Europe or Latin America, seen as being culturally similar, and more outgoing, therefore more likely to be easier to socialise with, and students with lower levels of English language skills seen as requiring a much greater degree of effort to converse with, more introverted, and labelled as 'distant, unfriendly, quiet, rude or arrogant' (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 490-491).

In addition, since language gives information about an individual's personality and 'plays a pivotal role in the social construction of identity' (Grimshaw & Sears 2008: 266), 'poor linguistic ability undermines effective self-presentation and can lead to avoidance of the host language' (Pellegrino Aveni 2005, in Brown 2009b: 188), and limits self-expression, even among those with good host language skills. As a result, a positive self-image in a student's first language may not be transferred to a second language, if the person is

unable to articulate their thoughts or desires effectively in the second language. They are unable to joke, they lack finesse when expressing their feelings and they cannot respond effectively to being patronised. The sense of disempowerment and frustration leads them to feel that their 'real self' is being lost and that a 'false persona' is being imposed upon them by the host culture. (Grimshaw & Sears 2008: 268). (see also Brown & Holloway 2008: 239; Allan 2002: 76; Henderson 2009: 402; Yen & Stevens 2004: 302; Pearson-Evans 2006: 51)

Among students with good host language skills, they can find themselves in 'an ambiguous realm where neither host nor guest was clear what extent of fluency had been attained', and if their proficiency was over-estimated, this could lead to the impression of intended slights, rather than linguistic error (Pearson-Evans 2006: 52).

The use of another language by overseas students among themselves has been reported by host country students as 'making a division, creating a barrier between themselves and others' (Henderson 2009: 407; Peacock & Harrison 2009: 490). Pearson-Evans notes how



Irish students in Japan, although none were fluent Irish speakers 'saw their choice of language code in Japan as an 'act of identity' (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985) and power (Bourdieu, 1991). ... 'an 'in-group' code, students used Irish to create privacy and power' (2006: 50).

The definition of 'friend' in different languages can also lead to confusion. Gareis (2000), reporting on interview research with German students in the US, found that the different definitions of '*friend*' compared to '*Freund*', could cause confusion, the former in the US referring to acquaintances, the latter in German referring to close friends (2000: 86). For Gareis, this reflects the differences in private and public layers of personality between the US and Germany, claiming that 'in the US, all but the central innermost layer are public domain, but in Germany only the outermost first layer is considered such', which can lead to confusions on both sides. Germans may initially appear cold and unfriendly, but acquaintances quickly pass to the 'private core of the German personality' to a 'vast area of friendship potential with a gradual and now unrestricted transition from friendliness to warmth', while for Americans, initial friendliness may go no further, and contact is based more on activities and less on in-depth conversations, characterised by 'weak ingroup/outgroup boundaries' (Gareis 2000: 69). Gareis claims that many European and Asian cultures are similar to the German model (2000: 86; see also Kim 2007: 182 who reports similar findings with Korean students in the US). It has also been suggested that the looser ties between individuals in individualistic cultures mean that it is necessary for people to make more of an effort to form and maintain friendships, learn how to make small talk, compared to collectivist cultures where friendship is linked to social networks and the maintenance of harmony, therefore individuals from collectivist societies may have less developed skills in friendship formation and maintenance (Trice 2007: 115).

The challenge to a student's identity if they experience adjustment difficulties has also been suggested to lead to dependence on the co-national network. Spindler's (1987, 2000) cultural therapy model suggests adjustment difficulties could result in overseas students experiencing a deficiency in their concept of self if they fail to adjust. From this perspective, the co-national network operates as cultural therapy in order to reassure the endangered self that the enduring self, faced with overwhelming information and expectations in an unfamiliar environment, is not incompetent by providing support in coping with a different

education system and different expectations, and therefore permits the situated self to adjust to the new environment (Major 2005: 89).

Host country students can also feel their identity has been limited by the need to adapt language use for overseas students (Dunne 2009: 233). In addition, the knowledge of a society's values and norms related to language are considered important (Gu *et al.* 2010: 16), as are cultural and humour references and topics of conversation (Novera 2004: 483; Peacock & Harrison 2009: 499; Dunne 2009: 232). Although host country students may choose their words, language and cultural references carefully when interacting with overseas students, indicating a degree of cultural awareness, this may have the unfortunate consequence that host country students find interacting, particularly with non-native speakers, to require significant amounts of concentration and effort, to the point of strain, and therefore disengagement (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 495).

On the part of host country students, many may be perceived to lack the necessary skills, interest or preparedness to make the effort to adapt their language to non-native speakers (Brown 2009a: 443-444; Leask 2009: 206), which can also lead to the perception of lack of interest on the part of host country students (Leask 2009: 214; Kudo & Simkin 109), who may appear to withdraw 'into a segregated group in an attempt to avoid cross-national interaction' (Brown 2009a: 444; see also Ayano 2006: 19; Holmes 2006: 26; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland 2008: 194; Barron 2007: 90; Kingston & Forland 2008: 212; Major 2005: 91; Katsara 2004: 84; Yen & Stevens 2004: 303; Trice 2007: 113), be unwilling to engage in short-term friendships (Papatsiba 2006: 125) or be seen to lack interest in global issues (Lunn 2008: 237). From the perspective of the host country students, they may also think there are already too many international students on campus, or that their educational experience is negatively affected (Barron 2006: 11; Henderson 2009: 403; Peacock & Harrison 2009: 492-493), or find international students difficult to talk to due to differences in language and culture (Leask 2009: 214). In addition, while host country students may have respect for and empathise with the challenges overseas students face in coping in an unfamiliar environment (Henderson 2009: 403; Peacock & Harrison 2009: 490), recognise in principle the value of intercultural interaction (Leask 2009: 214) and view overseas students as an opportunity to learn more about other cultures, they have been found not to see the presence of international students on campus as bringing new friendship

opportunities (Barron 2006: 11), or to report much incidence of intercultural interaction in practice (Leask 2009: 214).

Among perceptions of difference, Peacock & Harrison found that host country students viewed international students to be different in terms of age and maturity and academic orientation, and also believed that most overseas students, particularly those from the Far East, did not share the UK drinking culture (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 496; Dunne 2009: 227; see Ujitani & Volet 2008: 292; Novera 2004: 483; Katsara 2004: 84 for overseas' students perspective), considerations which could serve to limit friendship formation. Dunne notes how host country students in Ireland may feel that inviting an overseas student to join a friendship group might be met by a negative response from their existing friendship group, so inhibit cross-cultural friendships from developing (Dunne 2009: 229). Similarly, Peacock & Harrison report concern by home students that if they encouraged their overseas peers to socialise, they may be required to give them more attention, explain cultural referents and humour references, or the overseas students may feel pressured into behaving in ways they would not feel comfortable with. The use of humour would often create a barrier between host country and overseas students, as did references to host country popular culture (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 496-499; Dunne 2009: 232).

The tendency for many overseas students to socialise privately, rather than publicly (Dunne 2009: 231), thus creating another barrier to interaction, has also been noted. Brown (2009a: 447) found that different nationalities were even physically separate and met in different areas, while Dunne found in addition they sat in different parts of the lecture hall for classes (2009: 226).

While there are undoubtedly many barriers to developing cross cultural friendship, many students are successful in developing a mixed friendship network as they adjust to the host culture (Henrickson *et al.* 2010: 10-11; Gareis 2000: 73; Pearson-Evans 2006: 45); research on how and where this has been achieved is discussed in the next section.

### **2.2.3 Developing friendships cross-culturally**

Cultural difference need not be a barrier to friendship. As contact and exposure to a multicultural environment extends over time and adjustment begins to occur, students

view their friends simply as individuals; cultural difference becomes less salient and personal characteristics and compatibility become more important (Kudo & Simkin 2003: 101-102, 108). The impact of cultural difference diminishes 'once people move to the friendship stage. In this stage, intra- as well as intercultural interactions have a personalistic focus; i.e. each person is treated uniquely, predictions are based on psychological data and cultural stereotypes are broken down. Thus intercultural friendships may be more difficult to initiate but should be fairly similar to intracultural friendship in the maintenance stage' (Gareis 2000: 72).

Among factors which facilitate cross-cultural friendship are stronger English language skills, willingness to vary language by host country students (Kudo & Simkin 2003: 106), confidence in speaking, ability to appropriately disclose personal information and an active communication style, since through spending time talking friendships become closer. Other important factors include being prepared to adjust socially (Katsara 2004: 85), sociability (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 107) being prepared to be outgoing and communicative, (Katsara 2004: 86), which counters perceptions of passivity and weak language ability which are often common about international students, and being very aware of others' reactions (Kudo & Simkin 2003: 102-104; see also Gareis 2000: 73), motivation and the ability to tolerate anxiety due to difficulties in intercultural communication (Brown 2009b: 191) and, importantly, being prepared to take responsibility for developing friendships (Papatsiba 2006: 126; Jackson 2006: 149; Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 107). The host culture adopting an integrationist approach towards other groups evidenced by a lack of pressure to conform has also been found to assist overseas students in friendship formation with host students (Henrickson *et al.* 2010: 11).

While similarity between friends (homophily) is considered important, research has suggested that similarity in attitudes is more significant than similarity in culture (Kim, H.J., 1991, in Gareis 2000: 72; Dimmock & Ong Soon Leong 2010: 33). One area where similarity can become evident is in having similar hobbies and interests. Taking part in shared social activities and sport has been suggested as an important means of encouraging intercultural interaction (Campbell & Li 2008: 386; Peacock & Harrison 2009: 490; Sawir *et al.* 2008: 173; Sakurai 2010: 184), since this 'produces a fraternity based on the discovery of a certain commonness ... Sharing experiences contributes to the emergence of a common history' (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 107-108). The type of social event is important, with factors

including the size of event (smaller being more successful), the ratio of international to host country students (Leask 2009: 214), 'very forced international social events' not gaining favour, and 'low key icebreakers' thought more appropriate, as is the need for institutional support to encourage mixing and cross-cultural friendship formation from early on (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 503), and careful structuring to encourage adjustment and interaction (Leask 2009: 214). A multi-cultural ice-breaker ('bus excursion') which it is claimed assisted students in developing local ties, even though no host country students were involved, is reported by Sakurai (2010). However, while Sakurai states that the participants and non-participants 'were found to have similar background characteristics as well as personality tendencies' (2010: 183), it is not clear whether participation in the excursion 'triggered interests in new experiences and self-efficacy in forming local ties' (ibid) or whether students with these characteristics were more likely to participate.

It should be noted that cross-cultural friendship also applies to the network of international students where friendships may occur. It has been argued that the international student group is more likely to constitute equal contact, due to shared otherness (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 109), although there can also be a tendency for friendship to occur mostly among other overseas students (Papatsiba 2006: 121).

However, some institutions focus on societies and activities aimed at foreign students, which may not encourage integration with host nationals (Papatsiba 2006: 122), since host country students report unwillingness to join societies where the majority of members are overseas students (Dunne 2009: 231). The tendency for overseas students not to participate in the same type of activities as host country students (Robertson *et al.* 2000: 96), the lack of time overseas students may have due to pressure of their studies (Snow Andrade 2006: 140), and consequent low take up of involvement in student associations (Ward 2005: 20; Robertson *et al.* 2000: 96), have all been noted as barriers to engagement through shared activities, as has the tendency for host country students to take on leadership roles, thus creating an unequal relationship (Trice 2007: 113).

As can be appreciated from the complexity of findings concerning international students and their friendship with co-nationals, host nationals and other national students, and the impact of individual differences, personality and interests, the ethnographic interviewing approach can be seen as an appropriate way of investigating and gaining a better

understanding of student experiences in developing friendships in the residential environment.

It could be suggested that singling out one particular nationality for detailed consideration could be considered as treating those students as a homogenous group or stereotyping them. However, given the extent of the discussion of the situation of Chinese students, by non-Chinese and Chinese students alike, literature on this group was sought out in order to gain a better understanding of why this particular nationality of students were labelled as appearing significantly different to others.

#### **2.2.4 Chinese students**

Peacock & Harrison suggest 'there appears to be a specific issue of interaction between UK students and Chinese students. Chinese students were seen to be the most culturally distant, to be the most likely to exhibit self-excluding behaviours, to have the poorest language skills, and to share the fewest cultural reference points' (2009: 507, NB 'Chinese' includes East and South East Asia). It has been suggested that 'maximum distance exists between Western and Eastern cultures, thereby increasing the acculturative stress on the students' (Chen and Chung 1993, in Burnett & Gardner 2006: 66), and that 'across British educational institutions, 'Chinese' or 'East Asian' also represent 'problems' (Reid *et al.* 2009: 4)' (Holliday 2011: 74).

Students from East Asia are reported to find great difficulty in speaking to host national students (Kingston & Forland 2008: 212), partly through fear of losing face if their English language skills are found wanting (Wright & Lander 2003: 247; Zhou & Todman 2009: 481), with cultural references such as understanding jokes a particular issue (Tian & Lowe 2009: 665; Jackson 2006: 146). This difficulty manifests itself both inside and outside the classroom. In the classroom, Chinese students have been found to have difficulty engaging in and learning from group work with host country students (a difficulty it is argued they do not have in the home learning environment, Turner 2006: 29), partly through language, and partly through each group interpreting the activity according to their own cultural norms (Holmes 2006: 28) or through feeling deliberately excluded by host country or proficient native language speaking students (Tian & Lowe 2009: 667-668).

In addition to language level, the number of verbal interactions students from different cultures routinely produce may differ and lead to the impression of passivity on the part of Asian students, as may how each group reacts when in a cross-cultural environment. Holmes suggested that the 'listening-centred' approach to communication of Chinese students contributed to difficulties in group interaction (Holmes 2006: 28). Wright & Lander found South-East Asian students produced much lower levels of interaction in mono-ethnic groups than Australian students in mono-ethnic groups did, with a considerably higher drop among the South East Asian students in multi-ethnic groups (46% compared to 9% for Australian students), which they attribute to students being 'inhibited by the presence of the Australian students' (2003: 247). They concluded that the Australians adopted a dominant position, which may account for why students prefer to learn content in similar culture groups, though of course this would inhibit the possibility for developing intercultural communication skills.

Outside the classroom, some, though infrequent, contact took place, usually through 'international' or 'intercultural' type events, which sometimes 'reinforced a sense of alienation and marginalisation' (Tian & Lowe 2009: 669). Students attended parties, but found it difficult to approach other groups of students, and would often appear passive, not wishing to lose face with people they didn't know (Jackson 2006: 147) leading to groups of students according to nationality sitting in different places (Tian & Lowe 2009: 669; Jackson 2006: 147). While students hoped to engage in intercultural contact, they realised they were 'sticking together' with other Chinese students (Tian & Lowe 2009: 668). In addition, sometimes Chinese students' assumptions or stereotypes about British students' 'unfriendliness, indifference or arrogance' prevented intercultural interaction (Tian & Lowe 2009: 670), which can lead to Chinese students labelling their hosts as prejudiced against Chinese (Jackson 2006: 146). Socialising has been found to be of concern, with finding friends becoming significant after concerns with academic work lessen (Zhou & Todman 2009: 481), and many Chinese students not taking part in UK drinking culture (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 496). Since on many campuses Chinese students are often the biggest and most recognisable group of international students, this can also serve to distance them from other students, as they may be considered to be self-sufficient and not in need of host country friends (Dunne 2009: 231).

Tian & Lowe argue that the impact of this level of alienation can lead Chinese students to blame themselves for their difficulties, though some students become aware of lack of awareness or understanding among many tutors and home students about the difficulties they face. Furthermore, they felt unable to express their unhappiness, which led to withdrawal or feelings of marginalisation, and reliance on co-national peers (2009: 666). Other research found that Chinese students accounted for their alleged lack of participation by claiming this was part of the Chinese character (Jackson 2006: 147).

Reactions to these experiences included persistence, withdrawal, or developing 'an enhanced sense of differentiation along ethnic or national lines that could contribute to reinforced national pride and identity as a means to rebuild self-esteem' (2009: 668). By being proud of being Chinese, they gave themselves back a sense of power and confidence, but in so doing created further distance from host country students (2009: 671).

Chinese students who have found more success in benefiting from the living and learning experience tended to be older, and with previous international or work experience (Turner 2006: 39). Where support and recognition was available, students were able to engage and benefit from the academic culture.

In Tian & Lowe's study, among the very small number of students who had experienced significant intercultural contact, 2 of the 4 were Chinese girls with English boyfriends, and one had reached the position where she found it difficult to engage with Chinese students to any great extent – by preferring to speak English, Chinese students attributed a disengagement from her original culture (Tian & Lowe 2009: 671).

### **2.3 Intercultural Experience**

In this section we focus more specifically on the cultural and intercultural aspects of the study. First, we consider Berry's acculturation model, and the different strategies sojourners and societies may adopt in managing multicultural environments. We then consider the intercultural competence which it is suggested is a possible outcome of intercultural experience, first by defining what it means, then by considering the challenges of developing intercultural competence, what factors have been considered to assist in



developing it, and finally the potential benefits of studying abroad and the intercultural experience.

It has been suggested that

The intercultural experience may be regarded as a specific cultural system with its own values, systems, beliefs and behaviour and, when combined with the criteria mentioned earlier [an individual is actively engaged with cultural material and systems] it is possible to regard participation in an intercultural environment as an acculturative experience. The individual is consciously required to learn new and different ways of being and thinking by virtue of being in a different environment and because of their explicit contact, whether direct or indirect, with other cultural systems. (Sen Gupta 2003: 163)

We therefore start this section by considering the features of acculturation.

### **2.3.1 Acculturation**

Berry defines acculturation as

the dual process of cultural and psychological change that takes place as a result of contact between two or more cultural groups and their individual members. At the group level, it involves changes in social structures and institutions and in cultural practices. At the individual level, it involves changes in a person's behavioural repertoire. ... Acculturation is a process of cultural and psychological changes that involve various forms of mutual accommodation, leading to some longer-term psychological and sociocultural adaptations between both groups. (2005: 698-699)

This definition includes two key elements – that acculturation happens at both the group and the individual level, and that acculturation can be considered as either psychological or sociocultural. Psychological adaptations include changes in behaviour, such as how to speak, what clothes to wear, what and how to eat. Sociocultural adaptations indicate how an individual has become connected to a society, 'for example, in competence in the activities of daily intercultural living' (Berry 2005: 702). These adaptations may involve learning languages, food types and clothes preferences by both groups. Acculturation

strategies consist of two components: 'attitudes (an individual's preference about how to acculturate), and behaviors (a person's actual activities) that are exhibited in day-to-day cultural encounters' (Berry 2005: 704).

For individuals, there are two possible outcomes to acculturation, which can vary to a significant extent between individuals – behavioural shifts, involving adjustments made in behaviour in a mainly straightforward way, leading to a better “fit” in the larger society, and cultural conflict, involving an awareness of lesser or greater amount of difficulty in adjusting, leading to acculturative stress (2005: 707), which manifests itself 'by uncertainty, anxiety, and depression (Berry, 1976)' (2005: 702). Berry suggests that psychological problems are highest at the beginning of new contact then decrease over time, whereas sociocultural adaptation shows a more linear pattern of adaptation (2005: 709; Snow Andrade 2006: 141), and warns against the tendency to “pathologize” the challenges involved in acculturation, due to its roots in psychiatry and clinical psychology, noting that most people who experience acculturation survive it (Berry 2005: 710).

Berry's four well-known and used acculturation strategies revolve around preferences for the maintenance of the heritage culture and contact with the new/wider society, leading to the options of integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation (2005: 704). The larger society will also have a preferred strategy for dealing with smaller groups, these being multiculturalism (integration), melting pot (assimilation), segregation (separation) and exclusion (marginalisation), and this will therefore influence the options available to sojourners. He notes

integration can only be “freely” chosen and successfully pursued by non-dominant groups when the dominant society is open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity. ... This strategy requires the non-dominant groups to adopt the basic values of the larger society, while at the same time the dominant group must be prepared to adapt national institutions ... to better meet the needs of all groups now living together in the plural society. (2005: 705-706)

Berry cites Murphy (1965) that societies which favour a multiculturalist approach provide a more favourable environment for sojourners since there is less pressure on sojourners to assimilate or separate or marginalise, and there is more social support available,

institutionally, and from the minority communities within the larger community (2005: 703). In fact the feeling of security provided by strong co-national support has been linked to promoting positive feelings towards host-nationals (sociocultural adaptation), thus supporting the integrationist strategy (Brisset *et al.* 2010: 423). Relating back to both the contact hypothesis (the features of encouraging equality of status, interdependence and the provision of institutional support) and social identity theory, in terms of reflecting a positive group identity and encouraging the definition of 'one of us' and 'like me' to widen so that group characteristics include characteristics of in-groups and groups previously considered out-groups, are reflected in the integrationist approach.

Individual differences in acculturation vary according to 'personal and situational factors and their interaction', with considerable variation among individuals based on 'biographical, affective, cognitive and circumstantial [elements] ..., motivation, attitudes, anxiety, learning style and strategies, as well as by unpredictable elements such as location, type of accommodation and degrees of contact with native speakers' (Coleman 2004: 583, in Gu, Schweisfurth & Day 2010: 11). Given that adjustment is subjective, what is considered satisfactory adjustment at one point in the year may not be so considered at another, and different individuals may find different levels of adjustment satisfying (Pearson-Evans 2006: 53). Personality factors which impact on acculturation include 'extroversion, openness and conscientiousness [and] agreeableness', which were found in particular to assist students from collectivist societies in adjusting to individualistic societies, particularly at earlier stages of their sojourn (Jang 2010: 365). Degrees of adjustment have been found to be reflected in the varying attraction of the host or home cultures, friends, food or language at different stages in the sojourn (Pearson-Evans 2006: 41).

In research on international students, Brown argues that the 'multicultural approach is widely agreed to be the most relevant to contemporary society, given the implied fostering of the values of tolerance, cultural relativism and respect' (2009b: 196), while Ward reports that integration is the approach most often adopted by sojourners, migrants, etc. (Berry, Kim, Power, Young, & Bujaki, 1989; Berry *et al.* 2006), furthermore, integration is most associated with adaptation, both psychological and socio-cultural (Berry, Kim, Minde, & Mok, 1987; Dona & Berry, 1994; Sam & Berry, 1995; Ward & Kennedy, 1994; Ward & Rana-Deuba, 1999) (Ward 2008: 106). However, it has been noted that 'tolerance' is not an

entirely positive concept since it can simply mean 'to put up with', (in Scots the word 'thole' is still used to convey this negative sense), 'oftentimes, one only tolerates people who are disliked for their differences' (Odora Hoppers 2009: 605), therefore 'tolerance is insufficient because tolerant persons prefer their own beliefs and values to those of the other culture' (Bredella 2003: 232). Furthermore, Poore (2005) suggests that 'in order not to be accused of intolerance, people often refrain from being truly convinced of anything' (Abbot and Ryan, 2000, in Poore 2005: 356).

In addition, it has been suggested that tolerance, even in a positive sense, has its limits, and therefore it becomes necessary 'to criticise the relativistic view that real tolerance must tolerate the intolerable because such a view would lead to the abolition of tolerance in a pluralistic society' (Bredella 2003: 232). Instead, awareness and acceptances of 'the disquieting tension in the intercultural experience' is necessary, in order to avoid 'justifying injustices and humiliations if it forbids us to criticise the beliefs and values of another culture because each culture defines for itself what is rational and humane' (Bredella 2003: 238). Being intercultural therefore means 'to be able to accept the others' beliefs and values, even if we cannot approve of them' (Bredella 2003: 237).

The extent to which host cultures adopt multiculturalist, integrationist strategies in relation to overseas students is called into question, with research (e.g. Smith 1998 in Ward 2006: 26-27) suggesting that overseas students are expected to make the most significant adjustments in terms of acculturation, identity change and development. Whether this is reasonable, given the short time many students spend away from their home culture is open to question, and it could be argued that such an approach or belief implies the cultural superiority of the host culture. Since 'surely one of the aims of studying abroad is to immerse oneself in, and gain experience and knowledge of, another culture, rather than in adopting that culture' (Kingston & Forland 2008: 211), the necessity for overseas student to adjust to aspects which may cause anxiety such as drinking alcohol, or adopting an individualistic culture have been brought into question (Sawir *et al* 2008: 171; Brown & Holloway 2008: 237), and for some 'the differences in values, attitudes and beliefs between home and host cultures were seen as great and coupled with the sense of loss of the familiar (including food) put considerable pressure on the student' (Lewthwaite 1986 in Gu *et al.* 2010: 17). Furthermore, for some students, the option of change to fit the

environment may seem risky, particularly if they are visiting for a short time and then returning to a more homogenous environment (Sen Gupta 2003: 164).

In addition to the perceived risk of change, for some adjusting to another culture can be seen as breaching loyalty to the heritage culture and a threat to cultural diversity, so they are 'suspicious of the intercultural experience because it might lead to new formations and third positions which transcend cultural boundaries' (Bredella 2003: 227). Ethnocentrism may be a more comfortable position, since it 'enhances the self-esteem of the individual ... those who defend ethnocentrism want to save the members of their culture from the experience of insecurity and uncertainty ... described as being a result of intercultural encounters' (Bredella 2003: 226-227). This may particularly be the case for groups who are less well accepted, and may 'experience hostility, rejection, and discrimination, one factor that is predictive of poor long-term adaptation' (Berry 2005: 704), in comparison to students from cultures which are closer to that of the host culture, who find they can adapt more easily (Mehdizadeh & Scott 2005 in Campbell & Li 2008: 376) and are more easily accepted (Ezra 2003: 138).

Rather than acculturation to the host environment, it has been suggested that overseas students are most likely to experience 'a meeting point between different cultures where there is recognition of the manifestation of cultural difference' (Leask 2009: 217), an 'individual and moveable hybrid space' (Burnapp 2006: 91), often known as a 'third place'. This can help develop a 'flexible model of intercultural understanding which allows us to mediate between relativism and ethnocentrism and to develop a third position which transcends the values of the foreign culture and those of our own' (Bredella 2003: 74). This 'third place' it has been argued provides those students who inhabit it with 'a basic position from which to claim a distinctive and advantages outcome, particularly in this rapidly globalising world' (Cannon 2000: 373).

### **2.3.2 Dimensions of Culture**

Much research which has been carried out into intercultural interaction references Hofstede's oft-cited 'dimensions' of culture. Of the four dimensions of culture Hofstede developed (individualism versus collectivism, power distance, uncertainty avoidance and masculinity versus femininity), the aspect of individualism versus collectivism, 'in individualist cultures the individual and their immediate family are of key concern, whereas

in collectivist cultures, the 'in-group' that people are members of, whether through extended family or other significant relationships, which protect in-group members in exchange for permanent loyalty' (Hofstede 1986: 307) is the one most often utilised in interpreting cultural differences in interaction.

There is some research which appears to support Hofstede's contention that individualism versus collectivism is of fundamental concern in intercultural interaction, with influences in friendship formation alluded to before. It is argued that the greater number of ingroups in individualistic societies (Wright and Lander 2003: 239) means each ingroup has less influence on individuals, which in turn means that members of individualistic societies may be more adaptable to varying groups, thus leading to lower interactions in mixed nationality groups for students from collectivist societies, for example South-East Asia (Wright & Lander 2003: 248; Nguyen *et al.* 2006: 6). However, it has also been noted that Australian students (Volet & Ang 1998), US students (Whitt *et al.* 2001, both in Wright & Lander 2003: 248) and UK students (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 503) prefer group work with students who are culturally similar, which suggests alternative or at least additional interpretations concerning whether the key aspect of intercultural interaction is connected to the notion of collectivist versus individualist societies. For example, Wright & Lander also suggest that South-East Asian students may be inhibited from interacting by actual or perceived language difficulties (2003: 248), and that East Asian societies can no longer be entirely accurately characterised as Confucian learning cultures, having developed more 'western' modes of behaviour (Shi, 2004, in Kingston & Forland 2008: 207; Gill 2007: 172).

In addition, Hofstede's categories have been criticised for being portrayed as 'found' and culture free, when it is argued they were derived from psychological research of 50s and 60s USA which the questionnaires Hofstede used to develop his dimensions must (it is asserted) have been based on, and as a product of their time and origin from the head office of IBM in the USA, cannot be other than ethnocentric (Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars 1997: 153), and therefore provide a 'western' view of cultures. For example, Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars note the concern that 'individualistic' US culture demonstrates with groups and team work, arguing that in individualistic societies the origin point is the individual, who then cooperates for the benefit of the group, whereas in collectivist societies the origin point is the group, which then cooperates for the benefit of the individual members (1997: 151), further reinforcing the view that the influence of what

is often labelled cultural differences may be overstated. Indeed challenges to the overgeneralised view of cultures as being homogeneous have been reported in ethnographic studies of communities (Pavelenko & Blackledge 2004: 5).

However, whether 'collectivist' or 'individualist' societies exist in the way Hofstede and others have suggested has been criticised by Holliday (2011) as subscribing to an essentialist view of national culture, which 'presents people's individual behaviour as entirely defined and constrained by the cultures in which they live so that the stereotype becomes the essence of who they are', and as a result '*Others* ... are lumped together as though all the same under a grossly simplistic, exaggerated and homogeneous, imagined, single culture' (2011: 4, 5). Furthermore, Holliday argues that this way of thinking about difference has been naturalised to such an extent that:

The discourse of Othering is so powerful that anyone who does not fit the essentialist definition is thought to be not a 'real' Chinese, Arab, Muslim or whatever; and in the case of non-Western cultures it is thought that they must be 'westernized' to have left their true nature behind. The serious implication here is that people are not allowed to step outside their designated cultural places. (2011: 4-5)

Holliday suggests that not only does this belief confuse westernisation with modernity (2011: 107), but that the dimension of individualism highlights characteristics believed positive in what he refers to as the 'Centre-West', and is therefore 'the projection of a positively imagined Self on a negatively imaged Other' (2011: 10) and cites research which suggests characteristics similar to collectivism have been used to describe low-achieving schoolchildren in the US, and has been associated with western descriptions of totalitarian (non Western) societies (2011: 10).

Notwithstanding these reservations about the use of the terminology of individualism-collectivism, since a number of the interviewees made reference to ideas which implicitly referenced these concepts, these terms have been used to reflect on interviewees comments in the findings chapters.

### 2.3.3 Developing Intercultural Competence

Some key aspects of intercultural competence, highlighted in the introduction (see Bredella 2003: 39), include the need for distance to view one's own and other cultures, the role of context in communication, negotiating between the inside and outside perspective, and the flexibility to start on the journey. To further expand on those characteristics, these include being interested in the 'daily experience' of others, rather than 'collecting experiences of the exotic' (Byram 1997: 91, 50), attitudes such as openness about one's own culture and curiosity about others, being willing to view the world from the point of view of others, feeling comfortable with cultural others (Kymlicka 2003: 157 in Lee 2005: 203), empathy, tolerance of ambiguity, being non-judgemental (Bredella 2003: 228), self-awareness, and learning about oneself as well as others (Cushner & Brislin 1997 in Sen Gupta 2003: 159), 'critical understanding of self and others and the personal limits of individual perceptions and understanding' (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 111); attitudes and knowledge to enable appropriate and effective intercultural communication skills (Deardorff 2006: 238) and the knowledge to 'read' and be able to function in another culture (Heyward 2003: 215); and being able to use strategies to situate oneself and one's identity in a specific cultural environment (Chen & Starosta 1996: 359 in Holmes, 2006:19; Zarate 2003: 215). The value of intercultural competence reflects 'the individual's increased ability to understand difference and to experience a transformation in their self-perception, such that awareness of their own cultural identity is 'un-frozen' and extended in parallel with the increasing awareness of other cultural systems (Lustig & Koestle, 1999)' (Sen Gupta 2003: 167).

These definitions share many characteristics in common – attitudes, knowledge, and learning from interactions. For the purpose of the current research, Deardorff's Delphi study among university administrators and intercultural experts provides a consensus definition. US Administrators rated Byram's (1997) definition of intercultural competence as being most applicable to higher education institutions. These include *savoir être*, attitudes towards and knowledge of self and others; *savoir comprendre*, skills of interpreting and relating; *savior s'engager*, education for cultural awareness ('valuing others' values' Deardorff 2006: 236); and *savoir apprendre/faire*, skills of discovery and interaction ('relativizing one's self' Deardorff 2006: 236) (Byram 1997: 34).



Deardorff proposes a pyramid model of intercultural competence, with attitude at the base, which includes respect, openness and curiosity. The second level consists of knowledge and comprehension, and requisite communication and analytical skills, which leads to the next level up, 'an internal shift in frame of reference', including adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelativism and empathy, enhancing the external appropriate behavioural and communicative outcome (2006: 244-255). Therefore intercultural experience, if it leads to reflection and analysis, can bring 'a heightened awareness' of one's own identities and group identities and how these interact with otherness, leading to a 'sense of communality, of community' (Alred *et al.* 2003: 4), and so lead to

a deeper, more complex, sense of belonging to groups, communities, societies and nationalities. Psychologically, a person's centre shifts, greater competence and comfort in being in-between socially, culturally and internationally is matched by a more profound, tolerant and integrated sense of self. (Alred *et al.* 2003: 5)

Not everything about an individual may be open to change. Those aspects that can be altered include for example being 'half an hour late ... But such modifications mainly concern surface behaviour, behaviour one can switch back and forth' (Paulston 1992, in Byram 2003: 57), making 'a useful distinction between levels: the ability to adapt in behaviour but not necessarily in values and beliefs' (Byram 2003: 57). Individuals may therefore develop 'proficiency in self-expression and in fulfilling their various social needs' in the host culture (Kim 2005: 391), whilst continuing to experience a sense of boundary or 'otherness' when confronted with conflicting values and beliefs' (Gu, Schweisfurth & Day 2010: 11). For others, immersion in another culture may not breach an impermeable skin:

The frogs are happy to jump headlong into the cultural pond and let diversity and difference wash over them. ...The snails, however, carry their houses (their culture) on their back wherever they go, hardly exposing themselves to other cultures at all. (Campbell 1996 in Sanderson 2008: 299)

In particular, it has been suggested that 'students in general and White students in particular (at least in the West) have a difficult time identifying their own cultural connections' (Johnson & Inoue 2003: 254). This is due to members of cultures viewing their culture as 'natural', 'rational', 'superior to others' (Bredella 2003: 226) 'innate ... Even

common sense in our own culture is naturally translated to common sense for the world' (Johnson & Inoue 2003: 257). Through intercultural understanding we 'realise that things which appear irrational and inhumane from our perspective are rational and humane from the others' perspective' (Bredella 2003: 226).

Participants in intercultural encounters may equate the difficulties they are having in communicating with personal difficulties. Instead of realising that their familiar ways of behaving and interacting are not effective, they may attribute difficulties to personal failure, or alternatively view others' behaviour as incorrect or wrong (Weber 2003: 199). Since we are unaware of having undergone a 'primary socialisation' process, we are also unaware of our 'deeply entrenched, automatic behaviour', which 'lays the foundation for our own ethnocentrism and the acquisition of our cultural lenses through which we view the world (Sen Gupta 2003: 161). Therefore in order to learn from the intercultural experience, individuals must be aware of themselves and how they have naturalised their own cultural experience, and be willing to learn about themselves.

As a result, while encountering cultural difference need not be challenging in itself, it becomes so 'when the encounter forces us to evaluate our own fundamental beliefs and values systems' (Sen Gupta 2003: 160). This challenge includes cognitive and affective aspects, including a range of feelings such as fear, anger, anxiety, excitement, relief, the encounter with otherness and new experiences prompting reflection, and possibly 'anger that a deeply held belief may have been challenged' (Sen Gupta 2003: 160). This process can lead to acculturative stress, common features of which include 'feelings of marginality and alienation, identity confusion and heightened psychosomatic symptom levels, high levels of anxiety and depression (Sanua, 1970)' (Sen Gupta 2003: 164).

While negative emotions may not be pleasant to experience, it has been suggested that stress and anxiety are important first steps towards intercultural learning prompting adaptation, and change in perceptions of oneself and others (Gill 2007: 170-171). This 'cultural dissonance', which occurs when people encounter a different culture, 'laws, rules, customs, traditions, ... routine behaviour and habits' (Larcher 1993, in Allan 2003: 91), while necessary for intercultural learning, may also inhibit it. In a study of an international school, Allan found students from majority cultures encountering little cultural dissonance, and so little necessity to question their experience, their culture and that of the school, and

so little change occurred. Conversely, if students experience significantly negative cultural dissonance they 'may often resort to the forming of close same nationality/language/culture groups' (Allan 2003: 98). This is often described as the 'so called 'cultural distance hypothesis', 'the adjustment and coping difficulties of sojourners [that] increase with the distance between the culture of origin and that of the host society (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham 2001: 169 in Forbes-Mewett & Nyland 2008: 200), which states that students from countries that are culturally close/similar to the host country experience less stress and difficulties in adjusting in comparison to students from culturally distant countries' (Chirkov *et al.* 2008: 438).

### **2.3.3 Challenges in intercultural interaction**

Overseas students' dissatisfaction with the low levels of interaction between overseas students and host country students both inside and outside the classroom is frequently noted: among overseas students in Finland (Clarke 2005: 493), Chinese students in New Zealand (Holmes 2006: 28), overseas students in Australia (Robertson *et al.* 2000: 96), in the UK, Australia and New Zealand (Ward 2005: 7-8), international students in the UK (Merrick 2004: 66-70). However, host country students report little interest in interacting with overseas students (Hurtado, Dey & Trevino 1994; Mills 1997, Beaver & Tuck 1998; in Ward 2005: 10; Ayano 2006: 24; Turner 2009: 250), with reluctance to work in culturally mixed groups reported (Volet & Ang 1998), even when host country students had developed more favourable attitudes to culturally mixed groups after experiencing them (Coughlan 1996; Smart, Volet & Ang 2000, all in Ward 2005: 23-24).

From a host student perspective, four main areas which limited intercultural contact were reported by Dunne (2009: 232-234), these being anxiety, effort, language and identity. Anxiety was found partly to relate to fear of being misunderstood by the overseas students as a result of possible misinterpretation associated with joking and teasing, humour having been noted as a cause of intercultural misunderstanding by Ujitani & Volet 2008: 285. Host country students questioned whether the effort of intercultural interaction was worth the potential benefit, effort also having been noted as being required in terms of modifying speech, in addition to the feeling that host country students compromised their identity through language modification, resulting in intercultural interactions feeling 'more demanding and less rewarding than contact with their cultural peers' (Dunne 2009: 232-234).

These feelings of lack of reward in intercultural interactions can be seen to be related to the notion of 'cultural-emotional connectedness', which has been found to be a barrier to engaging in group activities, and refers to 'students' perceptions of feeling more comfortable, thinking along the same wavelength, and sharing similar communication style and sense of humour when interacting with peers from the same emotional background' (Volet & Ang 1998: 10, in Wright & Lander 2003: 240). Home and international students state 'that interacting with people they knew well was much easier since they could anticipate their reactions and would know how to tell them if they disagreed with their ideas' (Volet 2004: 5). 'Socio-emotional challenges', defined as 'intercultural misunderstanding or not understanding the cues from another culture due to cultural differences (Volet & Tan-Quigley, 1999)' (Ujitani & Volet 2008: 282), can also cause affective challenges in communication. In a small one-site interview study consisting of self-report information from both host (nine Japanese) and overseas (eight Australian) undergraduate students, Ujitani & Volet (2008) report critical incidents identified as leading to misunderstandings included 'joking and teasing', Japanese students' preferences for implicit communication and vice-versa, and non-verbal behaviours, such as Australian students demonstrating their feelings physically ('touching, hugging or kissing') (see also Novera 2004: 483 regarding Indonesian students; Jackson 2006: 145 regarding Hong Kong students). Humour, especially sarcasm, appears to be particularly problematic, with the Japanese students unable to identify jokes – instead of humour helping to relax others and create common ground, humour's 'culturally bound' nature becomes clear, and has been found to limit rather than develop intercultural interaction (2008: 285-594; see Dunne 2009: 232; Jackson 2006: 150; Kim 2007: 179). For example, Ujitani & Volet (2008: 295) cite Oshima (in Struck 2000) that 'people in western countries often tell jokes to 'break the ice' with strangers, whereas people in Japan share a joke only after they have developed a good relationship with someone'. A recent example of this occurred at the site of the current research when a note was left for a Chinese student intended as joke, which instead she interpreted as a serious notification from administration to leave her accommodation and led to a panicked reaction. Staff explained to her that the student who left the note intended it to be humorous, and that the expected reaction was to meet the 'joke' with another joke.

The display and understanding of emotion has been considered to be important in intercultural interaction; however, research has suggested that international students feel

they should restrict the display of emotion while in another culture (Gullekson & Vancouver 2010: 322). In addition to the role of physical display of emotion, the method of communication of empathy, important for intercultural communication in making an emotional connection, may be problematic if this is displayed differently. For example in many Asian countries empathy may be communicated non-verbally, and not so easily recognised by other cultures (Alred 2003: 21). Research has found that Japanese participants displayed the same negative facial expressions as Americans when not observed, but significantly less so when observed, which may be linked to what is acceptable in Japanese culture (Gullekson & Vancouver 2010: 317). When in another culture participants displayed even less emotion (Ekman, 1972; Friesen, 1972), however, Japanese participants read a greater degree of emotion in facial expression than Americans did (Matsumoto, Kasri & Kookken 1999, all in Gullekson & Vancouver 2010: 317). That these results may be linked to the status of being a 'guest' in the host culture, or a perception of being lower status, and thus able to express less emotion, has been considered (see Basabe *et al*, 2002 in Gullekson & Vancouver 2010: 323).

Other issues in intercultural group interaction include resentment by host country (Australian) students at working in groups, particularly with non-native speakers, and a reduction in skill level by both host and overseas students, with 80% of non-native English speakers reporting cross-cultural group work a negative experience (Soontiens 2004: 313; see also Barron 2006: 12; Dunne 2009: 230). However, Gu *et al* found that about half of the students they surveyed reported little difficulty with group work with UK students, with the defining factor appearing to be language proficiency rather than culture (2010: 17; Robertson *et al*. 2000: 99).

Issues have also been reported around the use of silence, which can become 'pathologized' (Turner 2009: 251) and lack of clarity of team and leadership roles, with students negatively stereotyping each other, UK students being characterised as 'intolerant, confrontational, aggressively individualistic, and unwilling to move out of comfortable ways of working', and in turn UK students negatively stereotyping Chinese students in a way they didn't do with other groups, and having little individual knowledge of Chinese students (Turner 2009: 247-250). Success by both home and overseas students was seen as adapting to the local norm, and attempts to introduce other ways of working 'discredited' (see also Allan 2003: 97, who further found that students from other cultural groups, particularly those from Japan

and East Asia, experienced not an international but a western school culture, which appeared at times unwelcoming and 'traumatic', Allan 2002: 75). In addition a lack of knowledge of host culture norms can lead to perceptions that the host culture is unwelcoming, Jackson noting that the students she researched believed communication difficulties were due to anti-Chinese prejudice, while she noted 'other possibilities. Early in the sojourn, I observed that the students rarely said 'please' or 'thank you' in intercultural transactions'. (2006: 145)

In addition to the challenges reported by individuals in intercultural interaction, another challenge relating to the effects of having a large number of international students on campus is that it can serve to give the illusion of intercultural interaction without any meaningful interaction actually taking place. In a long term interview study of students in a multicultural US university, Halualani found that interviewees defined their presence in a diverse campus as 'engaging in intercultural interaction' (2008: 2), overestimated intercultural interactions, with many unable to identify individual examples, and those they identified consisting mainly of being passively in the vicinity of students from other cultures (2008: 7; see also Peacock & Harrison 2009: 502). Demographic diversity itself was seen as leading to tolerance and acceptance of cultural and ethnic diversity, and evidence of intercultural interaction. The outcome of this passive perspective of intercultural interaction may be to discourage students from engaging in genuine intercultural interaction because 'they think they are already doing so' (Halualani 2008: 11).

Furthermore, the students interviewed defined intercultural interactions as taking place between *strangers* of different nationalities or ethnicities, viewing their own friendships as being outside the realm of culture. As a result of not recognising their friends as culturally different, students may deny themselves the opportunity to reflect on their views of 'typical' members of a racial or cultural group, and challenge their possibly unrecognised prejudices, and thus 'may not take the full advantage and promise of intercultural interactions' potential to transform how they think, view, and act towards other cultures on a daily basis' (2008: 11). Rather than genuine intercultural interaction, this 'naturalization of cultural difference' could promote 'a type of non-engagement or non-reflexive stance towards cultural difference in which one's predispositions, judgments, and stereotypes of specific cultural groups are not processed, challenged, or re-thought' (2008: 14). Indeed, Peacock & Harrison found that few host country students had developed

sufficient levels of intercultural awareness to start the process of self-reflection necessary for any fundamental change in understanding their own or other cultures, although for some the process of taking part in the focus groups provided an impetus to do so (2009: 502).

Similar to other US research, the research reported above does not distinguish between students who would be classified as 'international students' in the UK, and those with American citizenship but from different ethnic groups. Halualani does report that students describe most of their intercultural interactions as being with international students, and suggests they conflate 'culture' with 'nation', though it is also reported that students do have friends of different national origin (2008: 10).

Having considered some of the challenges in interaction across cultures, we now turn to consider which aspects facilitate intercultural interaction and the reported benefits.

### **2.3.5 Moving towards intercultural interaction**

A number of personal characteristics have been found to assist intercultural interaction, including curiosity, flexibility and open-mindedness (Ryan 2003: 133; Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 108), being reflective, empathetic, having a positive attitude and motivation to communicate with people from other cultures (Arasaratnam 2006 in Arasaratnam & Banerjee 2010: 2; Gill 2007: 173), sensation seeking, since people from overseas could be thought of as 'a form of novelty' (Arasaratnam & Banerjee 2010: 6), risk-taking, which contributes to language development (Ezra 2003: 144), and social skills, including communicative competence and social confidence, and the ability to relate to others (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 106). Students who made the decision to study abroad themselves have been found to be happier and better adjusted (Chirkov *et al.* 2008: 428), which may be linked to internal locus of control, meaning individuals who believe they have some control over what they do and what happens to them are more likely to be able to cope in intercultural environments than those with an external locus of control, who believe that luck or others are in control (McLeod & Wainwright 2009: 67-69), and resilience (Dimmock & Ong Soon Leong 2010: 32; Wang 2009: 22; Gu *et al.* 2010: 18). Wang suggests that lower levels of resilience have been found in 'countries in which groups act as individuals, as in Asian countries', and finds evidence to support this view (Wang 2009: 38), and suggests active engagement in student activities to help develop cultural knowledge, friendships,

and improve English language skills, in order to develop resilience (2009: 40). Painting a portrait of a 'potentially successful international student', Chirkov *et al.* (2008: 438) describe students who made their own decision to study abroad, are curious, interested and motivated, value the education and career possibilities of studying overseas, prepare themselves by improving their language skills and learning about the host country, establish a network of friends and contacts, including from the host country, and try to understand the values of the host country, with which Allan, citing better English language skills, more accurate expectations and better advanced knowledge, self-confidence, the ability to empathise and reflect, largely concurs (Allan 2002: 76). Not having one's expectations met, thus forcing individuals to take risks and learn from their environment (McLeod & Wainwright 2009: 69), and stress and anxiety (Gill 2007: 170-171) have also been suggested as important for personal growth and intercultural learning.

Accepting that an individual's identity is an 'ongoing negotiation between the individual and the social context or environment' (Hawkins, 2005: 59, in Grimshaw & Sears 2008: 264), can also assist students in understanding that they may 'manage multiple identities in their different languages, and that each of these languages may be associated with distinct sets of values and behaviours' (Grimshaw & Sears 2008: 2008: 266), or that by improving their language skills, an individual may find themselves with an 'expanded identity', able to 'play with different linguistic identities' (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 104), as well as the use of a second language possibly enhancing the 'critical distance' needed to interpret one's own culture (Davcheva 2003: 76).

Returning to Deardorff's pyramid model of intercultural competence, with attitude at the base, including respect, openness and curiosity, research findings suggest this is the level at which many students most often report changes, such as tolerance, the flexibility to 'bend' when faced with difficulties while remaining true to themselves' (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 110-111), (Brown & Holloway 2008: 239; Cannon 2000: 365), acceptance of difference (Gu *et al.* 2010: 17; Janes 2008: 30) and uncertainty (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 106), independence, confidence, maturity and feelings of ability to cope (Gu *et al.* 2010: 18-19; Burnett & Gardner 2006: 88; Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 104), these also being felt among students who spent most of their time in co-national groups (Brown & Holloway 2008: 239-243). The second level, knowledge and comprehension about the host culture (Gu *et al.* 2010: 17; Janes 2008: 30; Brown & Holloway 2008: 243), and requisite communication and



analytical skills is reported, building on the maturity, independence, development of self-confidence and ability to express oneself in a different language, and in some cases the feeling of escape from undesired personality traits, such as shyness, or 'liberation' from the 'limitations of Chinese education and academic culture' (Gill 2007: 176-177, 172). The final level in Dearsdorff's pyramid, 'an internal shift in frame of reference', including adaptability, flexibility, ethnorelativism and empathy, enhancing the external appropriate behavioural and communicative outcome (2006: 244-255), and a sense of being comfortable being 'in-between socially, culturally and internationally' (Alred *et al* 2003: 5) is reported less often, and can be difficult to articulate. Gill, in her interview study of 8 Chinese postgraduates who had returned to China after spending time in the UK, found that there was a feeling of having changed at a deeper level of values and beliefs, giving examples of changing attitudes towards queuing and recycling, 'critical and reflective thinking', and the ability to adopt European modes of behaviour while in Europe and Chinese behaviours while in China, for example including differences in workplace 'mindsets' or 'ethics', although the students felt able to bridge the gap between Europe and China in this respect (2010: 366-371). Participants believed the entire process of being overseas was what influenced their intercultural learning, not just their studies, valuing 'the qualitative changes in the returnees' sense of self, ways of seeing and perceiving the world, values and (work-related ethics)' (Gill 2010: 372).

## **2.4 Conclusion**

In seeking to understand students' experience in a residential context, and place the current study within other research in this area, this review of the literature in the field has indicated the individual and societal influences on students' intercultural experience and acculturation to it. Research has indicated the limits of a naïve interpretation of the belief that contact leads to greater understanding, and the importance of structural and institutional support factors in facilitating positive contact. The importance of affective factors in reducing prejudice is reported in Pettigrew & Tropp's meta-analysis (2008: 190), leading to the conclusion that friendship is an important factor in reducing prejudice and encouraging intercultural understanding. Social identity theory (Tajfel 1974) complements the contact hypothesis through its focus on both the interpersonal and intergroup level, and therefore takes into consideration the effects of group membership and its emotional significance on an individual and their self-image in addition to their individual identity.

The residential environment has been suggested as rich with possibilities for encouraging intercultural contact of the type that could lead to friendship and intercultural understanding. Todd & Nesdale's (1997) study in an Australian residential college emphasises the need for the imaginative and inclusive involvement and commitment of staff and students on a day-to-day basis in encouraging intercultural interaction, and brings into focus the importance of involving international and home students in designing, leading and implementing 'interventions', in spite of the reported reluctance for international students to take on leadership roles in multi-cultural environments.

In terms of friendship, the tendency for students from the same country to engage in co-national friendships at least initially is noted, as is the tendency to ascribe this to 'cultural' factors even by the students themselves, in spite of co-national friendships being common across countries and cultures, with the time and effort required to build up any friendship network rarely mentioned as a factor affecting friendship patterns. In particular the research notes difficulties in encouraging friendships between UK and Chinese students, due to the assumed cultural distance and believed language difficulties.

These findings indicate that the espoused motto of the college, to value diversity, may be challenging to achieve in practice, depending in part on the extent to which students are able to acculturate to the environment, whether they find an integrationist, welcoming environment, a 'third place', or for students from the east, experience a predominantly western culture that may not realise it appears as such. There is also the question as to whether students are genuinely open to other cultures, and are aware this involves understanding their own culture and being able to be self-aware and possibly change their own behaviour, or lack an awareness that their behaviour and attitudes are also cultural artefacts.

The lack of research in the experience of students in their college residences has been noted, and therefore this research provides an opportunity to investigate experiences in the residential environment, the ethnographic interviewing methodology facilitating the collection of a rich data set to understand students' experience from their own standpoint. The thorough literature search also strengthens one of the areas in which the ethnographic approach has been described as weak, that is in terms of validation, by triangulating the current study with the existing literature in the field, and respondent validation through

asking participants to comment on findings and the comments of other participants. By integrating ideas from the literature into the process of interviewing, re-interviewing and participants commenting on interview findings, this permits the participants to give their perspectives on research findings and hypotheses, and thus push the boundaries of current research and knowledge.

### 3 Methodology

A number of different approaches to the research were considered, including conducting surveys to ask student members to assess how/whether they believed they had developed any understanding of other cultures as a result of residence, or a series of individual interviews. However, what was of greatest interest was how the students experienced residence in the college, their feelings, impressions and how they as individuals, and as members of a 'named' sub-group within the larger university community, felt about and assessed their own experience. As a result, a qualitative method, involving 'an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000: 3) was employed, focusing on a number of in-depth interviews.

#### 3.1 Qualitative methodology

In qualitative methodology 'qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them' (Denzin & Lincoln 2000: 3), stressing 'the socially constructed nature of reality, the intimate relationship between the researcher and what is studied, and the situational constraints that shape inquiry. ... They seek answers to questions that stress *how* social experience is created and given meaning' (Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 10). A key tenet of qualitative research is that it 'sees human beings ... as persons who *construct* the meaning and significance of their realities. ... In order to understand *why* persons act as they do we need to understand the meaning and significance they give to their actions' (Jones 2004: 257, in Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 13), and accessing the perspective of those involved is most often achieved through in-depth interviewing and observation (Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 13), to permit those involved to explain in their own words how they view their reality (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 2). Rather than seeking to generalise, qualitative research aims to 'raise sufficient discussion to interrogate established views' (Holliday 2011: preface x).

In this section, we will consider some of the key characteristics of qualitative research, and the choice of ethnographic interviewing technique, and how this choice impacted the research.

### 3.1.1 Why ethnographic interviewing?

After the choice of qualitative interview methodology, the question then arises as to the choice of a number of interviews over a period of time with a more limited number of respondents, rather than a series of one-off interviews with a larger number of participants. The main reasons for the choice of approach relate to the need to obtain data for analysis in depth, the potential for the inequality in the relationship between the researcher and the participants to unduly influence the interview encounter, and the attempt to capture a complex, changing society. The next section addresses how the ethnographic interview approach responds to these issues.

First, we start with considering what ethnography is about. Ethnography has been described as being

an approach to social research based on the first-hand experience of social action within a discrete location, in which the objective is to collect data which will convey the subjective reality of the lived experience of those who inhabit that location.  
(Pole & Morrison 2003: 16)

Characteristics of ethnography include the focus on a discrete location (Pole & Morrison 2003: 3); exploring 'the *practices of everyday life*, the way those practices are built out of shared knowledge' (Agar 1996: 9-10, emphasis in original); accessing first hand experience, gaining perspective from the inside, and 'privileging the perspectives of the people involved in the situation that is the focus of the investigation' (Pole & Morrison 2003: preface xiii); the holding back of judgment and emphasis on discovering '*what* people actually do and the reasons they give for doing it before we can assign to their actions interpretations drawn from our own personal experience or from our professional or academic disciplines' (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 1-2, emphasis in original); 'the lack of control of the setting' (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 2-3); and the inclusion of numerous voices, representing the views of all those in the study (Bernard, 1995; LeCompte, 1997; Marcus & Fischer, 1986, McLaughlin & Tierney, 1993; Pelto & Pelto, 1978; Weis & Fine, 1993 - all in LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 14; Fontana & Frey 2005: 709). The position of the researcher is also distinctive, since it 'involves a relationship between the interviewer and interviewee that imposes an obligation on both sides' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 2). As a result, the researcher is 'not neutral, distant, or emotionally uninvolved. He or she forms a

relationship with the interviewee, and that relationship is likely to be involving' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 2). In addition, ethnographic research involves the existence of unexpected occurrences, often referred to as *rich points*, which illustrate a 'gap, a distance between two worlds'; that the gap or *rich point* has a meaning and makes sense within the context, often referred to as 'coherence', and that ethnography is a 'partial' account, representing 'fuzzy' knowledge, built on these rich point or gaps in understanding (Agar 1996: 31-36, emphasis in original). Through this rich data, the researcher 'build[s] theories that describe a setting or explain a phenomenon' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 56).

Hence, the goal of ethnography is not simply to describe, but to 'move from detailed description to the identification of concepts and theories which are grounded in the data collected' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 3), to 'generate(s) or build(s) theories of cultures – or explanations of how people think, believe and behave – that are situated in local time and space' (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 8). In addition, ethnography can be seen as a process, the carrying out of the ethnographic research project in situ, and product, the ethnographic research report itself (Agar 1996: 58), 'a theoretically informed interpretation of the culture of the community, group or setting' (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 8).

Looking back at the reasons for carrying out the research, to understand the experiences of residents and how they view the world that they are at the time members of, it can be seen that adopting an ethnographic interviewing methodology addresses the concern to access residents' personal experience as an insider, without the pre-imposition of certain categories or limitations, and to gain their honest and trusting involvement through the developing of a relationship with interviewees. This approach also serves to address the power disparity between the researcher and interviewees, which will be discussed further below. The lack of homogeneity in the membership is also reflected in the polyvocality of ethnographic reports, reporting the voices and perspectives of those who took part. Furthermore, an ethnographic approach has been suggested as particularly appropriate for investigating the experience of studying and living abroad, since

ethnography can identify the individual, contextual and cultural factors that influence language and cultural learning by capturing the sojourners' view about their goals and experiences (e.g. their intercultural contact, attitudes towards members of the target culture). An ethnographic approach can monitor changes in

the sojourners (e.g. their intercultural adjustment, the development of their intercultural communicative competence) and ascertain how the various elements of the study and residence abroad have or have not influenced their thinking and/or behaviour. (Jackson 2006: 137)

As we have noted, ethnography is an attempt to describe a culture, a 'group's patterns of behavior and beliefs which persist over time' (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 21), or 'what we need to know (not do) to function as a member of a society' (Goodenough 1956 in LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 22); *the acquired knowledge that people use to interpret experience and generate social behaviour*' (Spradley 1979: 5, emphasis in original), the challenge of which has been described as 'asking fish to describe the water in which they swim' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 20).

This has led to the suggestion that one way to find out about a culture is to 'ask new members of a cultural group to describe what they learned as they became part of the group. The answers provide a pretty good idea of what the culture is all about' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 20). On the other hand, others suggest that this approach will lead to, rather than learning about the culture, learning how others learn about the culture, and recommend a minimum of one year's involvement with the culture (Spradley 1979: 47-48). For this research, it was decided to reflect the make up of the community by asking college members in residence for different periods of time to participate. This includes students on one-year programmes, two-year programmes and three or four-year programmes. The minimum length of residence was 8 months at the outset and 11 months at completion of the interviews, the maximum being over 3 years full-time residence at the site of the research. As a result, the research captures the differences in experiences of members resident for different periods of time, with typical residence being just under one year. The experience of interviewing the respondents exemplified the impermanence of the college community – one masters student departed the UK earlier than expected, so only 2 interviews could be carried out, two PhD students also left early, curtailing their interviews.

The role of the interviewer in ethnography has been likened to that of a newcomer to the culture, learning how to negotiate the new culture in order to survive. The advantage of being a stranger to the culture is that the culture is not taken for granted, not seen from

the inside, but seen more objectively (Schultz 1964, in Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 8-9).

Ethnography therefore

exploits the capacity that any social actor possesses for learning new cultures, and the objectivity to which this process gives rise. Even where he or she is researching a familiar group or setting, the participant observer is required to treat this as 'anthropologically strange', in an effort to make explicit the presuppositions he or she takes for granted as a culture member. In this way, it is hoped, the culture is turned into an object available for study. (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 9)

The ethnographer, being marginal to the society and culture, attempts to understand the culture both from within and without, as being external to the researcher (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 9-10). However, this 'naive' idea of the ethnography as being external to the ethnographer has been challenged as ignoring the central position of the researcher in interpreting the culture they are seeking to describe (Warnkey 1987 in Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 13), and the influence of language choice in constructing the world described by the ethnographer (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 13-14). The influence of reflexivity, that 'the orientations of researchers [are] shaped by their socio-historical locations' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 15) is therefore recognised as challenging 'naive' ideas of realism - research must be shown to take account of the influence of the researcher. Ethnographers accept that their presence 'inevitably impacts upon the social action therein and consequently upon the data that are collected' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 53). The issues of researcher reactivity, research within a familiar setting, and other potential challenges to ethnography will be addressed below, but first we will continue with the role of the interviewer before considering the concept of naturalism within ethnography.

Ethnographic interviewing is seen as being towards the informal end of the interviewing spectrum. Informal usually refers to a more 'natural' 'conversation', the absence of precise questions prepared in advance, a set order for asking questions, or the asking of precisely the same questions to each interviewee, the use of more or less directive questions as the situation permits, partly due to the ethnographer's limited knowledge of the situation, 'a naive ignorance' (Spradley 1979: 29) in favour of a 'repertoire of question-asking strategies from which you draw as the moment seems appropriate' (Agar 1996: 140; Hammersley &



Atkinson 2007: 117) and including opportunities for interviewees to ask questions (Pole & Morrison 2003: 29).

A characteristic of ethnographic interviewing is that it takes place over a period of time, 'Multiple visits over time combined with the intimacy of intensive interviewing do provide a deeper view of life than one-shot structured or informational interviews can provide' (Charmaz 2005: 529). This 'series of friendly conversations' permits 'the researcher [to] slowly introduce(s) new elements to assist informants to respond as informants' (Spradley 1979: 58), with respondents being interviewed several times 'so ideas and themes that emerge in the early interviews can be pursued in greater detail in later ones' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 28). To enable this 'deeper view of life', the importance of establishing rapport is emphasised (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 109), as is the significance of establishing an appropriate tone from the beginning. Also important is the role of the interviewer's manner in signalling acceptance and interest, or otherwise, to the interviewee, the interview being much more akin to a conversation, with the interviewee able to talk as they wish (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 110). Indeed, for many, it is ethnography's ability to 'capture the unique voices of those you are intending to research' that encapsulates its unique appeal (Pole & Morrison 2003: 115).

The role of the ethnographer is often seen as two-sided - to be both insider and outsider, able to participate, observe and record the inside, and also to distance themselves to analyse and interpret on the outside, to be a friend and a social scientist (Pole & Morrison 2003: 155); it is this role that Agar has described as that of *professional stranger* (Agar 1996). The notion of *professional* is significant to the acceptance of the authority of ethnographic research as a valid method of research:

We can't let go of the responsibility to build an argument so that people can evaluate what we say. Besides, if one is committed to application of knowledge as well as creation, one needs credible arguments to persuade sceptical people who are being asked to put themselves on the line .... (Agar 1996: 17)

Indeed, ethnography, like other research methods, requires 'an emphasis on rigorous or thorough research'; however, unlike some other research methods, in ethnography 'the complexities of the discrete event, location or setting are of greater importance than

overarching trends of generalization' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 3). The 'rigorous research' is achieved through detailed data collection, analysis, a thick description of the social activity, an insider's perspective with the meaning given to actions by those carrying them out considered as the most significant, while permitting the views of the researcher, leading to a detailed account of the research setting, built inductively from the data which has been collected upwards (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 16), but which also 'incorporates a conceptual framework that facilitates understanding of social action at both empirical and theoretical level' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 4), and so 'thinking deductively from the top down - that is, by applying more general or abstract ideas from theories that are relevant to their work to the concrete data they have collected' (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 16). In contrast to more positivist oriented research methods, where an existing theory forms the basis of data collection and analysis, 'qualitative researchers build theory step by step from the examples and experiences collected during the interviews' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 56).

Turning now to another key characteristic of ethnography, naturalism, which involves studying the social world in its natural setting, with the researcher showing sensitivity and limiting intrusion, in order to describe 'what happens in the setting, how the people involved see their actions and those of others, and the contexts in which the action takes place' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 6). To facilitate 'naturalism', the ethnographer should show 'respect' towards the context, and 'fidelity to the phenomenon under study' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 7). A key tenet of naturalism is that 'the social world cannot be understood in terms of simple causal relationships or by the subsumption of social events under universal laws: this is because human actions are based upon, or infused by, social meanings: that is, by intentions, motives, beliefs, rules, and values' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 7). Moreover, researching people in their natural environment 'centralizes the importance of understanding the meanings and cultural practices of people from within the everyday settings in which they take place' (O'Connell-Davidson and Layder 1994: 165, in Pole & Morrison 2003: 5).

Furthermore, naturalist researchers believe that behaviour, not being the product of simple stimulus, does not lend itself to simple 'causal analysis and manipulation of variables that are characteristics of the quantitative research inspired by positivism' due to the belief that behaviour is socially constructed, (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 8), therefore it does not seek the discovery of universal laws. As Hammerley and Atkinson

(1983) state, it 'draws on sociological and philosophical approaches to symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, hermeneutics, linguistic philosophy and ethnomethodology' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 6).

The importance of ethnography in educational research as 'one of the most frequently adopted approaches to educational research in recent years' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 1) has been noted. Educational ethnography has its primary objective 'to collect data that conveys the subjective reality of the lived experience of those who inhabit 'educational' locations and for various purposes' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 17), to find out 'what is going on here?' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 18; Agar 1986; Geertz 1988; Wolcott 1990 - sources from Pole & Morrison 2003).

Returning to the reasons for carrying out the research, the interest in building a detailed picture of 'what is going on here?', the concern to develop a relationship with participants in order to limit the differences in power between the researcher and informants, to understand the informants' perspective and focus on the particular rather than the general, signal the choice of ethnographic interviewing as a key research technique.

Rather than attempting to describe an entire social setting:

Contemporary ethnographies generally are focused on a particular aspect or dimension of culture simply because it is no longer possible for most researchers to spend years in a single site [meaning ] researchers restrict their studies to a topic or "lens" through which they view the community they are studying' (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 5).

In addition, although there is not generally a hypothesis in place before the research process begins, 'research always begins with some problem or set of issues, at the very least it start from what Malinowski (1922) referred to as "foreshadowed problems ... and these problems are first revealed by his theoretical studies"' (Malinowski 1922: 9, in Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 21). In this case, the researcher is most interested in focusing the "lens" on participants' experience of living in the mixed nationality environment, since this is one of the main differences between this college and other

colleges in the same institution, and intercultural interaction has been noted as an issue in the initial literature review and through experience of working in the college.

### 3.1.2 Ethics

The ethical treatment of informants in this research project was a prime concern. The research was carried out in the place of work of the researcher, where the researcher held a position of responsibility and authority. This was also reflected in a concern related to possible researcher reactivity effects, in the informants not feeling comfortable with the need for honest, in-depth interviewing. In this respect, the choice of an ethnographic interviewing approach by bringing clearly into focus the need for ethical treatment (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 93), forces the researcher to recognise and address the effects of 'power' imbalance (Edwards & Mauthner 2002: 27, in Fontana & Frey 2005: 715).

At their most fundamental, 'Research ethics are about how to acquire and disseminate trustworthy information in ways that cause no harm to those being studied' (Neuman, 1994; H.J. Rubin 1983; in Rubin & Rubin 1995: 93). This involves 'avoiding deception, asking permission to record, and being honest about the intended uses of the research' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 94). In addition, the researcher shows honesty and therefore respect when asked their opinion on topics by the interviewee, though this requires judgement (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 99). It is also recommended to 'share your findings with your interviewees and obtain their responses to your interpretations before publishing a report' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 100). It is therefore recognised that

because the objects of inquiry in interviewing are humans, extreme care must be taken to avoid any harm to them. Traditionally, ethical concerns have resolved around the topics of *informed consent* (receiving consent by the respondent after having carefully and truthfully informed him or her about the research), *right to privacy* (protecting the identity of the respondent), and *protection from harm* (physical, emotional or any other kind. (Fontana & Frey 2005: 715, emphasis in original)

Finally, 'contemporary ethnographers have an ethical responsibility to come up with the best and most truthful interpretation of data possible; they can be aided in this process by

inducing research partners to share in the interpretations' (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 198).

In this research, these issues are addressed by obtaining written consent to participation, including the recording and transcribing of interviews and the use of the resultant data in the report; answering, in brief, questions when asked by the interviewee; giving pseudonyms to participants; and making available transcriptions, if the interviewee wishes, and summaries of the research to those involved, where possible. Consent was also applied for and received from the School of Education Research Ethics Committee, and from the Principal of the College.

There are some concerns about interviewing informants from different backgrounds to the researcher, for example different social, ethnic origin or age. Burnett & Gardner note the potential difficulties of conducting interviews cross-culturally, including those related to language, cultural attitudes to according respect to those in authority, and the extent of cultural awareness of the interviewers (2006: 76). Others however argue that interviewing those from different backgrounds can be effective, since this identifies the interviewer clearly as an outsider, and therefore not someone who already knows what is being investigated (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 111). In addition, it is recommended that 'the interviewer should pay attention to the differences in *how* people from distinct groups communicate stories and narratives' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 112). The researcher addressed the issue of the unequal power relations by explaining the context and purpose of the research, attempting to put the informants at their ease, conducting the interviews at a time and place of the informants' choosing, not in the researcher's office but somewhere within the college the informants felt comfortable, noting that the college had been the informants' home for at least 8 months at the start of the research. The informants appeared to be relaxed during the interviews, and even approached the researcher to ask when the next one would take place.

Pertinent to the current research, with the majority of interviewees being non-native English speakers, the question of how to represent quotations of what the interviewees have said needs to be addressed. The inclusion of grammatical or lexical errors can colour how the reader views the person speaking, but research with non-native English speakers is likely to contain a number of such errors. It is noted that

to improve the grammar, complete the thought or eliminate dialect can make the text far more readable. But doing so might distort what the person said and impute to him or her too much of your own interpretation. (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 272)

However, interviewees may be distressed to see quotations including incorrect English; strategies here include agreeing with the interviewee a 'correct' version or including missing words in [brackets], to indicate that these were not in the original (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 273). Another question is the use of hesitation devices and conversational repair. Here, one strategy is to include enough to retain the original features, and indicate any areas where hesitation may have indicated difficulty with the expression of views (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 272-273).

One reason why it is important to take care in reporting how interviewees speak is that 'the representations of speech can be used to convey the status and character of the speaker. The choice of conventions is thus a choice about the representation of person as social and moral actors in the text' (Atkinson 2004: 390). As a result

we strongly influence the apparent character of our informants in the eyes of readers by our choice of textual conventions. ... The sustained representation of non-standard forms of regional/class accents is one way in which the 'subjects' or the reported speech may be represented as 'other' than, different from the reader *and* the ethnographer. ... The reflective ethnographer will need to be sensitive to the ways in which his or her representation of speech establishes the speaking subjects as 'Others' in a dialogue of difference, or assimilates them to a complicity of identity with ethnographer and reader ...' (Atkinson 2004: 393-394)

For the purposes of the current research, the strategy taken is not to ignore the non-standard forms of spoken language, but to report language exactly as it was used in the interviews, for native and non-native English speakers alike, including the researcher. The inclusion of significant degrees of conversational repair, 'incorrect' language forms and incomplete 'sentences' from native and non-native speakers, are evidence of the difference between standard written forms of language and spoken grammar – the notion of a sentence is itself an orthographic convention, not a conversational one. Interviewees

had access to full transcripts if they wished to have them, which a number did, and were made aware that direct quotations from the transcripts might be used in the final report. In addition, interviews have been transcribed as near as possible to the original, in accordance with Spradley's Verbatim Principle (1979: 102), and include hesitation devices ('um'), pauses indicated by dots between brackets (...), both of which can signify the informant searching for ideas, language, or finding the question either personally or conceptually difficult, and changes in direction indicated by dashes (-).

However, informed consent is itself a complex issue. Respondents may forget they are taking part in a research study, something the researcher encourages through the development of rapport with the interviewees, to address reactivity, (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 210). As a result, 'ethnographic research ... involves making public things said and done for private consumption. ... it has been suggested that all social research 'entails the possibility of destroying the privacy and autonomy of the individual ...' (Barnes 1979: 22, in Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 212; see also Christians 2005: 154). There is also a concern that

the research process may also have wider ramifications, beyond immediate effects on the people actually studied, for larger categories of actor or for one or more social institutions. For example, Tronya and Carrington (1989) criticise several studies for the use of research techniques which, they believe, reinforce racism: techniques such as asking informants about the typical characteristics of members of different ethnic groups. (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 213).

This is an issue to be aware of in this research project, since respondents are being asked to discuss how living with their fellow residents from all over the world has influenced them as individuals, as self or other ascribed 'representatives' of their own nations and their views of students from other places. While the assumption may be that this has had positive effects, the reality might be that the result has been less understanding and greater stereotyping. In this respect, interviewees may feel they say more than they would have initially liked to, however it has also been suggested that the status of 'stranger' can assist in feeling 'freedom from conformity' and being able to express 'politically incorrect' ideas (Brown 2009a: 450). Given the almost unique character of the college under

investigation, hiding its identity, and therefore by implication the identity of potential respondents, may be difficult:

despite the signature status of privacy protection, watertight confidentiality has proved to be impossible. Pseudonyms and disguised locations often are recognised by insiders. What researchers consider innocent is perceived by participants as misleading or even betrayal. What appears neutral on paper is often conflictual in practice. (Christians 2005: 154)

Great care will therefore need to be taken in anonymising respondents as far as possible. In addition, it has been suggested that 'interviewing places a potentially heavy burden on interviewees to talk' and can therefore be stressful for the informant. This can be addressed by the provision of 'clear and unambiguous parameters' for interviews (Pole & Morrison 2003: 33).

Being close to participants and asking for their assistance in research can also bring issues of reciprocity, respondents asking for something from the researcher (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 195). This can itself bring ethical dilemmas. In this research project, some respondents did make requests of the researcher, some small (a lift to sports practice one morning), others larger (a particularly sought-after room). While the first request was acceded to, from the perspective that the respondent had asked a favour of someone with a car he was on friendly terms with, the second, which was in the gift of the researcher as a function of her post at the site of the research, and was not justifiable, was not, a decision the person who made the request appeared to take with equanimity, and he continued to apparently happily take part in the research.

### **3.2 Evaluating Ethnographic Interviewing**

Ethnography has been criticised as not being sufficiently objective or scientific. There are a number of reasons for this, including the difficulty in ensuring validity and reliability in the research design and outcomes, the influence of the researcher on the research and the lack of generalizability of the outcomes. First we will consider the challenges of addressing validity and reliability in ethnographic research.



### 3.2.1 Lack of 'scientific rigour'

The similarity between ethnography and 'the means we all use in everyday life to make sense of our surroundings, of other people's actions, and perhaps of what we do ourselves' (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2007: 4) has been observed, noting that this can be seen as a strength, or as a weakness. A weakness, because ethnography does not adopt a positivist approach and is therefore felt to lack 'scientific rigour' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 6), due to the belief that its findings could be viewed as impressionistic or anecdotal (Silverman 2006: 47). Instead, as we have seen, ethnography views itself as belonging to a tradition of 'naturalism' (see 3.1.1. above) (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 4-8), which includes the primacy of the natural setting, the emphasis on context and socially situated data, including the need for 'thick description', the recognition of the centrality of the researcher both within the setting and as the prime research tool to investigate human experience, the recognition of the importance of process as well as outcomes, the inductive analysis of data, the privileging of participants' terminology and perspective and the role of informants in validating outcomes (respondent validation) (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; in Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2003: 106). Rubin & Rubin argue that positivism is not appropriate for 'hearing data and understanding meaning in context' because 'it denies the significance of context and standardizes questions and responses, so that there is little room for individual voice' (1995: 22).

Indeed, some researchers have questioned the appropriateness of the use of an ethnographic approach due to its lack of precision, descriptive nature, the accusation of subjectivity due to the reliance on researchers interpreting what has been said/seen, and the lack of generalizability, all of which lead to a view that ethnography 'has little to contribute to understandings of wider social issues, being both time and space bound' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 15). However, these criticisms miss the point, not representing the purpose of ethnography:

In education, as elsewhere, ethnography has been used to investigate the local and the small scale. The core interest may be to address questions like 'what is going on here?' and 'how much are such "goings-on" understood and by whom? inside a classroom, an education department in a university and so on ... in order to address a specific research problem(s). Purposes may or may not lack any *primary*

intention to draw theoretical inference or empirical generalizations as outcome indicators of usefulness. (Pole & Morrison 2003: 113, emphasis in original).

Having acknowledged this, while the traditional measures for evaluating research of reliability and validity may have different definitions in qualitative research, the researcher is still required to demonstrate how they will be addressed (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2003: 105, 119). In addition, Pole & Morrison note the notion of ethnography's 'usefulness' in educational settings, 'first, as critical insight into educational processes and practices; second as a sensitizing device or source that can be used in subsequent studies; and third, in the development of theory that is grounded in empirical investigation (Pole & Morrison 2003: 112). Finally, Hammersley, in considering more recent critiques of interview-based studies, warns that 'we should exercise great caution in our use of interview material' and recognise the potential for bias, incomplete or partial accounts, but does not believe that these limitations negate any use for interview studies (2003: 124).

Various approaches to addressing validity have been suggested, including 'through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the disinterestedness or objectivity of the researcher' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2003: 105). In terms of reliability, this 'can be regarded as a fit between what researchers record as data and what actually occurs in the natural setting that is being researched, i.e. a degree of accuracy and comprehensiveness of coverage (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992: 48)' (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2003: 119). Others argue for different terminology, such as "'credibility", "transferability", "dependability", and "confirmability" as "the naturalist's equivalents" for "internal validation," "external validation," "reliability," and "objectivity"' (Lincoln & Guba 1985: 300 in Cresswell 2007: 202). To ensure credibility, Lincoln & Guba recommend 'prolonged engagement in the field and the triangulation of data sources, methods and investigators' (Cresswell 2007: 203-204); transferability is addressed through the provision of thick description; dependability is seen through the results being 'subject to change and instability'; with dependability and confirmability being addressed through 'auditing of the research process' (Cresswell 2007: 204). Eisner also used the term 'credibility', and among other aspects, this requires significant evidence (1991: 1100 in Cresswell 2007: 204). Similarly, credibility can be viewed as a function of '*transparency, consistency-coherence, and communicability*' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 85, emphasis in original). Transparency refers to data collection processes

being easily visible, allowing 'the reader to assess the intellectual strengths and weaknesses, the biases, and the conscientiousness of the interviewer' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 85-86). Consistency relates to identifying and addressing possible areas of inconsistency, while coherence involves the researcher identifying thematic representations across interviews. Inconsistencies may exist, and the qualitative researcher's role is to understand them, rather than eliminate or hide them. Similarly with coherence, the researcher's role is to identify and understand seeming contradictions (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 88-90). Lastly, communicability involves the

portrait ... (feeling) real to the participants and to readers of your research report. It should communicate what it means to be within the research arena. Your conversational partners should see themselves in your descriptions, although they may not agree with every detail or interpretation. Other researchers should understand your text and accept your descriptions because they complement what they and others have seen. ... The richness of detail, abundance of evidence, and vividness of the text help convince those who have never been in the field that this material is real. (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 91)

In addition, the researcher should be able to establish credibility by '(demonstrating) the researcher's familiarity with the overall field by putting the study in the context of professional literature or current policy discussions' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 263). To counter accusations of ethnography's lack of rigour, Agar recommends addressing 'falsifiability', that is

There must be a possible set of responses that informants can give that prove you wrong. This is a key point. A frequent criticism of ethnographic work goes roughly like this: "Well, all I see are some conclusions and a few supporting anecdotes. How do I know the ethnographer didn't just see those things that supported a conclusion that had already been reached?" (Agar 1996: 181)

Data selected to support the conclusions reached must therefore be representative of the all the data collected (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2005: p 107).

An analysis of a selection of views on validation in qualitative research by Whitemore, Chase and Mandle divides validation criteria into primary and secondary criteria. The four primary criteria include credibility, authenticity, criticality and integrity, reflecting how accurately participants' meanings are reported, the reporting of different voices, how critically the research process is evaluated, and the researcher's degree of self-criticism. Constituting the secondary criteria are explicitness, vividness, creativity, thoroughness, congruence and sensitivity (Cresswell 2007: 206).

Similarly, criteria for judging ethnography include 'validity' and 'relevance' (Hammersley 1992 in Pole & Morrison 2003: 102), with validity referring to '*plausability and credibility*', credible referring to 'whether it is of a kind that we could reasonably expect to be correct given what we know about the circumstances in which the research was carried out' (Hammersley 1992: 70, in Pole & Morrison 2003: 102, emphasis in original). Furthermore, a greater weight of evidence is required to support central claims (Hammersley 1992: 71, in Pole & Morrison 2003: 71). To address this, Pole & Morrison (2003: 102) suggest the following (Miles & Huberman 1994: 263; Denscombe 1998: 223; Brewer 2000: 124):

1. *Checking* with informants, but also adopting a critical attitude towards what informants say.
2. *Seeking* alternative explanations
3. *Checking* ethnographer effects
4. *Representing* the range of voices in the field.

The first of these, respondent validation, considers

whether the actors whose beliefs and behaviour they are describing recognise the validity of these accounts (Lincoln & Guba 1985). The aim is therefore to establish a correspondence between the sociologist's and the member's view of the member's social world by exploring the extent to which members recognize, give assent to, the judgments of the sociologist' (Bloor 1978: 548-9). (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 181)

This approach itself is not without problems, since the respondents themselves may not possess accurate information about their networks, nor can it be taken for granted that an

individual is able to view their own behaviour with dispassion, or accurately understand and remember past motivation –

In short, while people are well-placed informants on their own actions, they are no more than that; and their accounts must be analysed in the same way as any other data, with close consideration being given to possible threats to validity.

(Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 182)

Triangulation is another method of enhancing validity, and has been defined as involving

the comparison of data relating to the same phenomenon but deriving from different phases of the fieldwork, different points in the temporal cycles occurring in the setting, or as in respondent validation, the account of different participants (including the ethnographer) differentially located in the setting. (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 183)

In relating the data to each other, the researcher must be aware not to assume that matching results indicate validity, since this may itself indicate random or systematic error, or 'simply artefacts of one specific method of collection' (Lin 1976 in Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2005: 112), or be a symptom of 'method-boundedness' (Boring 1953, in Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2005: 112), triangulation is therefore 'an attempt to relate different sorts of data in such a way as to counteract various possible threats to the validity of our analysis' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 184). They go on to note that 'differences between sets or types of data may be just as illuminating' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 184). LeCompte & Schensul note how 'redundancy' is built into 'data collection methods', for reasons including the necessity of 'multiple sources of data' serving as 'confirmation or corroboration', so 'researchers try to ensure that each question asked is answered by more than one data source' (1999: 131). On the other hand, it has been argued that triangulation is based within a positivistic framework, and therefore not relevant to qualitative research, and the existence of multiple sources of data does not itself lead to greater validity or objectivity (Silverman 1985, Denzin 1997: 320; Patton 1980; Fielding & Fielding 1986; in Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2005: 115). In this research, although the main method of research were in depth interviews, having worked at the college for 5 years at the start of the interviews, and lived there for 3, which involved attending events,

spending considerable time in the shared social spaces and meeting and talking to a large number of students both formally and informally, there was a considerably greater depth of experience to draw on. In addition, one of the college members, interested by the environment, carried out a small scale research study into members' experience, the results of which were also available and have been commented on in section 6.1.1.

The lack of generalizability can be seen as a weakness; however, it is argued that this misunderstands the purpose of ethnographic research, the generation of concepts from the data leads to 'findings with significance which is capable of resonance beyond this specific case' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 159). Similar to 'fuzzy' knowledge, it has been argued that ethnography can result in "fuzzy generalization" that 'carries an element of uncertainty. It reports that something has happened in one place and it may happen elsewhere' (Bassey 1999: 52 in Pole & Morrison 2003: 114). In order for this to occur, researchers should provide rich, thick, clear and detailed descriptions (Schofield 1992: 200; Lincoln & Guba 1985: 316; in Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2005: 109).

Cresswell summarises that in qualitative research validation refers to 'an attempt to assess the "accuracy" of the findings as best described by the researcher and the participants', that lengthy fieldwork and thick description and closeness of researcher and informants strengthen validity, that validation refers to a process and procedures, including the use of validation strategies. The use of at least two of the following validation strategies are recommended: including lengthy engagement, the development of rapport with participants, the use of respondent validation, close contact with the culture and people being studied, a multiple method approach to triangulation, including the use of various sources, theories, methods making clear any researcher bias, background, experiences, etc., which may impact on the researcher's perspective, and the provision of thick description to facilitate the identification of transferability (2007: 206-207). Similarly, in terms of reliability, Cresswell notes the maintaining of good field notes, the use of recording equipment and complete transcription, including the transcription of pauses and hesitations (2007: 209).

In this research, the following methods were employed to address these issues: respondent validation, the informants being provided with ongoing analysis and initial hypotheses for their comments; the provision of rich, thick description and representative

extracts from the interviews, in the informants' own words; the development of rapport with the informants; the provision of sufficient evidence for central claims; an audit trail of clear information on the progress of the research and the decisions taken, including reasons for this; any inconsistencies addressed and accounted for; perspectives informed by existing literature on the subject; and looking for alternative explanations.

### **3.2.2 Reflexivity & Reactivity**

Given the centrality of the researcher, ethnography has been criticised as being

incapable of providing knowledge or truth which is independent of the process that produced it. ... Consequently, ethnography is incapable of providing knowledge undistorted by the researcher, or of independent verification and validation, and thus lacks reliability and is merely conjecture, anecdote or a story. (Pole & Morrison 2003: 130)

They counter this by arguing that all research is inextricably linked with the researcher who conducts it, decides the main focus, 'what questions to ask, who should ask them, when and how they should be asked' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 131), the main difference as far as ethnography is concerned being that the central role of the ethnographer is recognised (Pole & Morrison 2003: 311). In order to minimise the effect of the researcher on the research, and permit informants to speak openly and at length, ethnographic interviewers prefer to use a non-directive method of interviewing (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 101). In addition, understanding how the research may impact the informant and the research is recommended, with the researcher engaging in a similar process of making sense of the world as the informants (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 17). Researchers in this respect are recognised as

part of the interaction they seek to study and they influence that interaction .... Interviewers are increasingly seen as active participants in an interaction with respondents, and interviews are seen as negotiated accomplishments of both interviewers and respondents that are shaped by the contexts and situations in which they took place. (Fontana & Frey 2005: 716)

In addition, it has been argued that the central role of the ethnographer itself 'yields authority' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 139). This relates to the 'first-hand experience of the subject of the research. ..., which may also be characterised as a heuristic perspective. ... which affords an understanding of social action within the specific context in which it is performed or takes place', and is both engaged and 'sufficiently detached' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 139). This is developed by Agar's notion of the professional role of the ethnographer lending authority, in addition to the necessity to 'build an argument so that people can evaluate what we say' (Agar 1996: 17). However, Hammersley rejects the notion that 'being there' necessarily lends validity to ethnographic research, pointing out that 'being there' can lead to bias in the form of 'over-rapport or 'going native'', and that in addition, 'the impression theory fails to recognise that what we experience is not what is there, rather, the effects of what is there on us, those effects being the product of a considerable physiological and cultural processing' (2004: 243). He calls his position 'subtle realism', 'validity still means the degree of correspondence between a claim and the phenomena to which it relates' (Hammersley 2004: 243-244). He goes on to argue that 'what research offers from this perspective is ... knowledge that can reasonably be assumed to be (on average) less likely to be invalid than information from other sources' (Hammersley 2004: 244).

However, while acknowledging the issue of the influence of the researcher, they argue that 'it is misleading to regard it simply as a source of bias that must be, or can be, entirely removed' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 101). They situate the issue of reactivity within that of 'the effects of audience, and indeed of context generally, on what people say and do. All accounts must be interpreted in terms of the context in which they were produced' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 102). Instead of asking whether the interviewee is telling 'the truth' and whether the data which are collected are bias free, we should recognise that there is no such thing as pure data, and we should strive instead 'to discover the correct manner of interpreting whatever data we have' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 102). Minimizing researcher reactivity is therefore not the only option, instead the researcher can consider 'how the presence of the researcher may have shaped the data' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 102).

Noting research that indicates 'informants will respond differently depending upon how they perceive the person asking the question and/or the intent behind the question' (Pole



& Morrison 2003: 33), such personal characteristics as age, gender, job are difficult if not impossible to change, and must therefore be accepted (Demosombe 1998: 117, in Pole & Morrison 2003: 33-34) and understood, 'the fact that behaviour and attitudes are often not stable across contexts and that the researcher may influence the context becomes central to the analysis' (Hammersley & Atkinson 1995: 19).

Of particular relevance to the current research, given that the participants are all postgraduate students and therefore have a significant degree of knowledge of various research methods, the perspective that informants have of research of this nature and how it may impact on their responses (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 176) should be taken into consideration. Being such an informed respondent can lead to informants attempting to 'help' the research along by analysing their experience rather than reporting it (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 176). However informants seemed to understand the purpose of the research process and research, and be committed to the purpose of the research, sufficiently to refrain from this.

Reactivity is multi-directional, with the ethnographer also being affected

ethnographers *always* impact upon their chosen fields of study ... . Moreover, this means that not only do we inevitably influence the fields we observe but we may also 'change ourselves' as observation causes us to reconsider, rethink and reflect upon our actions and attitudes as we collect and analyse observational data. (Pole & Morrison 2003: 28-29, emphasis in original)

In addition to personal effects on the ethnographer, reflexivity recognises the impossibility of an ethnographic account being totally objective, due to ethnography being situated within the society being investigated (Pole & Morrison 2003: 103), with 'the task of the ethnographer in educational settings (being) to engage in reflexivity as a means of substantiating 'interpretations and findings with a reflexive account of themselves and the process of their research' (Altheide and Johnson 1998: 292)' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 104). With the process of decision-making about how to conduct the research often conducted on an on-going basis as the research is carried out,

we recognise that the research process not only reflects the decisions made by the researcher, but also the research product, as the two are clearly interdependent. Consequently, we also argue that what results from ethnographic research cannot be divorced from its relationship with the researcher. That is, ethnography as product is a reflection of the ethnographer in terms of his or her biography, the intellectual tradition(s) that have influenced his or her approach to research and to the decisions he or she makes about the research process as it progresses. In making such a statement, we may leave ourselves open to charges of relativism and to concerns about the capacity of ethnography to yield data that are not only rich and detailed but also that reflect the reality of the situation that it seeks to understand, not merely the opinion of the ethnographer. These are important charges which we need to be taken seriously, for if we regard research as a search for some kind of truth, or at least truths, then presumably our objective is to present our research product, our ethnography, with some degree of confidence that what it says is in some way correct. (Pole & Morrison 2003: 129)

To address this reservation, they suggest the need for 'firm foundation of data, analysis and interpretation' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 130) and 'the careful collection and analysis of detailed data which are at the heart of ethnography' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 154). This reflects the view of 'research as the search for information which will take us further towards a truth', and therefore the need for reliability and confidence in the data and findings. (Pole & Morrison 2003: 129-130). Also noted is the need for

A critical attitude towards data, and recognition of the influence on the research of such factors as the location, of the setting, the sensitivity of the topic, power relations in the field and the nature of the social interaction between the researcher and the researched, all of which influence how the data are interpreted and conveyed in writing up the results. Reflexivity thus affects both writing up the data (called representation) and the data's status, standing and authority (called legitimisation). (Brewer 2000: 127, in Pole & Morrison 2003: 154)

Finally, the influence of time also needs to be considered, both in terms of position within the interview, and also in terms of the context outside the interview:

Ball (1983) has pointed out that many organizations are characterised by short- and long-term temporal cycles. Most universities and schools, for example, have terms whose beginnings and endings are important benchmarks for staff and students. Moreover, the different terms are not equivalent; they form part of a longer cycle based on the year. ... Data, of whatever kind, recorded at different times need to be examined in light of their place within the temporal patterns, short or long term, that structures the lives of those being studied. (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 179)

In the current research, the majority of interviews were carried out after the exam period, when students were feeling more relaxed, and after they had had time to become more comfortable with life in college and the UK, get to know their neighbours, become involved in clubs and societies, and attend a number of college events. For Masters and PhD students pressures of work differed, in that PhD students experienced consistent pressure throughout the year, with a peak near the end of their studies, as in Zack's case, whereas June-August is much less pressured for the majority of Masters students, with a peak of work in May and September, when assignments and dissertations are due.

The complexity of accounting for subjectivity and interviewer effects compared to positivist notions has been noted, with these being viewed, not as problems to be solved, but as 'a normal part of human interaction', to be understood and accounted for (Agar 1996: 159).

To summarise, in this research, these issues were dealt with through a non-directive approach to interviewing, and encouraging interviewees to speak at length while acknowledging that the interviewer is an active participant in the interaction; recognising that the data is produced within a context and providing information in order to contextualise the data; attempting to reduce personal reactivity through putting interviewees at their ease including conducting interviews at a place of the interviewees' choosing, recognising that the college is the students' home as well as the interviewer's place of work; the guarantee of anonymity and names changes on the transcript, to which participants had full access (ages, programmes and nationalities have been retained, since this demographic information is often pertinent to the research); in terms of the participants' understanding of the research process, providing participants with a full explanation about the purposes of the research and the reasons for adopting the research

method, in order to encourage them to adopt an appropriate role (informant, co-researcher in participant validation); careful data collection and analysis and critical interpretation; and the provision of information on when the interviews were carried out, including the stage in the interviewees' academic career and college residence.

### **3.3 Research Design**

According to Denzin & Lincoln

A research design describes a flexible set of guidelines that connect theoretical paradigms first to strategies of inquiry and second to methods for collecting empirical materials. A research design situates the researcher in the empirical world and connects him or her to specific sites, persons, groups, institutions, and bodies of relevant interpretive material, including documents and archives.  
(Denzin & Lincoln 2005: 25)

Ethnographic research design has certain characteristics, key among them including that it is '*flexible, iterative, and continuous*, rather than prepared in advance and locked in stone' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 13, emphasis in original) and emergent 'at the beginning of the study, the researchers may not know all of the salient research questions to be asked, and the data collection strategies anticipated initially may evolve and change in response to unexpected events or questions encountered during the study' (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 163-164). These aspects of ethnographic research will be considered in the next section, starting with the question of selecting participants.

#### **3.3.1 Selecting participants**

Sampling strategies in qualitative research tend to differ from quantitative research, where random samples are important for generalizability. In ethnographic research, sampling is often initially opportunistic – 'picking people to talk with had to do with the quality of their relationship and their aptitude as informants' (Agar 1996: 168), and then judgmental, 'seeking out particular people who are specialists in an area you want to know more about' (Agar 1996: 168), an approach similar to purposeful sampling, which 'intentionally sample(s) a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination' (Cresswell 2007: 118), while bearing in mind the importance

of gaining viewpoints from a range of informants, in order to 'build the credibility of your statements as representative of the entire group' (Agar 1996: 168). In addition, there is also the question of the 'kinds of people who are not interested', in order to address any bias in the sample, to be able to reflect at least to some extent the degree of representativeness of the sample (Agar 1996: 169). The researcher may also adopt the strategy of eliciting from informants how representative they believe their views to be, in addition to making a comparison of key features between the sample and the whole population (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 106).

As regards the selection of informants, there are a number of characteristics to bear in mind, including that they should be knowledgeable about the culture or situation (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 66) or encultured (Spradley 1979: 46), prepared to talk, represent a range of viewpoints (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 66), currently involved, have sufficient time and are able to provide information without resorting to analysis, lest they might influence the data (Spradley 1979: 46).

As the research unfolds, 'the ethnographer chooses in a self-conscious way the next people to interview to obtain data for comparison with the group she has already talked with' (Agar 1996: 172), known as theoretical sampling, 'choosing those whose testimony seems most likely to develop and test emerging analytic ideas' (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 107), and may involve the need to select other informants to gain better data (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 108). If what you find among other groups you talk to is similar, 'you are now approaching what Glaser and Strauss called *theoretical saturation*, where you are not learning anything new' (Agar 1996: 172). Further, Agar refers to 'what Glaser and Strauss called *slices of data*. This simply means that you look for other information on the group you are studying, or on similar groups and see if it fits or contradicts the statements that you think are correct. ... this is now the time to go to the literature' (Agar 1996: 173, emphasis in original).

In this study, the sampling design involved a combination of opportunistic, judgmental/purposeful and theoretical sampling, concentrating on students who were known to have some involvement in college life, since the initial literature review indicated a concern with low levels of interaction between home and overseas students, therefore focusing on students who were known to have been involved in interaction was necessary

in order to investigate interaction. The initial students invited to take part in an opportunistic sample were already known to the researcher as students who had volunteered to become involved in college club, societies or activities. This was later extended to include students who were also known to have participated in events, and students who were recommended by initial participants as interested in taking part in the study.

The resident membership of the college consists of different national groups in varying proportions, the single biggest nationality being students from China, and the most common subject being business and finance, therefore these groups formed a large proportion of students interviewed. In addition, a balance of female and male students were approached, with six students on taught postgraduate programmes in their first and only year (with the exception of one student on a two-year masters programme), and four research students, who were in second or subsequent years of residence in college, again with the aim of discovering through judgmental/theoretical sampling as much as possible about the students' experiences. Some respondents suggested gaining the perspective of staff members, so two members of staff were also interviewed for additional contextual information, and their interviews are summarised in section 5.5.1.

Only one student (a female masters student from Taiwan) declined to take part, citing a lack of time and a family habit of not being quoted.

### **3.3.2 Interviewing**

Despite the challenges involved, interviewing remains a popular method of obtaining information about society (Fontana & Frey 2005: 697-698), with both researchers and with informants, 'Because interviews involve the informant as an expert witness, they generate considerable enthusiasm' (Spradley 1979: 52).

The role of the interviewer is one of "detached involvement" (Nash 1963, in Agar 1996: 100), with the interviewer seeking understanding by becoming close to the community, and also the space to critically analyse by remaining apart from the community being studied, in order to assess it (Agar 1996: 100). Interviews can range from the very unstructured, though the use of this term can cause confusion – interviews are part of the structure of the research design (Pole & Morrison 2003: 30), on the spur of the moment

and informal, to meetings formally arranged for this purpose (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 108). The most common approach in qualitative research is that of the semi-structured interview, with a small number of open questions decided by the interviewer in advance, which lead the informant to discuss, explain and clarify at greater length (Pole & Morrison 2003: 30).

The importance of building rapport at the beginning is noted, and of explaining to informants the reasons for the interview, its confidential nature, and the option for the informant not to answer questions they feel uncomfortable with. In addition, the interviewer's manner should indicate that s/he is open to what the informant has to say, and the interviewer is listening (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 110). The interviewer starts by asking open questions, to allow informants to speak widely at first, and continues by guiding the discussion, prompting the informant to provide answers that are both lengthy and deep (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 124). The interviewer may also answer questions if asked, even express their own beliefs and feelings, signifying a more equal, collaborative approach (Fontana & Frey 2005: 711). In considering why people might agree to be interviewed, Rubin & Rubin note that

most people want to share what they know. ... At a basic level, most people like to talk about themselves; they enjoy the sociability of a long discussion and are pleased that somebody is interested in them. The interviewer provides the conversational partner with both attention and recognition. ... Sometimes being interviewed becomes a confirmation of the interviewee's status, as the conversational partner learns he or she is important enough to be included in the group of those being interviewed. ... interviews give people a chance to reflect on their life and work, an opportunity that most people lack. (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 103-104)

In this research, the informants expressed their satisfaction that a member of staff in the college was interested in their experience enough to research it, and a number also commented that the interviewing process felt 'like therapy', providing them with the opportunity to make sense of their experience.

However, it is also recognised that interviewing may be challenging for the informant, not solely due to the sensitive nature of any content, but also due to the challenging nature of some questions, which require informants to reflect at some depth (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 135), and as a result, conducting a series of interviews can assist in obtaining answers to more difficult questions, whether conceptually or emotionally (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 136).

There has been some concern over the topic of leading questions, questions that may influence the informant to answer in a particular way. While disputing the notion of a “nonleading” question, Agar notes the importance of control of where the question is leading (1996: 142), and that ‘baiting’ the informant can be a useful strategy in prompting the informant to disagree (Agar 1996: 144; Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 120).

Different types of questions have been identified, including main questions, prepared in advance but adapted during the interview; probes, to request clarification, further examples or evidence or completion of an answer; and follow-up questions, examining ‘central themes or events, or ask[ing] for elaboration about core ideas and concepts’ (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 145-146). Spradley identifies five types of questions, including Grand Tour, Mini-Tour, Example, Experience and Native-Language Questions (1979: 86). Grand Tour questions are concerned with eliciting ‘a verbal description of significant features of the cultural scene’ (1979: 87). Sub-types of Grand Tour questions include Typical (inviting generalisation), Specific (often something recent), Guided (for example, a typical month), and Task-Related (describing a task the informant has been asked to carry out) (Spradley 1979: 87). Mini-Tour questions are essentially the same as Grand Tour questions, but focus on a ‘smaller unit of experience’ (Spradley 1979: 88). Example questions focus in ever greater detail, asking for an example of a specific happening, while Experience questions ask informants to describe particular experiences, often non typical ones, and can be quite challenging to answer (Spradley 1979: 88-89). Finally, Native Language questions ‘ask informants to use the terms and phrases most commonly used in the cultural scene’ (Spradley 1979: 89).

The design of the interviewing changed over the course of the research. The initial plan was to interview 12 participants on four occasions over the course of one summer, from June to September 2008. This proved impractical, due to pressure of time on the part of both researcher and informants. It was then decided to interview the masters students on



three occasions over the summer, and continue interviews with the PhD students over the autumn, however the early and unexpected departure of three of the informants meant this proved impossible. The design therefore became one stretching over two summers, and with two groups of informants, enabling an assessment to be made of the stability of findings over time. A semi-structured approach to interviewing was adopted, with some general topics to open up discussion selected in advance. The series of interviews started with Grand Tour questions, asking informants about themselves and where they came from, including any previous contact with other cultures, their experiences in the UK and in the college, which led on to Mini Tour questions, including the type of activity they got involved in and whom they met as a result, with follow up questions asking informants to expand on, or give an example or clarify something they may have said. They were also asked Example questions, such as to describe the flat they were living in, when they met the other students in their flat, and what usually happened, these meetings usually taking place in the kitchen, and how they would describe the college to a friend. The second interviews drew on elements from the first interview, from transcripts and from analysis of the transcripts (all interviewees asked to have a copy of the entire transcript of at least their first interview), and to explore in further depth any items of interest that occurred in the first interview. Where third interviews took place, these considered items from the previous two interviews which merited further exploration, and from interviews with other interviewees. Participants were invited to comment on ideas reported by other participants, to agree, disagree, and say how they thought the idea in question related to themselves and their friends. In this way interviewees were able to take a more active part in the research process, and emerging trends could be exposed to a degree of scrutiny as to their reliability. Later rounds of interviews focused on participants' response to hypotheses that had emerged. Not all respondents participated in all the rounds.

The interviews took place in two phases. The first phase was from May – October 2008, the second from May – September 2009. A total of 12 participants took part (10 students and 2 members of staff), 6 in 2008 and a further 6 in 2009, with 2 participants taking part both years. Each participant was involved in between 1 and 4 interviews, according to interviewer and interviewee interest and ability to contribute.

A total of 28 interviews took place, lasting between 45 and 90 minutes, with a word count between 4800 and 15300. Interviews were recorded with a small, inconspicuous digital

voice recorder, transcribed then coded and analysed. This analysis then formed the 'findings' section of this thesis.

### **3.3.3 Interviewing, analysis and coding**

A key characteristic of ethnographic research is that it is cyclical in nature, 'in ethnographic research, data collection and analysis are done concurrently rather than being separately scheduled parts of the research' (Glaser & Strauss, in Agar 1996: 62), in a cyclical process of collecting data, analysing it, then collecting more data to help make sense of the analysis, followed by further analysis, a process he describes as 'dialectic, not linear' (Agar 1996: 62). This 'simultaneous data collection and analysis' permits researchers to 'focus further data collection' resulting in 'an analytical interpretation of participants' worlds and of the processes constituting how these worlds are constructed' (Charmaz 2005: 207-508). The scope of research in ethnographic interviewing has been likened to a 'funnel', open to start, narrowing and focusing over time, possibly focusing on some initial interest brought to the research, but continuing to learn, to check, and to test hypotheses, becoming increasingly specific, and on many occasions, leading to outcomes not initially envisaged (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 160; Agar 1996: 184).

The iterative nature of ethnographic interviewing means that 'New themes and questions emerge and are looped – *backed* into earlier data, *across* to complementary data and *forward* into the next stages of fieldwork' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 88-89, emphasis in original) in 'an iterative spiral which moves from collecting data to describing it, classifying it and making connections between the classifications in order to arrive at a qualitative account of the research' (Dey (1993) in Pole & Morrison 2003: 93; see also LeCompte & Schensul 1998: 158). As the iterative process leads to hypotheses being developed, the perspectives of the informants are sought, and tested against relevant literature (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 46), with a halt being called to the research process when '*theoretical saturation*' occurs (Glaser and Strauss 1967, in Rubin & Rubin 1995: 47, emphasis in original), that is when the themes, supported by the research, have been defined and little new is being added.

Analysis takes place on an ongoing basis, starting from before interviewing, with focusing on the research problem, through the iterative research process of interviewing, analysing the interviews, which then informs the next round of interviews, and finally into writing the

research report itself (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 158; Spradley 1979: 92). The researcher reads the transcript after every interview and after every round of interviews, looking for areas to explore further 'themes, ideas, concepts, and events and prepare additional questions on those that address your research concerns' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 151), including 'self-evaluation ... examin[ing] what is going right and wrong' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 164).

Under the general term 'content analysis', the ethnographer starts by closely reading and rereading the transcripts, gaining a holistic and detailed picture, before attempting to categorise sections using the informants own implied categories, within interviews and across interview, noting recurrent topics and categorising as much of the interview as possible. The researcher then compares each interview and informant to the others, identifying consistency and inconsistency, and developing questions which can be asked next time (Agar 1996: 153-154). The researcher naturally brings to the research perspectives from their experience and from the literature, which may include 'sensitising concepts' (Blumer 1954, in Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 192), which serve to facilitate understanding of the data rather than forming it into a particular shape, and the self-aware researcher can identify assumptions they bring to the research (Charmaz 2005: 519) (see 3.2.2 Reflexivity above). As the interviewing and analysis progresses, more themes are identified, and sections of interviews assigned to those themes, and these themes may become subsumed in other themes, or new themes may occur, requiring the researcher to return to previously analysed interviews and begin the process of coding anew, in a 'constant comparative' method of analysis (Glaser & Strauss, in LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 151; Silverman 2006: 295), until a stable set of core themes emerge (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 165-167; see also Pole & Morrison 2003: 79-81; LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 15, 149-151, 164; Strauss & Corbin 2004: 301). The final aim of the analysis is 'to integrate the themes and concepts into a theory that offers an accurate, detailed, yet subtle interpretation of your research arena' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 226-227).

In this research project, the constant comparative process was adopted, with interviews transcribed in their entirety as soon after the interview as possible, notes being made during the transcription. While the transcription was a lengthy process, it permitted the researcher to develop a good acquaintance with the texts before detailed analysis began. Transcripts were printed off, then read and reread, with sections highlighted and tentative

'descriptions' made in the margins. As the process continued, more areas were highlighted, and some initial themes began to emerge, and items associated with those themes numbered (e.g. R2: Theme X: 3 would stand for the third instance of theme X in the second interview with Ruth). This then required the rereading of previous transcripts, in an iterative process, until a small number of coherent themes emerged, and these were collated under headings, and checked again for thematic coherence, the close interaction with the transcripts facilitating critical thinking about the emergence of themes, although the sheer quantity of data (400+ pages) at times threatened to overwhelm. Once initial groupings of ideas and themes occurred, this suggested a tentative organisation of the thesis into two main areas, aspects of life in college, and how cultural features impacted on the student experience. A second literature review then took place.

### **3.3.4 Writing the research**

As we have seen, 'ethnographic research requires constant feedback from one stage to another. Although we can identify five tasks in sequence, they must all go on at the same time'. These tasks consist of '*selecting a problem ... What are the cultural meanings people are using to organize their behaviour and interpret their experience?*'; secondly, '*collecting cultural data – ... The ethnographer begins by asking descriptive questions, making general observations, and recording these in field notes*'; thirdly '*analysing cultural data*'; fourthly '*formulating ethnographic hypotheses (which) arise from the culture studied*', as a result of which, the ethnographer returns to collecting more data, analysing it, formulating further hypotheses, which is then repeated; and fifthly, '*writing the ethnography*' which may itself lead to further hypotheses and fieldwork, with 'Writing, in one sense, ... a refined process of analysis' (Spradley 1979: 93-94, emphasis in original).

In writing the ethnography, Spradley argues that '*the concern with the general is incidental to an understanding of the particular*. In order for a reader to see the lives of the people we study as they see themselves, we must *show through particulars*, not merely talk about them in generalities' (1979: 207, emphasis in original). He describes 6 levels of analysis:

*universal statements ... all-encompassing statements about things that occur universally;*

*cross-cultural descriptive statements. ... (which) help place a cultural scene in the broader picture of human cultures;*

*general statements about a society or cultural group; and*

*general statements about a specific cultural scene* ... This level of ethnographic writing contains many of the themes that the ethnographer wants to present to the reader. ... Making use of an informant quotation helps provide a sense of immediacy and gives the reader a closer acquaintance with the culture;

*specific statements about a cultural domain* ... a class of events, objects, or activities as labelled by informants;

*specific incident statements* ... (which) takes the reader immediately to the actual level of behavior and objects, to the level of perceiving these things. ... instead of being *told* what people know, how they generate behavior from this knowledge, and how they interpret things, you have been shown this cultural knowledge in action. *A good ethnographic translation shows; a poor one only tells*'. (Spradley 1979: 207-210, emphasis in original)

Spradley recommends to 'students and others to avoid the middle levels of generalizations, to use them, but sparingly. Emphasize the most general and the most specific' (Spradley 1979: 212).

The researcher tells 'what the 'story' is about', provides the context, provides an explanation of 'the history and progress of the research'; shows 'how and why key insights and concepts emerged', provides clear data, and indicates connections to the 'educational world in which the research operated' (Pole & Morrison 2003: 109-110). The voices of the informants are often reported both polyphonically, with multiple and different perspectives reported (Fontana & Frey 2005: 709).

Once initial groupings of ideas and themes occurred, this suggested a tentative organisation of the thesis into two main areas, as noted in section 3.3.3, aspects of life in college, and how cultural features impacted on the student experience, and a very rough first draft was undertaken. A second literature review then took place. Over the drafting process, some topics were moved from one section to another, as they appeared to fit more closely to other findings and interpretations (e.g. Cultural Festival was moved from culture, to events then back to culture, following on from the topic of 'representing one's culture'), this flexibility of interpreting and reinterpreting data being characteristic of ethnography. The temptation in writing ethnographically-influenced work is often to

include as much data as possible, given the effort that has been invested in obtaining it, so a significant challenge was in choosing which extracts to use to illustrate a theme.

### **3.4 The Setting**

The College used in the study is a large college, which is part of a university in the north-east of England. While all full-time postgraduate students must be members of a college, it is not a requirement for the students to live in the college, and all teaching takes place in the students' departments. Although much of the university and the system of residential colleges dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the college concerned was founded in 1965 as a 'society' for postgraduate students, defined as a 'minor collegiate body', an institution with much looser connections than the majority of colleges which require all their first year undergraduate students to be resident. In 2002 the decision was taken to change the name and the title, so 'Smith' College (a pseudonym) was born in 2003, with the aim to consolidate the distributed resource of the former society into a more traditional college structure. This included the building of designated college accommodation on one of the then 5 college sites, transferring the majority of residents to one site, and the construction of office and social facilities on this site, to the south-east of the city centre, with only one small additional site, consisting mainly of accommodation for families, remaining to the north-west of the city. This was finally achieved in 2006. The precise number and breakdown of residents varied across the year, with the following figures representing an average position on the site where the interviews took place. In 2008, when the first interviews were carried out, there were 550 residents on the main college site, with 130 UK, 360 overseas and 60 EU students, with 85% of residents on one-year programmes. The nationality with the largest number of residents was People's Republic of China, with approximately 200 residents, which was again the case in 2009. In 2009, there were 115 UK, 365 overseas and 70 EU students, with again 85% of residents on one-year programmes. The majority of students (approximately 70%) when applying to the university do not specify which college they would like to become members of, though those that have a particular preference do so, and most often become members of the college they have expressed a preference for. The students who are members of Smith College are most often attracted by the fact that all members are postgraduate students, its situation close to the Business School, which has very large numbers of one-year taught postgraduate students, many from overseas, particularly from China and Taiwan, and that

the accommodation is self-catering (the majority of other colleges offer full catering). Smith College is the last in a string of 8 colleges on the main road leading from the university library, and in its position surrounded on three sides by fields, feels slightly isolated from the rest of the university. As the sole postgraduate only college at the university, Smith at the time of the study accepted all postgraduate students who wish to become members or are allocated membership.

With so many one-year students, the turnover of students and residents annually is extremely high. This can lead to the impression of impermanence, with only a small number of research students, the staff and the college buildings themselves providing continuity. It should be noted that it is not unusual for there to be a high turnover in postgraduate accommodation in the UK, the distinctiveness of the current setting relates to the university's belief in the collegiate structure providing a community members belong to. A number of initiatives are in place to encourage in students this feeling of community membership, including the 'naming' of college members (Smithsonians, coined by a former President of the Graduate Student Association); the college magazine, the *Smithsonian*, which carries articles about the activities of college members, including alumni; numerous clubs and societies where students can compete for the college against other colleges; a pastoral tutorial system which gives members the opportunity to get together more or less frequently, with dinner being held for approximately 150-200 members 3-4 times per term; initiatives, such as seminars and café discussion groups to foster a culture of research within the college; plus the normal (in the UK at least) student activities which take place in the bar, including parties, discos, music evenings, films, quizzes, cultural evenings, among many others. In spite of these activities, the annual student survey reports concerns over the extent to which the mix of members, principally the high numbers of students from the Far East and on one-year programmes, limits the possibilities for interaction and community development – students from the Far East report that UK and EU students don't interact with them very much, and students from the UK and EU report that students from the Far East 'stick together' and seem uninterested in getting to know students from other parts of the world.

Unusually for communities that are often researched, the students are not within their home environment, but form a community, a shared culture for only a short time, with the community constantly changing in part every week, and 80% of it every year.

### 3.4.1 Participants

Name	Information	Round 1	Round 2	Round 3	Round 4
Gary	M, China, age 26, PhD Business School, resident in college 3 years	May 08	July 08	September 08	Left unexpectedly
Jenny	F, Lithuania, age 26, LLM Law School, resident in college 10 months	June 08	July 08	Left unexpectedly	
Hillary	F, China, age 31, PhD Education, resident in college 4 years	June 08	July 08	June 09	December 09
Zack	M, Jordan, age 31, PhD Business School, resident in college 4 years	June 08	July 08	September 08	Left unexpectedly
Steve	M, UK, age 24, MSW Social Work, resident in college 2 years	June 08	August 08	May 09	July 09
Ruth	F, China, age 24, MSc Business School, resident in college 11 months	June 08	July 08	September 08	
Marie	F, China, age 31, LLM (Law School), resident in college 11 months	June 09	August 09		
Fiona	F, Pakistan, age 24, MA English Studies, resident in college 11 months	June 09	August 09		
Laura	F, Azerbaijan, age 24, MSc Business School, resident in college 11 months	June 09	August 09		
Neil	M, UK, age 25, PhD English, resident in college 2 years	August 09			
Caitlin	F, UK, age 30, staff member	July 09			
Peter	M, UK, age 55, staff member	July 09			

Gary (G) is from northern China and was studying for a PhD in Finance, and had been a college member and resident from October 2005, first as a master's student, in which he gained a distinction, then as a PhD student. Gary came to the UK with his girlfriend to study because he believed working in business would provide him with better understanding of western concepts and business practices. He withdrew from his PhD in September 2008 and returned to China, with the aim of continuing his studies in Canada or Australia, which he subsequently did. Before coming to Kirkton he had studied for an



undergraduate degree in the north of China, then moved to Shanghai for work. He was 26 years old when he participated in the study.

Jenny (J) comes from Vilnius, Lithuania and studied for an LLB in law at a university in her home city, which she described as 'purely Lithuanian'. However, Jenny had considerable international interaction through a number of programmes at school and university, such as participating in a European model parliament, and attending and organising international debating competitions, which she considered important for her intended career in law. She had started learning English at a young age, not long after the Soviet Union started to break up. Through taking part in activities such as debating, she became more interested in European issues and meeting people from other cultures. She wanted to study abroad first of all for academic reasons, since she felt what was available at home was limited and the UK was well-known for strong curriculum, and 'I just needed to see the world (laughs)' (J1), had become a college member in October 2007, and studied for an LLM. She left unexpectedly early in August 2008 to return to work in Lithuania, having submitted her dissertation early. Jenny was 26 years old when she participated in the study.

Hillary (H) is from Beijing in China, where she attended school, and studied for a degree in English. Due to her family background, her grandfather and father having worked overseas, Hillary started learning English at the age of 6, and had a number of opportunities to practise speaking English with her father's business colleagues. At university in China she also had a number of 'language partners', overseas students with whom she could practice speaking English. Hillary studied for a masters degree in London, which she found a positive academic and social experience, then returned to China for a year before coming to Kirkton to study for a PhD in 2006. Hillary was 31 years old when she participated in the study.

Zack (Z) is from Amman in Jordan, which he describes as 'a melting pot in the Middle-East', with a mix of nationalities, mainly from other parts of the Middle-East, most particularly Palestine. He considers Jordan to be tolerant of different religions. Zack attended a private school along with a number of non-Jordanian children, took part in an International Peace Camp in Amman when he was about 14, and also spent several weeks visiting his sister in the USA, where she had been studying. Zack took his undergraduate degree in Amman,

then after graduation worked for an English-medium private school in Amman, where approximately one quarter of the teachers were from overseas. He started working in a local university, which included assisting with some international projects, then was offered the opportunity to take a PhD overseas. Zack was a college resident from 2004 to 2008, and was 31 years old when he participated in the study.

Steve (S) is from the north-east of England, and was studying for a Masters of Social Work degree from 2007-2009. He was a college resident for the entire period. Steve had completed an undergraduate degree in Linguistics in a north-east university, then attended college to train as a journalist, before changing tack to social work and volunteering as a Community Service Volunteer in London for 8 months. Steve was 24 years old at the start of the study.

Ruth (R) is from Xinjiang Province in north-west China, where her family had moved to work for a petroleum company. She attended the company school, where most of the pupils were Han Chinese. She studied for her undergraduate degree in commerce in Shanghai, where although there were overseas students, she didn't get the opportunity to get to know any of them, before moving to Beijing to study English, which she had started studying when she was ten. She had travelled in Asia, but hadn't been to the west before coming to Kirkton. She came to the UK primarily 'to see different cultures', rather than for academic reasons. Ruth studied for a Masters degree in Finance from October 2007-September 2008, and was resident for the entire period. She agreed to participate in the research after being approached by Gary. Ruth was 24 years old when she participated in the study.

Marie (M) is from Urumqi in Xinjiang province in north-west China, where her family had emigrated to from southern China. She attended school mainly with Han Chinese, since, as Ruth explained, most Uyghur's preferred to attend Uyghur schools. She started learning English at school when she was 12. Marie studied Law in Beijing, where she was very involved in student life and student organisations, then worked for over 4 years as a lawyer. She decided she wanted to change her life, experience life abroad and the possibilities it could bring, so saved up, improved her English, then came to the UK to study for an LLM from October 2008-2009, and was resident for the entire period. She had asked to transfer to another college in summer 2008, but had decided to remain a member of

Smith College after moving in during induction week and making friends with her flatmates. She went to London in October 2009 to take a masters in Anthropology. Marie was 31 years old when she participated in the study.

Fiona (F) is from Lahore in Pakistan. She considers her first language to be 'Urdish', a mixture of English and Urdu, and considers both Urdu and English as her native languages, although she believes she speaks English better than Urdu, 'which is sad'. Fiona studied English literature for her undergraduate degree, and lived at home, with her activities mainly socialising with friends and family. Her mother had encouraged her to study her undergraduate degree overseas, but Fiona decided not to, and felt this was the right decision 'I saw a lot happening in Pakistan politically and otherwise, and also I think it builds your national identity', explaining she had friends who had studied for their undergraduate degrees abroad then didn't want to return to Pakistan (F1). There were very few overseas students at her university, but Fiona had frequently travelled overseas, to Dubai, to the USA and to the UK. She had wanted to study for her Masters degree in Turkey, but her family dissuaded her, so she came to the UK to study for a Masters in English Literary Studies in October 2008, preferring a small campus based university with everyone 'going through the same experience ... on a campus like this you're all together' rather than a big city experience. She returned to Pakistan in September 2009 to look for a job. Fiona was 24 years old when she participated in the study.

Laura (L) is from Baku, Azerbaijan. Laura started learning English when she was about 12. She studied economics as an undergraduate, and explained there were not a lot of opportunities for involvement in student life. There were a few overseas students from Turkey, but Laura didn't know any. Laura hadn't travelled overseas before coming to Kirkton, which had a high academic ranking and 'looked like a fairytale' and saw studying overseas as a good opportunity to get away from home and meet other people, and she hoped, get a better job at the end. Laura studied for an MSc in Finance from October 2008-2009. She returned to Azerbaijan in September 2009 to look for a job. Laura was 24 years old when she participated in the study.

Neil (N) is from Yorkshire in England, and was studying for a PhD in English Studies. He had taken both his undergraduate and masters degrees in Kirkton, as a member of another college, then took a year out to earn some money before returning to study for a PhD. As a

masters student, he got to know some Smith members, many of whom were from overseas. When he decided to return for a PhD he came to Smith, since he already had friends there, and was looking for a 'more mature environment, ... open and maybe a friendlier place' with 'people from all over the place ... so I figured this could be a place where it's going to be a lot more laid back about acceptance and things like that' (N1). Neil was 25 years old when he participated in the study.

Caitlin (C) had been working at Smith College for a year when she participated in the study. Her job involved managing the allocations of residents to flats, and she frequently dealt with residents unhappy with their living arrangements. Caitlin was 30 years old when she participated in the study. As a non-resident, her comments have been summarised in section 5.5.1.

Peter (P) had been working at Smith College for 3 years when he participated in the study. His job involved maintenance and general portering duties around the site, and he frequently came into contact with residents, as a 'first point of contact'. Peter was in his 50s when he participated in the study. As a non-resident, his comments have been summarised in section 5.5.1.

Chapters 4 and 5 present the findings of the research, categorised under the headings of college life, which relates to how students experience interaction in the residential environment, and aspects of culture, language and identity, which considers how this interaction impacts students personally.

## 4. College Life

In this chapter we consider how students experience interaction in the residence, looking first at the built environment (kitchens, communal areas), and at how students attempt to engage in interaction through socialising, and developing friendship networks, including considering the importance of shared background, hobbies and interests. Given the extent to which participants identified students from China for particular comment, beliefs and perceptions about Chinese students are reported. Moving on from the individual, how student life is organised in college is considered.

As noted in section 3.3.2, the initial interviews were open, with participants asked about themselves, their experiences in the UK and in college, social activities they engaged in, their friends and contacts, and life in their flats. These initial questions produced responses in which interviewees talked about their flatmates and how well they knew them, who their friends were and how they made friends, their experiences with students from other cultures, including where they felt there was difficulty in intercultural interaction, and demonstrated an understanding from many students that interaction difficulties in intercultural environments could have individual as well as cultural causes. Students also noted the difficulty in going beyond the college 'bubble', and interacting with the wider community (Gu *et al.* 2010: 16).

As noted in section 2.1.3, a small amount of research has been carried out into the student residential environment (e.g. Kudo & Simkin 2003; Trail *et al.* 2009; Todd & Nesdale 1997), which has reported the potential outcomes of shared accommodation, while other research has recommended shared university accommodation as a location where the conditions of the contact hypothesis could be met (e.g. Van Laar *et al.* 2005; Sakurai 2010). However, 'the sheer force of an unmediated holistic contact, particularly with linguistic otherness, must not be underestimated' (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 101), and the potential for increased contact to engender increased frictions has been reported (e.g. Greenholtz 2003: 123; De Nooy & Hanna 2003: 65).

In the following section, we consider how students experience interaction within the residential setting, and some of the issues which occur.

In order to understand how students interact in college buildings, it is useful to understand their layout. The shared social facilities and offices are located in a central building (Bayne House), with additional recreational and other facilities in a building a little further away. The central building contains the open-plan College bar and coffee shop, Common Room (with TV, games area) and offices. Nearby are the residences, which are divided into the 'old' blocks (about 12 years old) and the 'new blocks' (4-5 years old). The layout within the old and new blocks differs to some extent. New block flats contain 6 ensuite bedrooms to one shared kitchen, the older blocks flats, where Hillary, Steve and Gary lived, have up to 10 rooms, with a combination of ensuite and shared bathroom facilities, sharing one kitchen, in a more open arrangement without locked doors between floors or flats. Many overseas students prefer the flats with ensuite facilities, although this limits possibilities for interaction with UK students, who often opt for the older, slightly cheaper, blocks with shared facilities. How the layout of the flats and the students who reside in them affects interaction will be discussed in the next section, followed by consideration of how students use the communal facilities.

#### **4.1. Buildings - Student flats**

A number of common elements emerged when students discussed how they experienced living in such close proximity to students from other countries, including the mix in the flats and what was felt to be a 'good' mix, interaction issues, eating and socialising in the flats, and their concerns about how difficulties students might experience with flatmates could negatively affect their motivation to develop cross-cultural friendships.

It would appear from the analysis that when students describe a flat as not being 'mixed' they are primarily referring to the number and proportion of Chinese students living in it. Hillary describes herself as 'lucky', having heard from friends that others were in flats with mainly Chinese students, and comments 'this actually reflects that too many Chinese in one flat (laughs)' (H1). By 'not mixed enough' (H1), Hillary explains that in her flat of 6, there are 3 Chinese students and three Europeans. A number of interviewees described their flatmates as being 'all' Chinese, but on other occasions referred to non-Chinese students in the flats, who sometimes made up half the residents. However, the idea appeared prevalent that, particularly in the new buildings, the majority of residents ('90%' F1) were Chinese, resulting in the main college site being labelled 'Chinatown', when in fact the

percentage was closer to 25%. When asked by new Chinese students why he preferred to live in an old block, Gary explains that the old blocks are more culturally mixed and can give more opportunities for meeting students from a number of different places, and while ensuite facilities are convenient 'based to your learning experience, what is more important?' (G2). It would appear that the perception of an overwhelming number of Chinese students was felt strongly, whether or not they constituted a majority, leading to feelings that there were simply 'too many' (see Barron 2006: 11; Henderson 2009: 406; Peacock & Harrison 2009: 492-493).

Of those living in the new blocks, Marie and Jenny both commented on how mixed their flats were. For Marie, with flatmates from 4 other countries including USA, Europe, the Middle East and India, her flatmates were her 'closest friends', often eating and socialising together. She ascribes this to having a lot in common in spite of being from different parts of the world, and because their personalities mesh well – Marie and her friends appear to have gone beyond the level of culture being a defining characteristic to the interpersonal level (Gareis 2000: 72). Jenny, on the other hand, had not had such a positive experience in her flat; with students from Europe, UK, USA and India, Jenny did not find the flat friendly 'I just go there for sleeping and eating ... I have friends elsewhere', finding that personalities did not mesh well (J1).

Both Steve and Neil had similar experiences, becoming close friends with the non-Chinese students in their flats, who were a mix of UK, European and other nationalities, and being on reasonable terms with the Chinese students. Steve believes the layout of the older blocks helps with integration ('they're in blocks of 6, we've got this big open plan 25' S1), and led to more of a feeling of 'block' community, though he found that with more Chinese students in the block in his second year, this effect was less significant, and he became more friendly with the longer term residents, mainly PhD students, the belief that a community of longer term and PhD student existed being commented on by Marie and Fiona. For Neil, a shared interest in pool formed some connection with one of the Chinese students in his flat.

Not all students with high percentages of Chinese students in their flat found this difficult. Zack professed no problems with his mainly Chinese neighbours, and found them

considerate to his needs, though at the time of the interview, Zack had been resident in college for 4 years, and had already developed strong social networks.

The above initial discussion is reflected throughout the data and findings – while there were some shared experiences, students' experiences and reactions varied, indicating that the level of individual difference in attitudes, personality, time and interest (Gu *et al.* 2010: 11) was equally as important as that of national cultural considerations (see Van Oord 2008: 132; Bredella 2003: 233).

#### **4.1.1 Interaction Issues**

A number of issues were reported regarding interaction, but one common theme recurred; following on from the issue raised in the previous section of the national/cultural mix in the flats, and mainly related to a lack of communication with Chinese students. Even those on good terms with their Chinese flatmates described them as often not very communicative, which concurs with Smart *et al.*'s (2000) findings of lower levels of verbal communication among South-East Asian students both when speaking in mono-lingual and in multi-lingual groups.

Fiona's comment about her Chinese flatmates is typical, though expressed in her customary forthright style 'they don't talk, they don't communicate, they don't do anything' (F1), leading to a request to change rooms. She reports an occasion on which she spoke to one of her Chinese flatmates in the kitchen 'so I said 'can you move?' sort of thing and she jumped. She jumped, she got really uncomfortable' (F1). Fiona attributes Chinese students' lack of communication to feeling uncomfortable interacting with students from other countries, in particular due to low English language skills (Kingston & Forland 2008: 212; Smart *et al.* 2000: 247; Zhou & Todman 2009: 481), which she believes leads to Chinese students 'sticking together' and excluding others. For Fiona, this represents a wasted opportunity to engage in the college multi-cultural environment, explaining that as 'a proud Pakistani I will not change my culture in any way, but we're all here to get to know people, I mean, what's the point in coming here and not having that experience and just being with your own?' (F1). Fiona talks about pride in her nationality, but also indicates willingness to engage with the intercultural environment, while recognising the limits of what she is willing or able to change (Byram 2003: 57), although her comments about possible reasons for the lack of interaction in the kitchen suggest she may not yet be able to interpret intercultural misunderstandings (*savoir comprendre*, Byram 1997: 52).



Among other reasons for this lack of engagement are shyness (Marie) and not knowing how to engage (Gary), reflecting the anxiety sojourners may feel with knowing how to behave or what to say (Stephan & Stephan, 1985 in Pettigrew & Tropp 2008: 190; Yen & Stevens 2004: 306). All the students interviewed agreed that language levels and fear of making mistakes, in particular with native speakers, seemed to inhibit Chinese students more so than other nationalities (Kingston & Forland 2008: 212). The non-UK students interviewed reported they also found UK students quite difficult to talk to, for example that 'they don't want to open up too much' (F1).

Interviewees mentioned the challenges in dealing with difficulties between flatmates. Some students prefer to deal with problems face to face, but a strategy reported among East Asian students was to leave a note, which Hillary believes is due to East Asian students preferring indirect communication (Ujitani & Volet 2008: 282), finding face to face communication challenging, often on account of language difficulty or lacking strategies for handling difficult situations. A note, however, could lead to even more problems, since it was difficult to convey the correct tone, so could look 'like you're ordering people around ... notes always cause trouble' (H3). By the time of the third interview, Hillary had been resident in college accommodation for 4 years, and had become aware that face-to-face communication was likely to be a more successful strategy. Another issue concerned the ban on smoking in college buildings, which Zack believed particularly alienated Greek students, who saw it as an issue of values ('personal liberty' Z3), however their smoking in kitchens led to difficult relations with other students. Zack's approach to this was one of understanding the societal context they came from 'it's nothing to do with them not respecting your right', and, to demonstrate his understanding, would offer to go outside to chat to students while they smoked. In both these cases, after some time living in college, both Hillary and Zack demonstrated that they had acquired some ability to be culturally aware, for example in terms of understanding how a practice such as banning smoking may be viewed from a different cultural perspective (*savoir comprendre*) and were able to evaluate different perspectives on how these practices might be viewed (*savoir s'engager*).

#### **4.1.2 Eating & Socialising**

The cultural and emotional meanings of food and eating and its role in reinforcing cultural and group identity and social cohesion have been noted (Bochner *et al.* 1977: 290;

Bourdieu, 1986 in Pearson-Evans 2006: 46), and Hillary reports that food is a common topic of conversation among Chinese students (H1). It is therefore not surprising that in a shared self-catering residence, cooking and eating habits were identified as affecting interaction in flats. Students have different habits of sleeping and eating times, sometimes due to academic considerations (e.g. PGCE students were often out early and back late).

For many students, the kitchen is a focal point of social activity, for others it's a place where they go simply to heat up some food and spend as little time in as possible. Some students like to invite friends from other flats around for food – of the same or different nationalities - some eat frequently with their neighbours, while others, as we have seen, barely speak to their flatmates.

Most of the interviewees found spending time in the kitchen and cooking and eating together a good way to get to know their flatmates, but other more challenging issues occurred. Difficulties can occur when social habits from home are replicated in the college environment. Ruth explained 'our living style is different, yes, because Chinese, when Chinese in kitchen we cook together and, eh, talk a lot, ..., we have different times to eat' (R1), and the tendency in China for social life to be 'more private' (M1, also reported by Steve; Dunne 2009: 231) was also noted. This can lead to other students in the flat feeling excluded, as Fiona explains 'once there were all the flatmates, all 4 of them, sitting together having dinner, invited friends. I was standing in the kitchen, no one was talking to me, I felt invisible' (F2). This aspect of students of a particular nationality socialising in groups in the kitchen was initially reported regarding Chinese students, however, as the number of residents from India and Pakistan has increased, a similar issue was reported with residents from those countries. For Jenny and the other non-Indian students in her flat, Indian students socialising in the kitchen has caused tensions, with get-togethers in the kitchen happening frequently from third term onwards. While Jenny understood that this way of socialising with friends may be culturally influenced, she and her non-Indian flatmates felt excluded, and, as a student with exams and a dissertation to write, Jenny also needed her sleep:

J2        a sort of community, yes, from the same country, gathering for dinner, each evening, starting at the midnight always, and then the dinner, well, a sort of

dinners, started to eat in the kitchen. The dinner would last until 4, 5 am, and they are like communicating, but well, it is about shouting.

This habit of socializing late is confirmed in a later interview with Fiona, from Pakistan, who discusses meeting her Indian and Pakistani friends either in the kitchen or in Bayne House late at night to talk, particularly in the latter half of the year. While Gary is aware 'there is a lot of complaints about Chinese students and their cooking', Fiona seems unaware that other students, including Chinese students, make similar comments about Indian and Pakistani students:

F2 I mean, I guess it would look like that. The only reason we don't approach others is first of all we feel that they somehow don't want us to communicate with them, we feel they get like intimidated, ..., and sometimes we just feel that maybe they don't want us to talk to them, so we don't, otherwise we're inviting everyone, ... we know most people can't take it because it's really spicy.

Fiona's response suggests that she perceives her Chinese flatmates would not appreciate an invite to join her for dinner, because they have not invited her, which could lead to a cycle in which she and her flatmates become more and more isolated from each other (Papatsiba 2006: 126; Ryan 2003: 133). It could also reflect Fiona not yet being at the stage where her own cultural identity is 'un-frozen' and her understanding of other cultures and how her behaviour may be perceived still developing (Sen Gupta 2003: 167).

Students sought ways to limit the difficulties they faced in the kitchens, looking for ways to 'compromise' in the one area in which residents are forced together (Z3). One example Zack gives of this is over the issue of the preparation, cooking and eating of pork. This can cause tension between students, with some Muslim students interpreting the restriction on pork very widely. Zack believes that some students are 'oversensitive about pork. In Islam pork is just, told you not to eat, it doesn't say not to come into touch with it .... Unfortunately, people can interpret things in a very fundamental way, which is, I think it's stupid' (Z2). Zack, who appears to have developed a sense of perspective, important in interpersonal interaction (Van Oord 2008: 137), made some psychological adaptation to the college multicultural environment, in order to become more connected and 'fit' better to society (sociocultural adaptation) (Berry 2005: 702-707). However, on another occasion

Zack explains about 'criticising' a student for using kitchen foil on a chopping board (the student was concerned about how raw meat was being handled), and another student who was unhappy about students washing their hands in the kitchen sink, again for hygiene reasons, suggesting that in areas he didn't consider to be impacted by obvious 'cultural' considerations, Zack may be less tolerant of difference.

The view that focusing on difference could be counterproductive was expressed. Zack suggests 'it's not good at any stage to start, I mean in any relationship with looking what are the differences between me and you. If you start with common, differences little by little vanish' (Z3). The unfortunate possibility that external differences in lifestyle may reinforce the idea of difference between cultures and discourage students from becoming closer Marie found dispiriting:

M2 it's like now suddenly they find big different, big difference, then they will keep thinking another differences from Chinese students, and, eh, if, I was thinking, if after they know, they knew each other, they find more common, then they may want to go further to know each other, but if every time when they have some events together they find 'oh, this is different, oh that's different', but this kind of difference may may trigger your curious, but doesn't mean you want to get involved, your personal normal life.

This 'self-fulfilling prophecy' of cultural difference (Van Oord 2008: 144) can inhibit students moving to the interpersonal level, where they are able to learn more about each other as individuals, and how they share similarities (Kudo & Simkin 2003: 101-102, 108; Papatsiba 2006: 126; Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 112). Unfortunately, these problems when students are in such close proximity may provide such overwhelming input about students from other nationalities that this can result in some very negative attitudes. Marie reports an incident in the central communal space in which her Italian flatmate, who she describes as a good friend, joked with another European student about their experiences sharing a flat with Chinese students:

M1 he said this is my best friend Marie, she's from China, and he said this is my friend who's from France, and we used to live together during the pre-session course, we lived together for 2 months with another 4 Chinese students and we survived.

Unsurprisingly Marie was offended by this, particularly because these comments were made in public 'I didn't shake hands with that guy because they were laughing, they were so happy, so then I left. I was very upset', and her flatmate had no idea why. On discovering what he had said, Marie's flatmate was very apologetic. As will be noted later, Marie's European flatmate appears to be viewing Marie outside the realm of her nationality, not reflecting on his view of a 'typical' Chinese student, and possibly lacking the reflective skills to assess his own stereotypes (Halualani 2008: 11, 14; Van Laar *et al.* 2005: 342).

## **4.2 Buildings - Communal Space**

In this section, we move from considering how students interact in the more private areas of the college, the flat kitchens, to the communal spaces in college used for socialising, mainly the college bar and coffee shop.

### **4.2.1 Making use of college social spaces**

Interviewees reported that some students find difficulty in using the college social spaces for a variety of reasons – lack of friends who use the spaces, feeling intimidated or shy, perhaps due to language level, while some students report that café culture is not part of their home culture and there were one or two comments that the UK's reputation as a drinking culture (Peacock & Harrison: 2009: 496; Ujitani & Volet 2008: 292; Novera 2004: 483) could sometimes discourage them from going to the bar, though no one reported that they would feel uncomfortable frequenting a place which served alcohol, and they noted that many students whose religion forbade alcohol went to the bar.

A number of the students interviewed felt it was only possible to really use the communal spaces if their friends also frequented them, and that even though most students were welcoming, after Induction & Welcome week when it was felt to be acceptable to go to the bar, coffee shop and events alone and strike up conversations with strangers, they felt awkward going to the bar or coffee shop on their own, whereas with one friend present, a student could start speaking to others they may not already know.

The need for students to study hard was also mentioned, and the guilt and anxiety many overseas students may feel socialising, due to being under financial and familial pressure to do well (Fritz *et al.* 2008: 250; Yen & Stevens 2004: 300). On the other hand, Ruth suggests that the reason for Chinese students' studious image is 'not because Chinese students like studying, I think, um, its because our language not as good as native speakers and other European students' and Ruth believes this lack of confidence in their language ability leads to Chinese students feeling shy about socialising in the bar and café (Robertson *et al.* 2000: 99; Kingston & Forland 2008: 212; Wright & Lander 2003: 247; Zhou & Todman 2009: 481; Dunne 2009: 229; Brown 2009a: 447). This is something Steve has encountered with one of his Chinese flatmates:

S3 she almost felt it wasn't kind of hers, and it does seem to belong to certain people it was actually her language skills, she's very, very unconfident in her English, although her English is much better than my Mandarin or my Cantonese, no she felt (...) she felt the lack of English skills prevented her from taking part she felt she really couldn't go there, and it was easier for her and a couple of her friends to go down to a pub in town, but which strikes me as odd.

One interviewee, Hillary, mentioned that she used to use the café quite frequently, but stopped doing so when a group of mainly UK, European and American students, who she labels 'Europeans', started using the space regularly, and in her view 'dominating' it, putting 'off a lot of Asian students', by not appearing 'very approachable, or friendly', trying to 'play cool' (H3). Similar findings about how host country students are perceived to withdraw 'into a segregated group in an attempt to avoid cross-national interaction' (Brown 2009a: 444) have been reported (Ayano 2006: 19; Kudo & Simkin 2003: 98; Holmes 2006: 26; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland 2008: 194; Barron 2007: 90; Kingston & Forland 2008: 212; Major 2005: 91; Katsara 2004: 84; Yen & Stevens 2004: 303; Trice 2007: 113). Steve, a member of 'the clique' Hillary alluded to, simply saw the café as a convenient place to meet his UK and other friends (from China, Thailand, Mexico and Germany), who liked to socialise and study in a public place which they considered the college 'living room'.

While the café provoked some reactions, the subject of the college bar led to more discussion for appearing to focus more on attracting British, European and North American students.

#### 4.2.2 The College Bar

In many colleges, the bar is a core part of college life, makes a significant contribution to college finances, and is traditionally staffed by students. The difference between Smith and other colleges in terms of bar usage can be seen in the very low level of profit the bar makes compared to bars in predominantly UK undergraduate colleges, and in the different opening hours, the bar opening later in the evening in line with the later socialising hours of those residents who use it.

As noted above, none of the interviewees mentioned feeling uncomfortable in the bar, or objecting to using a place where alcohol was being served and consumed. While being 'completely against alcohol, I have no problems going to the bar, asking for a diet Coke' (F1), Fiona's problem with the bar was simply that it didn't serve hot drinks, whereas Laura found sitting in the bar with people who were drinking 'boring'.

A number of events take place in the bar and café area, many of which were attended by the interviewees. In order to learn more about them, participants were asked to talk about events they had attended (mini tour question), and describe in more detail an event they had attended (example question). They noted the tendency for many international students, themselves included, to attend events either aimed mainly at international students, or with the word 'international' in the title (Tian & Lowe 2009: 669). Gary gives the example of attending the Cultural Festival, and Laura the International Pub Quiz, which she helped organise. Marie attended events with music she could dance to, while Fiona found the dancing at one of the Induction & Welcome Week activities a little too authentically British:

F1 I remember the Ceilidh, the first, the second night, it was a lot of fun. I've never danced in public like this with strangers, holding strangers by their waist, so that was a good ice-breaking thing, I think. ... I do dance, but (...) not with strangers, switching partners, and no, not like that.

While finding this event to be outside of her normal experience, Fiona was aware that she was in a different country so should be open to trying out new things (Byram 1997: 50):

F1 it was a little funny, but I knew it's not my country, it's another culture, so it's not going to be looked at in the same way, (b) I thought I need to maybe change that, because I'm getting the whatever culture experience, you know different people, etcetera, I thought I'd still get – it was fun, so fine as well.

As we saw before with Zack, with this activity being very clearly a 'cultural' display, Fiona felt able to identify taking part in this event as one it was reasonable to adapt to (a behavioural shift), although mixed dancing is not something that would be permitted in her own culture, in comparison to day-to-day interaction with her flatmates, which appeared more challenging to understand.

The weekly pub quiz is a key feature of the bar. For Zack it represented the lack of willingness of the bar management and staff, who are all students, to adjust to the college's international membership.

Z2 pub quiz for example is viewed as predominantly English event. ... The pub quiz was always organized by the bar, and the bar always identified their market as the home students, because the international students don't drink as much.

As a result, he feels many students felt 'alienated by the pub quiz'. Laura replies to the criticism of the UK nature of a pub quiz by saying 'this is Britain, so they have the right to keep it, their own thing, but it's only British that can participate obviously'. Steve, one of the quizmasters, thinks the bar should do more to attract international students, but believes not all members of bar staff would agree 'I think some of the bar staff would be more receptive to it than others' (S3), reinforcing Zack's comments about the bar staff being unwilling to change some events. Steve also comments that most of the bar staff are UK, European or American, and believes this may end up appearing 'elitist, like saying that this is our bar, send that kind of message that maybe you're not welcome', acknowledging this could reinforce the impression of overseas students being excluded from the communal areas.

Although, as noted above, while the availability of alcohol in college was not seen as problematic, the effects of alcohol were noted by the interviewees. There was a feeling that British students' attitudes to alcohol could cause division, with a number of comments



about the amount and speed with which many students drink, 'alcohol in Britain seems to be fundamental to having fun' (S2), 'I think for some of them there's a conception of what happens in Britain, that we all go and we get absolutely smashed' (S3). Steve has noticed that his European friends drink far less alcohol, and 'don't seem to have that relationship with alcohol that you know Britain does' (S2), and acknowledges the belief about British students' drinking culture may put some students off going to the bar at all (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 496; Dunne 2009: 227; Ujitani & Volet 2008: 292; Novera 2004: 483; Katsara 2004: 84).

Not drinking or smoking could lead to some difficulties in integrating in certain groups, since these form an obvious marker of having something in common (Kim, H.J., 1991 in Gareis 2000: 72) ('there's no other way to bond with people in that way', 'you have to be really lively person to get out of that' F2). Marie and Hillary acknowledge they are sufficiently outgoing to socialise without alcohol. The students didn't report pressure to take part in drinking alcohol in order to better fit in (Sawir *et al.* 2008: 171), only boredom and irritation at watching others. One student, Hillary, who has a number of UK and European friends, has found that over time she has started to consume more alcohol, explaining 'when people are a bit stressed alcohol can make you feel a little bit better', she has concluded that being able to drink alcohol socially is an important skill for networking in the UK and China:

H4 I think be able to drink some alcohol is helpful, for example if you want to make some friends obviously, you know, um. And also, I think it's quite important skill for people to have, in order to socialise with people, no matter whether in China or here, yeah. Because in China for example the main way to really get things done is through dinner, dinners, let's say, and um, when we have dinner we will drink alcohol, very strong Chinese liquor, but over here people don't eat while people are drinking that is why (!?) get drunk so quickly. ... I realised that drinking too much is not good, but be able to drink a little bit alcohol, it's definitely quite helpful.

In this first section we have considered some of the issues students experience in sharing space together, private and public. The close proximity of the flats could both encourage interaction and lead to frictions, if students encountered habits and behaviours very

different to their own, while the public spaces may appear to 'belong' to some groups of students more than others. These individual differences in how students experience their living environment emphasise the difficulties in generalising, a common criticism of an ethnographic approach, though usually this relates to generalising to other locations rather than within the location under study. However, these different perspectives illustrate the depth of understanding of experience which is characteristic of a qualitative approach. In the next section we consider in more detail how students interact with each other at social events, the type of social events and socialising which is popular, and how and whether this contributes to students developing friendships with each other.

### **4.3 Socialising**

Students in general can spend a significant amount of their time socialising, which brings with it the possibility of intercultural interactions. The next section considers how the students interviewed experience social events, then goes on to consider friendship, and how they have developed friendships in college.

#### **4.3.1 Attending social events**

The students were asked in an early interview to talk about the social events they attended, describe a recent social event, who they talked to and what they did. In doing so, they reported some aspects of the events which inhibited integration. These include when students socialise, how students behave at social events, and language issues.

Two main issues became apparent regarding times of attendance; one that students from Asia tended to arrive on time at events and leave early ('in China, if we say party start from 9, people will come at 9, you know, we don't have kind of fashionably late' H2), whereas British and European students arrived late and left late ('I think for Europeans, they will gradually arrive around 10.30, 11' H2). Secondly, students from Asia, and masters students, tended to attend events early on in the academic year ('every beginning of academic year they came, because they want to integrate, they have time' H2), then not do so until after exams in June due to lack of time (see Trice 2007: 113; Snow Andrade 2006: 140), ('especially from the second term they gradually disappear, because of the workload' H2) and students from Britain and Europe, and PhD students, attended events consistently during the year, with a short break during the exam period in May, or for PhD students,

once they were very close to submitting their thesis. Some students, such as Hillary, Marie and Steve, found themselves making some sociocultural adaptations in lifestyle (Berry 2005: 702), in this instance their socialising habits, to integrate better with their European friends:

M1     you know in China, according to our lifestyle and like, before 11 we are supposed to prepare to go to bed (laughs) but here 11, okay let's go to take quick shower and get dressed up, go to Bayne House (laughs).

The culture being adapted to appeared not to be the UK culture of going out early and heavy drinking, but a hybrid UK/European style of going out a little later and drinking moderately.

When they attend events, students reported some differences in group behaviour (Van Oord 2008: 136). Hillary believes that Chinese students' expectations of a party may differ from that of UK and European students, for example 'Europeans they just stay there, cool, observe, drink, and then after they get tipsy they will dance' on the other hand 'Asians don't care, if I'm going to dance they just go dance ... no matter whether we're drunk or not' (H2). However, she thinks that many Chinese students may feel embarrassed to dance in an unfamiliar environment (see Jackson 2006: 147 about worries of losing face in front of strangers in social situations), so only the most confident 'good looking', 'good dancers' attend parties (H2). Even then, being a 'good dancer' can limit integration, 'one Asian girl actually scare people off, because she danced too well'. Hillary explains that in China if a girl dances in a very lively way, it will attract others to dance with her, because she'd be seen as 'cool', but that is not the case in the UK. While she drew a lot of attention and admiring looks from other students, others were reluctant to dance. In the end, the Chinese female dancer left the party early 'because she is too good, and I just feel that she may think that she is a bit left out, because nobody is compatible with her to the extent they can dance with her like that' (H2).

A UK student explained to Hillary that British students would be put off by someone dancing so well. She understands what he means:

H2 And I kind of get what he meant, because he said that, he's kind of given me an impression that, you know, like, just move your hips, you know, move your head, that would be like normal people, human beings dancing, know what I mean?

In this context, the Asian student's behaviour was not considered 'normal' and obviously marked her out as a member of another group (Byram 2003: 56), inhibited Western students from joining in, and led to the student withdrawing from potential intercultural contact. The British student's comment about how 'normal people' dance indicates he identified the Chinese female by her behaviour (dancing well) as an outgroup member, suggesting he had not yet acknowledged that this 'normal' behaviour was in fact an artefact of his culture (Alred *et al.* 2003: 4; Johnson & Inoue 2003: 254). Although he acknowledged the positive characteristic of dancing well, he apparently preferred his own cultural definition of appearing 'cool' (being aloof, rather than taking part). Hillary, on the other hand, demonstrates an awareness of not only how the behaviour could be viewed differently, but a willingness to understand the other perspective, which is crucial to intercultural understanding (Bredella 2003: 39).

A recent end of term party, which was attended by Steve and Hillary, gave another opportunity to reflect on how students from different countries interact at social events at a later point in the year, when first year students have been resident for 9 months and are feeling more relaxed after their exams. Both Steve and Hillary gave very similar descriptions of a very diverse mix of students attending, lots of dancing particularly from Asian (including Indian, Pakistani, South-East Asian and Chinese) and African students:

S2 Loads and loads of dancing, which is really awful because I hate dancing. Eh, and I think a lot of these parties, if it's a British thing, not quite so much dancing, lots and lots of heavy drinking. I think this international, multicultural element there was a hell of a lot of dancing  
but yeah, (...) I think that changed the dynamic a lot, there were a lot of people who went and were happy to dance and not get smashed, as opposed to the usual suspects who just wanted to (...).

Later in the year, there is some evidence that the environment has had sufficient impact on students to enable non-western students to feel comfortable displaying behaviour they

considered 'normal' (dancing) at a party, and, from Steve's perspective, for western students to alter their behaviour to fit in with the non-western students, by taking part in the dancing and not drinking to the extent they might usually, liberating students from expected behaviour, and in so doing helping to create a 'bridge across social distance' (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 108) between the students. The balance of western and non-western students attending might also have impacted on the behaviour (Leask 2009: 214), with a higher number of non-western students attending than at other points in the year.

Students may find that if they have been introduced at a social event, they may not be remembered afterwards:

M1 I remember a few days ago I went to Bayne House with my friends, and they introduce a Russian girl to me, I knew her, very well I think, but she don't remember me, and I think that's the 3<sup>rd</sup> time since last year, 3<sup>rd</sup> time, 3<sup>rd</sup> friend introduce me to her, and also you know we were living in the same building, she's living in ground floor, and I met her many times, and even when I was with my friends and we met, we talked, but she still don't remember me.

Marie believes this may be because she didn't talk to the Russian girl, or because the Russian girl thought of her as 'just another Chinese girl'. To counteract this, Hillary believes it's important to be 'the star of the party, that kind of person has to be very outgoing, be very, how to say, willing to be rejected' (H2) (Katsara 2004: 86; Murphy-Lejeune 2003:107), personality factors such as 'extroversion, openness and ... agreeableness' having been found to assist students from collectivist societies in adjusting in individualistic societies (Jang 2010: 365). Given that these are not characteristics thought common of Chinese students, this could be seen as emulating the in-group (Tajfel 1974: 82-83), adopting a rational strategy to assist with making friends (Bredella 2003:233), or could simply constitute stereotyping of Chinese students as quiet and shy.

#### **4.3.2 'Shyness' & Language**

This brings us on to issues regarding how students may feel in social situations, where the anxiety and uncertainty of dealing with people from other groups, and 'concerns about how they should act, how they might be perceived, and whether they will be accepted' (Stephan & Stephan, 1985 in Pettigrew & Tropp 2008: 190) was apparent. These anxieties

focused around feeling shy around students of other nationalities and language issues. Feeling shy was described as 'shy is partly because I don't know how to approach to you because you look really different from me' (H2), leading to anxiety in social situation and not knowing what to say (Yen & Stevens 2004: 306). While students show interest in other people, they find it hard to make the first move to talk to someone else (Jackson 2006: 147). From Gary's perspective, this shyness may partly be attributed to perceived cultural differences in how 'strangers' react to each other, with people tending to be more overtly friendly in the UK 'I think lots of people want to talk, they are easy to talk, because you have this kind of culture' (G1). Jenny and Gary both note the lack of culture of 'small talk' in their respective countries, the need for 'small talk' having been suggested as linked to the looser ties between individuals in individualistic cultures leading to individuals needing to make more of an effort to connect to each other (Trice 2007: 115). Gary explains that he has noticed that Chinese students may find themselves at a loss as to how to start and maintain a conversation, commenting that even when talking to his good friends he can talk 'maybe just three or five minutes. Sometimes I just watch, sometimes I can talk just 3 or 5 minutes together, and then, I don't know where to go' (G1) (Kim 2007: 179). In addition to this, many overseas students report difficulty in understanding accents and idiomatic language and fast speech (Brown 2009a: 444; Leask 2009: 206), and may blame themselves for this difficulty (Tian & Lowe 2009: 666), although Steve acknowledges the problem may reside with the native speaker, if, like Steve, they speak very indistinctly (Steve was in fact the most difficult interviewee to transcribe, with many sections being unclear).

Both Ruth and Marie emphasised the importance of persevering in order to overcome language difficulties, reinforcing the importance of resilience in adaptation (Dimmock & Ong Soon Leong 2010: 32; Wang 2009: 22; Gu *et al.* 2010: 18; Kudo & Simkin 2003: 106) as well as the willingness to tolerate anxiety (Brown 2009b: 191):

M1 at the beginning I was very nervous, everybody was listening to me, ... I felt nervous, then I may have a little bit difficulty, but after that much, much better. Even I remember when they talk about something I couldn't understand completely, but I tried, I tried, especially you need to talk.

Attending social events together has the potential to help students make friends, although we have noted some of the difficulties in doing so. The suggestion that university halls of residences are likely to provide a favourable context for the contact hypothesis and encourage the discovery of similarity and thereafter friendship among students from different parts of the world has been noted (Van Laar *et al.* 2005: 330; Sakurai 2010: 184), as have some of the difficulties students encounter in their residences (e.g. Kudo & Simkin 2003: 98; Trail *et al.* 2009: 681), and the weaker support shown for the contact hypothesis when dealing with 'culturally dissimilar groups, especially when the members of one group belong to the cultural majority' (Todd & Nesdale 1997: 65). In the next section we consider how the students interviewed experienced developing friendships in college.

#### **4.4 Friendship**

Turning to the topic of friendships, most students come into the college knowing few other students; however, many students rate their friendships and the time they spend with their friends as the most important aspect of college life. Some non-native English speakers may have made friends on the summer English language pre-session course, but often they end up living in different flats, so need to develop new friendships. The Induction & Welcome programme at the beginning of the academic year in October provides a good opportunity for students to meet others. As was noted by Bochner *et al.* (1977) and Bochner *et al.* (1985), from the earliest studies of overseas students and friendship patterns, the tendency for co-national friendships, at least initially, and for a number of students predominantly, was reported. Respondents also reported having friends of other nationalities, most often those from countries nearby their home country, though Hillary and Zack, both long-term residents, reported friends from many parts of the world. Many students start off by making friends of the same nationality or with the same first language. This tendency can be intensified on programmes with lots of students of the same nationality, making it even more difficult for those students to make friends from other countries (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 503; Dunne 2009: 229; Papatsiba 2006: 122), which Gary commented on.

##### **4.4.1 Making friends**

Fiona's experience appears fairly typical. She met many of her friends during Induction Week, who introduced her to other friends:

F1        where I met the friend that's my closest, one of my closest friends is the induction when we're standing in line for NHS ... yes, and there was a girl standing behind me and she's from India and she started talking to me, and because of her I met all my friends.

Laura also met people during Induction Week, but her long-term friends she met on her programme and in nearby flats. Being the only student from Azerbaijan, Laura's friends come from many parts of the world. Jenny says she finds it quite difficult to make friends, and suggests this may partly be down to 'national character', and admires the British ability to make small talk, a term which has no equivalent in Lithuanian, 'I just have no ability to speak without reason', but which she recognises is an important skill to develop (relating to *savoir apprendre*, identifying 'similar and dissimilar process of interaction', Byram 1997: 53). However, she has been fortunate that other students have made the effort to get to know her. Making the effort to get to know people and maintain friendships also comes through strongly from Marie, in order to develop really close friendships (Papatsiba 2006: 126; Jackson 2006: 149; Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 107). For example with her Chinese friends she finds having a similar experience can initiate a friendship (Gu *et al.* 2010: 16), but 'if you really want new friendship, you need to contribute a lot, you need to make a lot of effort' (M2). She acknowledges that in any circumstance it can be difficult to make friends, but in 'such kind of multi-culture community ... this is very special place, so you need to adjust yourself to, you know, just to make yourself feel comfortable in this society' (M2) (Todd & Nesdale 1997: 72). For students in the UK for just one year, it can be especially difficult to invest the time and energy needed for new friendships, particularly cross-culturally:

M2        It's like, okay, if this is just one year I may use some kind of strategy to deal with one year life, not for the long term, so maybe people will think let's just have fun, but maybe they just think, you know, just for short term, not for long term.

Unlike Jenny, Ruth has found it difficult to meet students from other countries. The issue of Chinese students, friendships and integration came through strongly, so is covered separately (Section 4.4.5).



Neil had a slightly different experience in making friends, having already made a number of friends at Smith before starting his PhD, who introduced him to other friends, many of them also PhD students, long-term residents and UK, European or native English speakers, which made his integration into college quite straightforward.

Some of the students interviewed had experienced romantic relationships with students of other nationalities. They commented that these close relationships had been instrumental in helping them learn more about people from other cultures, reflecting that 'intimate rather than casual contact (Gudykunst, 1979; Yum, 1988)' is more significant for producing positive attitudes to intergroup contact (Gareis (2000: 67). However, in a topic he found quite difficult to discuss, Zack explained that he had felt pressure from some co-nationals and other Muslim students about his relationship with his girlfriend (who was Christian), and his girlfriend had experienced some negative attitudes from her preacher, to the extent he had considered moving out of the college main site to get away from the 'pressure cooker' environment. At first, his friends appear to have thought he must be compromising his values and beliefs and those of his religion concerning relationships, and seemed concerned to ensure he didn't betray his own culture (Bredella 2003: 226-227). Over time, the majority of their friends accepted their assurances that their beliefs were fundamentally compatible.

#### **4.4.2 Having things in common**

Interviewees were asked to talk about their friends, and say who their friends were and how they got to know them. In later interviews, interviewees were then asked to comment on tentative themes which had emerged, including those concerning friendship development, for example having something in common, often culture or language.

Being friends with people with similar backgrounds was agreed to be the easiest option. The most obvious thing the students had in common was being from the same country or part of the world, or speaking the same language, and students would often gravitate towards those who seemed on the surface similar, providing 'reassurance of similarity in a diverse community' (Brown 2009b: 187; Papatsiba 2008: 120). Fiona believes 'if you're from the same country you end up having similar interests more than if you were not from the same country' (F2), and goes on to explain how it's much easier to talk about things you have in common with others, and get along with other people with similar cultural

habits, and gives an example that expectations of personal space are similar in Pakistan and India:

F2 I'd say it's because we're from the same place, we don't have the same issues about personal space, we don't have a lot of personal space, basically, we're together all the time, and there's no problem with that, but I think people from other countries are not like that really, they need space after a while, so I don't think you can get as deep as we would with people from similar areas, so deep on another level, as far as you can go with someone from the west, but deep from what I'm used to, no I don't think so.

Ruth refers to one of her friends as her 'Korean sister':

R1 because I think it's because we are all from Asian countries, we have very similar background, from Korea, and Thailand. I think our culture to some extent is similar, we can ... Anyway, we can become friends, most important thinks is we have the same habits.

With only one Masters student from Azerbaijan, Laura didn't have the option of having friends from the same country, but on reflection, she realises she has a number of friends who are Russian speakers 'the only thing that united us is language and similarities, not similarities, the same history and the same roots' (L2) (Brown 2009b: 188; Sawir *et al.* 2009: 165).

On the subject of language, Fiona notes that her friends sometimes use language to bond:

F1 the funnest part for us is that we're standing with people who don't know our language, we can talk in our language and say stuff, and that's been a bonding experience, I think for us, because obviously in our own countries we speak in Urdu or Hindi, and everyone can hear you, so there's no bond there, everyone knows. Here it's like a bit of a like a bond that we can speak in a language that no one else can understand, so I think that's also been very interesting. Because I think the first thing that one of us said when we met an Indian friend was 'oh my god, thank god someone can understand me in my own language', it's like very, very exhausting to speak in just English.

Fiona's example demonstrates that she and her friends have exploited the particular marker of difference and commonality, language (Byram 2003: 56) as a bonding tool (Pearson-Evans 2006: 50); however, it has also been noted that the use of a different language can create mistrust (Forbes-Mewett 2008: 184), and division with other students (Henderson 2009: 407; Peacock & Harrison 2009: 490).

Similarity does not always or only refer to cultural or linguistic similarity. Marie has been amazed at how much she has in common with her flatmates, even though they are from different parts of the world and emphasises the importance of having something in common to overcome initial obstacles and develop friendships:

M1 because actually it's amazing, you know, mm, people from different, sometimes people have a common even though you are from totally different background. ... I think personalities are quite similar, you know actually I used to talk about this with my friend from gym, we talk about actually people no matter you're black or white or Chinese or Japanese, actually you know if you mix those people together, you can divide them into different groups. And in one group you have some common. That's why in Smith people come you know, you can if your walking to Bayne House, you can see different groups and be with you know, they are different nationalities, why they can be friends, there must be some reasons, they must have some common. It's kind of human nature.

As Marie points out, while there are unlikely to be language problems with people from the same country, 'it doesn't mean you can have a friendship, because friendship is another level' (M2), emphasising the importance of personal characteristics and being compatible in other ways (Gareis 2000: 72; Kudo & Simkin 2003: 101-102, 108). In addition, some of the interviewees had begun to wonder whether they would have been friends with the same people back home, realising that in many ways 'we're very different in our backgrounds and upbringing, but here because you're from the same country we just gelled together and it just became like a little family' (F2), and are aware that the relationship is very much based on the context and environment, and may not last.

The students mentioned the initial ease they felt with students from their own countries, the speed with which they developed their friendships could reflect what is suggested to

be the differences in private and public layers of personality in different cultures. Gareis claims that in many European and Asian cultures, 'only the outermost layer' is considered public, and once this is passed, friendship develops quickly (Gareis 2000: 69; see also Kim 2007: 182). In comparison, in the USA, Gareis claims that initial friendships are straightforward but may go no deeper. In fact Marie and Hillary both comment on this aspect of students from the USA, that American students are quite easy to interact with on the surface, in comparison to UK students, who can appear more distant, and in particular both Hillary and Fiona reported they find female UK students difficult to befriend. There was a feeling that the UK students in the college were 'more open to getting to know people from other countries' (F2) than those in some other colleges with much lower numbers of overseas students (Todd & Nesdale 1997: 68-69), but while finding UK students to be 'very friendly, I don't know really whether they want to make friends with us or just friendly, just to be polite' (R3). The students suggested various reasons for the apparent distance of UK students, from having their own lives and friends (Kudo & Simkin 2003: 109), possibly due to many of those living in college being longer term residents or already having studied at the same institution, feeling more comfortable together (Brown 2009b: 189; Dunne 2009: 229), shyness (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 490), a lack of interest in overseas students and other countries (reported in many other studies), and, in a twist on the usual comment about overseas students, that it may be their 'culture' to keep distant. A friend of Ruth's decided to become a member of a College with more UK students, but Ruth thought she would find that lonely and isolating, citing UK students going to bars more often, and liking different types of TV programmes and music 'I cannot really get touch those things' (R3), indicating a potential feeling of 'cultural loneliness' (Sawir *et al.* 2008: 171).

#### **4.4.3 Friendships across 'political boundaries'**

A number of students commented that they were pleased to have made friends with students from parts of the world their country often had difficult relationships with (Ezra 2003: 127). This included students from China with friends from Japan or Taiwan, and Pakistani students with Indian friends. Gary, Ruth and Fiona all commented on this aspect of living in college. Gary seemed most profoundly affected by his friendship with his Japanese neighbour:

G1 my Japanese neighbour, eh, example is we push each other to understand more, because you know China and Japan, these countries fight each other for long time, in Second World War, even the First World War, and fight a lot, ... even my Chinese friends, lots of them still feel problem with Japanese, to be honest.

Although Gary recognises that his neighbour wasn't responsible and didn't need to apologise, the display of empathy and behaviour against stereotype helped develop affective ties and friendship with his Japanese neighbour (Van Laar *et al.* 2005: 330; see Gill 2007: 175 for a similar report on Chinese-Japanese flatmate friendship). Gary then invited his Chinese friends to meet his Japanese neighbour, and the students had the opportunity to become closer:

G1 I do think this bring my understanding of Japan, sometimes I invite my Chinese friends come here and have a dinner, he invite his French friends or German friends, we're together and then we, some my Chinese friends I'm so glad we find we talk with each other because I can use Chinese told them he is different, I think.

Gary concludes having one's preconceptions challenged and developing friendships and understanding is key to a peaceful future for many countries and their relationship to other countries. Zack found his negative views of Serbia being challenged when he befriended a student from there. Fiona was not surprised to find out she would get on well with students from India, notwithstanding the sometimes difficult relationship between the two countries, but was surprised by just how well they got on:

F1 actually I've always known from my brothers' and cousins' experiences that we would definitely get along with Indians, always closest friends are Indians, and I didn't not expect to expect it, but I didn't expect that we'd become like family, that's something very amazing that we're so similar and we can just become like the best of friends.

As a result of her friendship with Indian students, Fiona believes they have gained a better, more accurate and modern impression of Pakistan. These interactions exemplify *savoir apprendre*, students identifying 'contemporary and past relationships between one's own and the other countries and cultures' (Byram 1997: 50).

Some relationships appear more delicate, and Gary reports that some Chinese students have felt alienated by posters recently put up by Taiwanese students, whose numbers had at that time increased significantly:

G1 I see the pictures in the Fenwick building, they put the flag everywhere, ... and lots of Chinese people see it, they feel so depressed.

These comments highlight that it is over-simplistic to conceptualise students from overseas under the all-embracing category of 'overseas' and fail to recognise the intergroup differences which may already exist and contribute to a strong group identity (Van Oord 2008: 137) and which may be brought into focus with encounters with these groups (Tajfel 1974: 88; Sen Gupta 2003: 166), which in turn may be more likely to occur while studying overseas. While students have left their home country behind, they have not left behind their nationality or history.

In contrast to Gary and his Japanese neighbour's discussion of China and Japan's history (the distance in time from the events discussed facilitating the 'distance' required to initiate intercultural understanding), both Ruth and Fiona agree that focusing on the interpersonal level and not discussing politics considerably assists good relations between Chinese and Taiwanese and Indian and Pakistani students, since these are still very much ongoing situations. Marie found one of her flatmates was keen to talk about politics in the region he was from (Palestine), and concluded that some current conflicts may be too powerful for students from those countries to focus on the interpersonal level, and reflect the limits of what it may be possible to change, such as values and beliefs (Byram 2003: 57). However, Marie feels she has learned more about Palestine and Israel and has developed a deeper understanding of Israel, which had been one of the first countries to recognise the People's Republic of China, reflecting that knowledge may be gained of countries other than the host country.

#### **4.4.4 Sports & Hobbies**

There are some factors which all the participants agreed contributed to students being able to take part in and benefit from college life, and particularly in meeting students from other cultures, and a sub-theme of the importance of shared sports and hobbies emerged, which participants were asked to respond to in later interviews. The most immediately

obvious of these is having a strong interest in sport or similar group hobby (Campbell & Li 2008: 386; Peacock & Harrison 2009: 490; Sawir *et al.* 2008: 173). Examples students gave included table tennis, dancing, going to the gym, playing pool and basketball, all of which helped students to meet in a less pressured environment, realise what they have in common, and 'contribute to the emergence of a common history' (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 108), and so slowly build up friendships. Some other societies were thought to be less conducive to cross-cultural friendship, such as those focusing on nationality or culture, for example the Chinese Scholars and Students Association and the Hellenic Society, and the Choir, though for different reasons.

One of the most important aspects of societies and sports is that in addition to bringing students with a pre-existing interest together, students are able to take the development of friendship slowly because they are focusing on an activity, they meet regularly, and over a relatively lengthy period of time. Given that many of the students who join particularly the sports societies are already reasonably proficient, this brings students together on a fairly level playing field. In essence, these activities reflect the found conditions of the contact hypothesis – sustained, of equal status, interdependent and with institutional support (Allport 1954).

Gary explained in his first interview about his involvement with the Table Tennis Society, the membership of which is very mixed, with Asian players and a number of Europeans and Middle Eastern students. The society was set up a few months after the first interview, and had rapidly done well, winning the Colleges' B league in its first year and the A league in its second. The competitiveness of the group means they practise often 'so lots of us know each other very quickly' (G1). Gary observes:

G1      Actually, doing some sport is a very good place to build up good friendship, and, eh, we normally, we will say, let's meet regularly, sometimes every Wednesday every Friday night.

Other examples include the Pool Team, and the Basketball Team, who also won the colleges' Premier League the same year as the Table Tennis team, and which is mainly made up of Greek, Chinese and US students. Having a common interest of this type is especially important for students who are less talkative, since this allows students to spend

time together without the pressure of finding topics to discuss or where the focus is on cultural difference (Gurin & Nagda 2006: 21) – instead, students can become members of a ‘high status’ group, with the positive benefits to their self-esteem that entails (Tajfel 1974: 69).

Unfortunately, the type of societies overseas students enjoy may not exist, and overseas students may struggle, due to time or lack of familiarity with the system, to establish or engage with them (Ward 2005: 20; Robertson *et al.* 2000: 96). Gary explained the difficulties he faced in setting up a college society, and how long it took in the end for the Table Tennis Society to become established. He observes:

G1     you know this process is a bit new, it’s very new for us, how to do this college life, and the, ... You know, at the beginning, maybe we need some guidance book, and some people talk, talk to us.

Gary’s comment reinforces the importance of the importance of skills of discovery and interaction (Byram 1997: 53) needed to understand the culture which students find themselves in and the need for institutions to understand this and provide support.

Joining a society outside the college could be more problematic, since the demographic of the wider university community was much less mixed. Marie, a talented dancer, joined a university-wide dance team, but initially experienced difficulties finding a regular partner, at first dancing with the only other overseas student who was a team member. She believes that members of the team, who were mainly undergraduates and in much less culturally and nationally mixed colleges, may prefer to dance with people they perceive as being similar to them, and as one of only two Asians, Marie says ‘I felt like I’m an alien (laughs)’.

M1     my dancing partner, I had two, the previous one was from Burma, since he’s in South Campus, which is quite far, so he couldn’t manage to come every time, he missed many classes, I had to dance alone, so finally he refused to go to competition with me, so I changed my partner and with Bobby from St Basil’s College, and, uh, we went to many competitions, which is good.



Perseverance again was crucial to integrating herself in college and university activities:

M1 I kept going, that's really important, I didn't miss any class, or lecture, even you know I went to lectures, and dancing classes, and even the weather was very terrible, windy or raining it doesn't matter, I just want to be there.

Although a nationally mixed society and 'very friendly and welcoming', Fiona found joining the College Choir a rather difficult cultural experience, due to the Choir practising Christmas carols and hymns, which she felt slightly uncomfortable with as a Muslim, experiencing a degree of cultural conflict (Berry 2005: 707). However, it was the commitment required to continue which Fiona noted as the reason she stopped attending, indicating how acculturation is affected by 'personal and situational factors and their interaction' (Gu *et al.* 2010: 11):

F1 I thought I'm here for one year, I don't wanna be under any pressure, I mean it's fun, but I don't want to be under set, I have to go for meeting, I have to do this, I have to do that. It would have been fine if I was a more determined person, but I'm not like that, I don't like having a schedule like that.

The apparent 'whiteness' of some of the societies led to some questioning about whether and how the student organisation could encourage a greater diversity of membership. Steve was distressed when the Boat Club was labelled 'racist' by a student, due to its membership being mainly UK and European, and questioned whether encouraging students from other parts of the world to join if they weren't interested would be seen as labelling people 'a disadvantaged minority':

S1 part of me feels uneasy, because then we're getting people into a boat club because, we're getting someone into a boat, we're getting someone on the magistrate's bench, we're getting someone into parliament, not because they have the making of a good rower, magistrate or MP, but because they're black or they're female.

He acknowledges that identifying barriers to engagement from under-represented groups is important, but was unaware what the barriers to joining the Boat Club might be, and

mentioned a number of non-white rowers. Steve was also concerned that national societies, such as the Hellenic Society, focused too much on one aspect of similarity, and could be seen as encouraging separation (Pearson-Evans 2006: 42-43). This is something Hillary also reflected on, particularly when the most obvious things students have in common is their nationality. As an example, she describes her involvement in the Chinese Society as a Masters student in another institution, which provided support and helped her to meet friends (Gurin & Nagda 2006: 21), and in various college societies with more mixed membership at Smith:

H4 at least people from the same society they share similar interest, so they have a lot to talk about, you know but depends on what society though. For example they work for Chinese society, of course most of their friends are from Chinese society, I think it's pretty good, because especially when people, you know, become homesick or something, like students from the same country can understand you better, can really share your difficulties better. But for example other societies, for example I was in GSA, IA and I think for me personally, getting involved in all of these societies, this helped me really, well, interact with people a lot, and making friends depends on how, like, how deep the friendship goes, but that certainly helped me really a lot in terms of making friends, yeah.

In Hillary's response, she summarises many of the benefits (emotional support, help with feeling homesick, being understood culturally) of the co-national network, noting the limitations of co-national and international student societies in terms of restricting a student's potential friendship network (Papatsiba 2006: 122; Dunne 2009: 231) as well as the opportunities available in college to interact with a variety of students.

As noted above, a strong theme which emerged concerned how students reacted to the large number of Chinese students resident in the college, so this is covered in the next section.

#### **4.4.5 Chinese students**

It has been suggested that 'maximum distance exists between Western and Eastern cultures' (Burnett & Gardner 2006: 66) and that 'there appears to be a specific issue of interaction between UK students and Chinese students. Chinese students were seen to be

the most culturally distant, to be the most likely to exhibit self-excluding behaviours, to have the poorest language skills, and to share the fewest cultural reference points' (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 507; NB 'Chinese' here is taken to mean East and South East Asia, including Malaysia, Japan and Vietnam, as well as China itself), and that Asian students have particular difficulty in making non co-national friends (Fritz, Chin & DeMarinis 2008: 250). However, even students from countries which bordered China or were not in the West (such as Fiona from Pakistan and Laura from Azerbaijan) reported difficulties in interacting with Chinese students, suggesting this is not simply an East-West issue.

The large number of Chinese students resident in college (about 200 at the time of the study, which equates to approximately one-third of residents), led many students to conclude that they are in the majority, '90%', Fiona estimates, 'I have seen Chinese people everywhere, which sounds so racist. I don't mean it like that' (F1). It has been suggested that this numerical majority itself can serve to distance students from others (Dunne 2009: 231). The Chinese students interviewed reported that they and their friends found difficulty in developing friendships with students from other countries, particularly countries outside of Asia, and in some cases, other students simply didn't speak to them. There were various reasons for this, with students themselves reporting issues such as language difficulties (Wright & Lander 2003: 247; Zhou & Todman 2009: 481), which Gary felt was the main reason his first group of friends were fellow Chinese student 'maybe I want first to have some Chinese friends first, because when I go to a very different country I need some friends first' (G1), the importance of a sound basis for interactions with non co-nationals having been reported (Katsara 2004: 878; Alred & Byram 2006: 217; Pearson-Evans 2006: 42; Papatsiba 2006: 123). Gary also reports that many Chinese students are aware they will be outside of China for a short time, then returning, and are aware of the importance of building up a network of contacts which will be useful to them on their return (G1).

Fiona believes that Chinese students may feel intimidated by the different environment and challenge to their language skills, and take comfort in the security of what they know, their own culture and language (Forbes-Mewett & Nyland 2008: 186):

F2 we all find security in our own similarities in our own country or culture, but I think they're a lot more scared to go out of it because of the fact that they're not very good with English.

Other reasons include simply high numbers of Chinese students, in particular in one department, (the Business School). Hillary explained that when she was a Masters student most of her friends were Chinese 'because we discussed academic stuff we understand each other a lot easier. And also our essays about similar topics, because we're doing it in similar contexts' (H2) (Montgomery & McDowell 2009: 458-463; Gill 2007: 174).

As far as the non-Chinese students were concerned, their impression was that Chinese students didn't want non-Chinese friends. A student at the Business School, Laura had no Chinese friends, and had made the assumption that Chinese students didn't want to get to know students from outside China:

L2 Because all the other people say that they made an effort and we couldn't get any feedback from them, and they don't show what they think, what they think about your, about the topic of conversation. It's like they're very closed, don't know how to continue conversation.

Fiona considered the possibility that weaker language skills were inhibiting communication, so she and her friends tried to speak to their Chinese flatmates 'maybe they'll improve their English', but concluded that either through shyness or cultural reasons, or preferring to keep their distance, Chinese students were not 'approachable if I see them in groups, not approachable at all' (F2), the comment 'if I see them in groups' reinforcing the impression that as an assumed homogenous group, they were difficult to engage with.

Zack has a functional view of Chinese students often being together, which is that they prefer to cook together (Bochner *et al* 1977: 290 reports cooking as the most common activity with co-nationals) 'they occupy the kitchen, which we feel intimidated, like whenever I go to the kitchen I find, I have 5 Chinese living in my flat, and whenever I go there you'll find not 5, you'll have 10, and there isn't enough space for you to go and eat from there' (Z3). Later on Zack confirms there are in fact 3 Chinese students in his flat, plus himself and another non-Asian student.

Both Fiona and Laura state that they don't believe they arrived with preconceptions that Chinese students would be shy and difficult to befriend. Fiona has friends from other parts of East Asia, and doesn't believe that Chinese students are by definition shy, describing them as 'very lively, but amongst themselves' (F2), giving an example of a group of Chinese students using the games room 'but it just feels like they're the only people there and the other people could might as well not be there. That I think isolates them as well as other people' (F2).

As a result, Chinese students are accused of 'sticking together', a description which is not used of groups of western students, who are instead sometimes described as being 'cliquey'. Some of the Chinese students suggested this was because non-Asian students either couldn't, or wouldn't, make the effort to distinguish between students from different parts of Asia 'it's like Chinese, Taiwanese, Singapore, like Hong Kong people, we're all the same ... Korean students stick together, but they are small group, nobody noticed them. One day, when people see them, they will say "Oh Chinese"' (H3), which Marie similarly observes. To confirm this Hillary reports that her European friends admit they cannot tell which country East Asian students are from, though Hillary and Marie both admit they have difficulty differentiating between which countries western students are from. Hillary responds to questions about why Chinese students stick together with a question of her own:

H2     many American students and British students ask me 'Why Chinese stick together?' do you know what I asked them? Don't you stick together? Well, actually, you're right, they agree with me.

The issue of 'sticking together' was raised by some other students. For Zack, this manifested itself in feeling pressure to join the 'Jordanian group', which brought with it feelings of obligations to co-nationals (Gareis 2000: 70), which he tried to resist, because he wanted to meet people regardless of nationality. Fiona said she had not felt any pressure to behave in a particular way as a Moslem woman, but was aware of some other students who had.

The unfortunate consequence of this is that many Chinese students who are motivated to make friends with students from different nationalities may find their willingness 'crumble

through reality testing' (Papatsiba 2006: 123). Marie tells the following story about being in the gym with other students:

M2 You know I remember once, which is very, give me really really big shock, (...) I went to gym alone, and I was on the running machine on this side, and there is another girl, of course she's non-Chinese on the other side, and the one, there's a non-Chinese came in and take the middle, and he look at me, then he look at her, then he decide to talk to her first. So I was thinking, you know, because you know according to their conversation just very common, you know because they just arrived this place and they wanted to know new people. Finally he chose the maybe the similar appearance people to talk, just as her 'where are you from?' She's from Spain and, I don't remember where's he from, but actually seems like they have more common. Actually I was thinking maybe when they are looking for friends, they are looking for the common.

Marie thinks students are looking for people they assume they will have something in common with, using a student's appearance to make assumptions about cultural similarity and likely sociability (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 490) to form their first impression. By being an outgroup member because Chinese, Marie didn't fit the student's preconceptions. Marie decided not to speak to the other students when she was in the gym, worrying she might look 'desperate'.

However, Marie finds that British students can be very friendly and tolerant of others 'because a lot of different nationalities and groups are living here', (therefore used to the role of 'host', Byram 1997: 41) if a little distant, while she finds European students to be less friendly to other overseas students. Marie reports she has few friends among the mainly European students on her programme:

M2 actually I think European, especially Eastern European student choose nationalities. They choose to close to another European countries students and keep distance from Asia, because I'm doing European law, actually in my class majority of students are from European countries, and this is very, very obvious, European country students are, stick together, they always stick together. It's very common 'where are you from?' 'Greece', or 'Romania', or 'Switzerland' and 'Poland' and then after the class they just kind of maybe nature, now they become friends very,

very easily, they just talk, they stand like circle and talk to each other, then the rest part of world, some Chinese, just a few, very few, some Chinese and some one from Canada or Russia.

Echoing Murphy-Lejeune (2003: 127), Marie believes that relationships between Chinese and non-Chinese students could be enhanced if students were less judgemental of each other; European students should be more willing to engage with Chinese students and Chinese students should not assume that if 'non Chinese don't make efforts, they may think okay they don't like Chinese' (M2) (Jackson 2006: 146).

In spite of these difficulties, all the Chinese students interviewed had non-Chinese friends. In fact, after 3 years in Kirkton, Hillary now finds she doesn't have much in common with other Chinese students, who are mostly on Masters' degrees, most of her friends now being fellow PhD students. Hillary finds it difficult to have close friendships with other Chinese students, although she believes the network of Chinese students will be there to help her if she needs it. Unlike other studies (Tian & Lowe 2009: 671; Ayano 2006: 25), Hillary does not believe this is due to other Chinese students believing she had disengaged from her home culture, but thinks this may partly be down to her status as a PhD student, of whom there are only a small percentage among the Chinese students:

H2     it's because in China we have this particular culture of younger respect the older, senior is more like authority - they always call me Hillary (speaks Chinese) means 'elder sister Hillary'. So, they respect me as a sort of experience authority. ... So it's impossible for me to be like to be friends with them in this sense, equal. Yes, but with other students, European students, they don't have this concept.

As a result of groups having the reputation of 'sticking together' some students believe they become 'invisible' to others as individuals. The impression of overwhelming number of Chinese students leaves college members of other nationalities stereotyping the Chinese students as a homogenous outgroup (Sen Gupta 2003: 165-166) and makes it difficult for students in this group to be seen as individuals. Conversely, UK students also appear to be 'invisible' as a group, with students assuming there are few resident. All the interviewees express surprise on being informed that there were 100 UK students out of 600 residents.

Undoubtedly, friendship can help break down barriers, real or presumed, towards getting to know other students as individuals. A common interest, shared activities, making an effort to be approachable and outgoing and perseverance are important facilitating factors, including for the group (Chinese students) which were identified by all those interviewed as experiencing particular challenges in this regard. In contrast to previous research (e.g. Bochner *et al.* 1977, 1985), the network of other international students (non co-nationals) appeared to be an important friendship group, and many students did not appear to think in terms of co, host and other national students, but rather their friends were either co-nationals or from other countries, often countries nearby their home country, but not exclusively. This may partly be due to the small number of UK students resident, and/or influenced by the explicit multi-national ethos of the college.

One of the key characteristics of the site being researched is that the students organise many aspects of student life themselves, which is the topic to which we now turn.

#### **4.5 The organisation of 'College Life'**

All student members of Smith College are members of the Graduate Student Association, the organisation that represents members and organises many student activities in the college. A number of the interviewees had held positions on the committee, and the GSA was often mentioned by interviewees in discussion. The following section considers why certain students got involved in representing their peers, how they feel they and other students benefited from their involvement, and how students perceive the Graduate Student Association and the committee which runs it.

##### **4.5.1 Getting involved in the GSA committee**

The Graduate Student Association (GSA) committee is elected by the student body, though in practice many positions are elected unopposed, with possibly 2 or 3 students standing for the more senior positions, e.g. President, Treasurer, etc. Because of the nature of the more senior posts and the timing of the elections (in May each year), those positions are held by PhD students, with most positions elected in October, and mostly occupied by masters students or first year PhD students.



Reflecting to some extent the make up of the college, the GSA committee has a range of nationalities, though membership tends to be concentrated on UK, European and American students, with a few members from other parts of the world. The greater likelihood of host country students taking leadership roles in student organisations has been noted by Trice (2007: 113). For a time, a larger number of committee members were from the Middle East.

Regarding why students might run for the committee, the consensus was about helping other students, although one person openly admitted that, in addition to helping others, he ran for a senior position for the 'prestige', and to be the first senior officer (as far as he was aware) from his part of the world and his religion. For Zack, the catalyst to his involvement was serious disruption to the resident student body as a result of building work taking place, and a feeling that this was being badly handled by the college administration. In Neil's case, he had a number of friends who were committee members and who persuaded him to get involved. In Neil's opinion, students who got involved in student representation at postgraduate level were more likely to do so for 'less selfish and more altruistic reasons' than their undergraduate peers, who may be doing so to develop their CVs.

The interviewees who had held GSA committee positions felt they had been able to make some contributions towards making the college a better place for the student body, albeit in different ways. Hillary had held the position of International Student Representative. At the time, she was the only Chinese student on the GSA committee, and could be seen as a type of 'cultural role model' missing from the Todd & Nesdale study (1997: 71), and believed she was able to have some influence on the student committee by acting as a link between the Chinese, she corrects herself, 'Asian community' and the rest of the student body, and as a result some effort has been made to organise more culturally diverse events and involve more Asian students, the importance of appropriate social events to help bring students together having been noted by Peacock & Harrison (2009: 503) and Leask (2009: 214). She believes the committee members were open to suggestions and 'willing to consider how issues look from other people's point of view' (Kumlicka 2003: 157 in Lee 2005: 203), an important factor in developing intercultural understanding. Along with other non-British students, she was able to contribute different perspectives, and in concrete terms, influence the type of events and activities offered. This input involved

making suggestions 'this is what Chinese people would do, if you want Chinese party, if you want to do this and that' (H2), and by doing so 'help (the GSA President) bring from international students' perspectives to help him to make a better decision, let's say, or more appropriate decision. I think this kind of influence on the, um, wider level'.

One particularly difficult example Hillary gave was of trying to explain to the GSA Committee how Chinese students would feel if the Committee agreed to stocking a newspaper produced by a Falun Gong society. She explained that Chinese students would probably feel offended, however the European students strongly believed in the right to offend others. This led to an impasse. Hillary tried to explain that 'as a foreigner' Chinese students might feel 'attacked or something' and that

H2 if college allowed this stuff, they wouldn't look at this from European's perspective, it's like people have the right to be offended, they would think that college allows this kind of information, allow Falun Gong's information to be here, that means college supports this kind of, um, thing. ... I am not against people have the right to be offended, but this kind of concept Chinese students don't have.

Having spent longer in college and having many European friends, Hillary is developing the critical cultural awareness (Byram 1997: 53) needed to understand the western viewpoint, but was concerned that the Chinese students who had only been in the UK a short time would not be able to. While in many other ways the western students understood the need to take into consideration the perceptions of non-western students, this particular subject caused much controversy, since, although the students were aware the society was being opportunistic in asking for the paper to be displayed, there was a concern that not allowing the paper might seem like censorship (which Neil discussed in relation to a 'cross-dressing' society). A pragmatic compromise, that there was insufficient space for all the free newspapers external societies would like to make available and this particular one did not relate to a strong student interest, was reached and the approach to make the paper available was declined. A similar compromise was reached when the Taiwanese Society asked to join in organising a joint Chinese Scholars and Students Association, GSA and IA Chinese New Year event. Both these examples provide an indication of 'the disquieting tension in the intercultural experience' (Bredella 2003: 238), by demonstrating difficulties which can occur when a value (freedom of speech) which is fundamental to a culture is

challenged (Byram 2003: 57) and challenges to another key value, tolerance, which can occur (Bredella 2003: 238). They also exemplify how encountering cultural difference can be challenging 'when the encounter forces us to evaluate our own fundamental beliefs and values systems' (Sen Gupta 2003: 160).

The students who held more senior roles had rather differing views on what they had contributed. Zack initially protested he could not evaluate his contribution, but 'well, oh, I mean, (...) without being arrogant', he says he believes he was able to act as a catalyst for change, and to inculcate a culture of change and possibility, which his colleagues felt would be impossible. He acknowledges some people found this 'intimidating' because he was perceived as 'trying to do everything in one month', but referred to his time in office as 'the golden age' (Z2).

On the other hand, Neil, who was involved when things were more settled, felt his contribution involved 'putting out fires', or in the case of problems with heating, lighting them. Complaints about the heating rose from 'a ground swell of grumbling' until 'the flood gates opened'. Neil himself had been cold, but displayed what he described as 'British stiff upper lip' attitude of grumbling but putting up with it. Neil explained that mostly it was 'European, Brits and Americans' who openly complained, until the GSA committee decided to see if there was a bigger problem with the heating:

N1      it was everyone, everyone, people from all over the place, ... um quite a lot of Chinese students and Far Eastern students, um in general, and quite a few Middle Eastern students as well, and then some Eastern, I'm not sure if it was mostly Eastern Europeans.

Many of the students who complained had not voiced their complaints before. Neil was surprised by the number of complaints that came through, and that many students had not mentioned anything before, with some issues Neil had simply not thought about 'I heard from one student who was saying of course the fact that there's no hot water in the mornings makes it extremely uncomfortable when he's doing his daily ablutions before he prays, and I'd not even thought about that' (N1). Neil considers a variety of reasons why students may not have complained before, including the anxiety (which from Stephan & Stephan's Integrated Threat Theory is a 'fundamental cause for negative coalition between

'in' and 'out' groups', Fritz *et al.* 2008: 245) induced by not knowing 'where to start' or what the response might be, language skills, or 'deference', because they didn't want to publically complain in a foreign country (echoing a comment Ruth made about not wanting to get into trouble while overseas), (see Gullekson & Vancouver's suggestion that overseas students may feel like 'guests' in the host culture, or that they are of lower status and therefore less able to express emotion 2010: 323). He comments that despite studying at the institution for some time, he still didn't entirely understand the system, and could understand why this would be problematic for overseas students (see De Nooy & Hanna 2003).

#### **4.5.2 Leadership & Interaction on the Committee**

Some comments were made about different styles of leadership, with the view expressed by some about the 'colourful', 'charismatic' leadership of one individual, which others labelled a 'cult of personality'. On the other hand, leadership by UK students was felt by some students to be rather dull and uninviting. These views tended to separate along national lines, with the UK students seeing charismatic leadership styles as being divisive, while students from outside Europe saw this as more unifying. Hillary describes her view on what the GSA President needs:

H3 I really think the President of GSA should be someone who can really attract all the people together, and this is what this college needs, not only European students but also international students, and I really feel that this year I mean the international students, okay there's one Chinese girl, of course there are Europeans, but I think GSA has been really quiet in a way.

On the other hand, while Steve agrees that recent UK senior students are less charismatic, 'they don't have that colourful personality, at least I hope they don't, because I think it's an inappropriate way to go about running anything, be it GSA or otherwise', and refers to a previous student's presidency:

S3 um, my impression of it, and it really is my impression of it, was that it was, it was, it was a very non-British idea of democracy and very non-British idea of group identity, in this almost like a cult of the personality, and that didn't sit very well with, sort of local culture as it were, but it's much easier to get people – if you have

an absolute totalitarian, ... it's easier to get people to surround, be satellites round about that.

As a consequence, Steve wonders whether British political systems/ideals, such as voting, are appropriate to the community. This is something Hillary also comments on 'one thing Chinese students don't know is how to use their right, I think, yeah, and before they were persuaded to vote without knowing what's going on' (H2). Hillary reflects on the apparent reluctance of international students to vote for a UK student, because they felt the UK student was 'not interested in international student ... "I say hi to him, he never say hi to me, just don't see me"' (H3), and they assumed that a fellow non-Westerner was likely to have more in common with them.

Working on the committee presented some challenges in terms of expectations of working and communication styles. For Zack this involved a shift to utilising a 'European' model of working, and for his fellow executive members, to taking into consideration his enthusiasm to get things done, whichever day of the week 'so it was a good combination':

Z2     you have 5 days a week and that is your work and you have a weekend, when we relax. Middle Eastern model is different, it's 7 days a week, and if you can work them all, except for prayer times, then that's it.

Zack also found that they had different communication styles (*savoir apprendre*, Byram 1997: 52), he preferring face-to-face communication, the others preferring communication by email. For Zack, face-to-face communication allows more personal contact, which is important in the Middle East 'because formal communication takes all that emotion, that warmth and that, that, eh, trust factor that you need' (Z2).

For Neil, a bigger issue was the age range of the GSA committee, and his relative youth compared to some other committee members (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 495; Dunne 2009: 227), with national cultural differences a relatively minor consideration in how the committee was organised compared to age, background and work experience:

N1     it wasn't necessarily because they were all from different places, it's probably because they were all different ages, that was the bigger thing, and from different

backgrounds, there were people who, you know had jobs, careers, successful careers, then came back to do work on the GSA committee, and they were all from different places and I didn't know them all personally very well.

As a result, Neil adopted a more 'collaborative' rather than 'dictatorial' working style. In Neil's response to dealing with students of different ages and nationalities, the importance of the underpinning elements of respect and openness to other ways of thinking and working can be seen (Deardorff 2006: 244).

In terms of representing the student body, there was a great concern about trying to encourage as wide a membership as possible, and understanding that the GSA represented all the members, wherever they were from. Referring to his undergraduate college, Neil observes 'the paradigm would be the UK student, and if, this sounds terrible, but if the international students don't fit in, then that's their problem', however, at Smith 'we have such an international community that you can't help but think how is this going to effect people from these different, especially because we have a number of large ethnic groups. ... so you end up thinking about how these different groups will react to, well to all sorts of things' (N1) (related to *savoir comprendre*, identifying possible areas of intercultural misunderstanding, Byram 1997: 52). Neil's comment also reflects Sawir's *et al.*'s recommendation that local students need to become '*more open to and curious about the lives and values of international students, enabling them to learn more about the mores of collectivist relations* – to the extent that they not only understand those values better but at least, to some extent, can practise those values when relating to international students' (Sawir *et al.* 2008: 173, emphasis in original).

GSA committee members encouraged students from other countries to stand for election, but not always with great success:

N1 we did try, um, we did try and encourage people from different backgrounds to run, because, well, we the committee agreed in general, most people agreed with this, it's kind of useful to have faces from all the different representative cultures on the GSA, it's, so we did try and kind of encourage Chinese students to get involved in a very cynical attempt to say well if one Chinese student gets involved all the Chinese students they're friends with, or might see a Chinese student and

think okay, it's less daunting. Certainly at the bar, a lot of Chinese students have said that when Xiao used to work at the bar they felt more comfortable going up to the bar, because there was a Chinese student there. So we tried to do that, and then we got one Chinese officer who promptly never showed up, wouldn't respond to emails and didn't do anything, so we kind of bugged that. Um, but, for the most part we had quite a good balance.

In Neil's comments in particular can be seen the effort to which the student representatives have gone to provide the institutional support, in addition to that provided by the college staff, that is a requisite part of the contact hypothesis, and the difficulty when students from nationalities which are not normally committee members then don't engage. How students perceive and respond to these efforts, the GSA and the committee is considered in the next section.

#### **4.6 Perceptions of the GSA and the GSA committee**

The students interviewed had views about the GSA and the committee, and reported some confusion about the universality of membership of the Graduate Student Association. As reported in other studies (e.g. Trice 2007: 113), there is also a recognition that, in spite of the efforts mentioned above, the committee tends to be made up of students from more developed countries, and that there is often little involvement from the larger nationality groups, for example Chinese and Indian students.

##### **4.6.1 The GSA Committee**

In fact, there was some lack of clarity about who and what the GSA is, and how it differs to 'College' membership. There were suggestions that most students thought 'the GSA' simply meant the committee (S3), or possibly a student gym office (R2). Ruth explained she was aware she paid the GSA fee, but admitted 'I don't have any impression about GSA' (R2).

Steve comments that the committee 'try and bribe people with pizza' to come to meetings, but still they won't come' (S3), concluding that rather than 'a big inclusive accessibility agenda, it probably comes down to a much more personal level'. Hillary makes a similar comment about the need for the committee to appear more inclusive in dealing with all

students and observe how students from other nationalities approach people and conduct themselves in order to better understand how to involve them, concluding 'this very British, this very Kirkton, this very non Asian, this very non Indian' (H3) (see Allan's finding that 'international' school was experienced as 'western' by non-western students, 2002: 75). She makes a suggestion that the GSA President could introduce him/herself to students, 'maybe I have a card and hand my card, "okay if you're having any problem talk to me or talk to my executive members", act like a team, to build this kind of team image, right, and of course, ideally it's better to have a multiple cultural team, people can feel easy to relate with, but depends on who are active' (H3). These comments focus on the need for a personal willingness to discover other ways of approaching a particular practice (Byram 1997: 50), in this case gaining involvement and relating to others through a personal approach and demonstrate how the larger society is 'open and inclusive in its orientation towards cultural diversity' (Berry 2005: 705), which is a fundamental aspect of a multiculturalist orientation in the wider society in order to permit other groups to integrate. Indeed Steve comments that 'the GSA must shift as much as they can to accommodate' different ideas and approaches (S3). The importance of having a multi-cultural team to achieve this is also highlighted by Hillary, though she acknowledges that this depends on which students are willing to come forward and remain engaged.

On the other hand, Marie has found the GSA committee really helpful and approachable, that they 'do their best to try to get students involved', have been available to help with problems she's had and has found 'it's easy to talk to them' (M1). She gives an example of the then GSA Treasurer helping her to book a college room, and encouraging her and her friends to come to the bar, emphasising there was no need to drink alcohol, and offering to introduce her to other students. While she is aware that some students have a less than positive view of the GSA committee, she thinks they need to be realistic 'the thing is they're also students, they have their own problems, ... you know nobody paid them to service you, and sometimes you need to think of other people. I think they already, they've done a lot', emphasising the need for students to be proactive.

A simple way to encourage involvement, which echoes the call for a more personal approach, is suggested by Fiona and Marie, which is just 'maybe smile (laughs), sometimes just smile helps a lot' (M1). Fiona concurs 'a smile would be good', and describes one of the bar staff and committee members who 'says hello to me for no reason, and she smiles



at me when I ask for a drink, ... I think good cheer like that is important if you're in a committee like that, because you're here to integrate people' (F1). This notion of 'getting involved', central to college life throughout the colleges, is discussed further in the next section.

#### 4.6.2 Getting 'involved' in college life

For Steve, getting involved involves 'doing an activity, doing, activity, it's a verb':

S3 if you were to say 'why are you involved?' I would say 'I drink at the bar, I drink coffee in the coffee shop, I row for the college, I sit on the GSA', for example. For others is being involved to literally just be a member? Is that what it is to be involved, to be a member, to wear a hoodie?

Steve reports a frequent view heard around college 'I think people are "I just can't be bothered, I've got an MBA to do"', and Neil also comments on the lower level of involvement at Smith than his undergraduate college, speculating this might be a result of 'cultural differences and the expectations, ... high turnover', and whether students 'can't be bothered' to spend time trying to understand the college culture:

N1 they say 'I'm only here for a year, I'm going back, there's no point', I kind of sometimes think that that might be why there's less participation, because people are here to get, you know, the degree they're here for a year, they don't really see much value in getting involved in things for a year.

Steve's comment highlights that many students are happy and willing to express their identity as college members by wearing college labelled clothing (Gurin & Nagda 2006: 21; Altinyelken 2009: 180), known as stash, while Neil's comment reflects the time and effort required to fully engage in learning about the new culture for such a short time (Kingston & Forland 2008: 237; Sen Gupta 2003: 164).

The need for students to make an effort themselves to take part in college life is the subject of comment by all interviewees. Fiona suggests the role of the GSA committee is 'when you're advertising the event or when you're creating the event you just have to make it attractive enough that people would get involved' and then

F2 it's really up to the students to make it lively. So I think I would blame people if an event is dead I would blame the students for not participating. Like the open mic night I was so disappointed that a lot of people did not show up, because it's one of our last events and I was all dressed up thinking it's going to be one of our last events and a lot of people did not show up.

The question as to whether 'getting involved' is an appropriate expectation for students from different countries was considered. That similar types of student activities took place in other countries was confirmed by the non-UK students, apart from Laura and Fiona, who both commented that little was available in their respective home institutions, although all noted how much less stressful and demanding undergraduate studies were compared to postgraduate.

Whether students have the time to get 'involved' in college life was mentioned often, particularly masters students for whom English is not their first language (Snow Andrade 2006: 140; Trice 2007: 113). Once again, while the students had similar views that it was possible for masters students to be involved in college life, the individual variations in how these students responded to the pressure to do well in their studies and the possibilities of interaction provided by the college environment was apparent. Like most people, the students found that their involvement varied at different times of the year depending on particular pressures, although they believed it was important for them to find time to relax. While Marie acknowledges the time pressure on Masters students, she believes balancing 'study time and social life time' is important, and that complaining about lack of time 'it's kind of excuse', and that 'if you have more things to do, you may do your work more efficiently', so stresses the importance of structuring the time students have available in order to get the best out of their time in the UK:

M2 because I spent every penny which I made, I earned it, that means I paid a lot actually, because I used to work very hard, so now it's kind of investment, now I spend that (??) money during this year, I need to get as much I can back.

Hillary also comments that having work experience and being slightly older can help students to engage 'I think they are more understanding, yeah, they are more patient, and

they can relate with you better' compared to 'students who just being from undergraduate, they're very innocent' (H4). Hillary believes the underlying issue for many students may be the priority of studying and the motivation and the 'extra effort to get involved in clubs and societies' when they have some time compared to 'hang out with my friends who already you know feel very comfortable with' (H4), which is much easier. Hillary made the effort to get involved with college life because she was keen to learn as much as possible and

H4     have as authentic experience as possible, so that is why I chose, I deliberately made an effort to actually, to see how much I can do, and how well I can do, mmm, see like what I said, the interest is different. For example, I can, let's say it's of course a lot easier for me to interact with Chinese students, but I cannot gain a lot from doing that. What I mean by gain a lot is I cannot learn really something which is different, which I can compare to what I can learn from China, see what I mean? But if I get involved in the clubs and society I can definitely learn different things, that is my purpose of study here, yeah.

Zack also believed that students need to understand that 'it's not all about the academic' (Z3). Fiona's concurs that motivation is key. For Fiona, the question was not about time for getting involved, but priorities, with her main priority to have fun with her friends in what was, like Laura, her first year living away from home. As a result, she felt she couldn't commit herself to the 'pressure' of being involved in a college society on a regular basis, and, unlike Marie, didn't want to feel as if she had to organise her time and commit to regular activities, indicating the role of individual motivation and interest. Laura got involved in a college society, the IA, agreed about the need to be organised, and found there was some conflict with her academic timetable, but that other members of the society adapted their activities to suit her timetable. There were times she felt unable to take part in any activities due to pressure of academic work 'I'm just too nervous ... I don't want to fail because of any other activity' (L2). The priority for many to do well in their studies was apparent, particularly given the weight of family expectation:

G1     but some people, you know, even when they come here to do one-year course, they feel, they may feel they need to focus well on their study, and Chinese student group is like this.

In this respect, Marie's attitude to making the most of her time may be so strong because she was funding herself, unlike many younger Masters students who were being funded by their families, who would expect focus on studies (Fritz *et al.* 2008: 250; Yen & Stevens 2004: 300). Marie's work experience has also helped her to understand the demands of professional life and realise that while the workload in her subject (law) is quite intense at first, it's not overwhelmingly busy and she values a good work/life balance. This understanding has helped her take advantage of college life, whereas many younger Chinese students, according to Hillary, may never have encountered particularly difficult situations so may 'just chose to walk away' (H4) when they encounter difficulties:

M1 I have more experience, I have 4 years, I can, you know I could deal with very difficult situation, because it's like my job is, uh, is aiming to deal with other people's problem, so I may think a lot, I may think to solve other people's problems, solve myself problem, and, eh, you know, I talked with different people from my law firm, businessmen, politicians, for me nothing is, uh, a surprise, so I don't know, I just feel like I'm willing to deal with problems, I'm not afraid of problems.

In the students' reported experience, we see how the individual differences in interests, life experience and motivation, among other considerations, affects the extent to which students exert some choice over the extent to which they 'get involved' in college life

#### **4.7 Conclusion**

This chapter has focused on the participants' experience of living and socialising in college, looking at interaction in private and public areas, socialising and friendship, how students reacted to one particular nationality of students, who were singled out as in many ways 'different', and their views on the contribution of student organisers/role models, and the 'official' student organising and representative body in the college.

Residences both encouraged and brought into focus the difficulties of intercultural interaction. By bringing students together in mixed nationality flats, the differences in lifestyles became apparent, such as preferences for private and public socialising and eating and cooking habits (Dunne 2009: 231; Bochner *et al.* 1977: 290; Bourdieu 1986 in Pearson-Evans 2006: 46). Residents' definitions of a 'mixed' flat appeared to centre around

the number of Chinese and East Asian students in the flat – a flat with 3 out of 6 residents Chinese was considered not to be mixed, and was described as ‘all Chinese’, a flat with 3 British students and three other students, was considered mixed. However, a ‘mixed’ flat didn’t necessarily mean that friendship was more likely to develop among its residents. Marie and Jenny illustrate the importance of similarity in interests and personality in developing friendships (Kim 1991 in Gareis 2000: 72; Dimmock & Ong Soon Leong 2010: 33), while Marie stresses the concern that obvious markers of difference may limit opportunities for friendship development (Byram 2003: 56), by focusing on differences rather than similarities.

There is some evidence of the strength of affective factors in overcoming cultural barriers (Pettigrew 2008: 190), but that this could be at the expense of having one’s stereotypes of particular nationalities challenged, and therefore not prompting reflection (Halualani 2008: 14), as exemplified by Marie’s experience of her neighbour appearing to forget she was Chinese in laughing with his friend about how they’d ‘survived’ living with Chinese students.

Where differences could be attributed to ‘culture’, such as smoking habits or types of dancing, these could be understood and tolerated, but Zack and Fiona’s reactions to other differences, such as hygiene in the kitchen and food preparation, and communication with Chinese flatmates, indicates that where differences conflict with behavioural expectations and make people uncomfortable, this type of difference is much less easy to understand and tolerate and causes considerably more friction. This contrasts with Jenny’s experience of her Indian flatmate, where partying in the kitchen until the small hours can be understood to conflict with the human imperative of needing sleep.

Social events could bring students together, but students could still find difficulty in interacting. Over time, there is some evidence that residents become more comfortable with differences, for example with behaviour at parties, where dancing by British students (who it seems are self-conscious) may become more common, as their behaviour is influenced by students from other countries, for whom dancing more and drinking less is more ‘normal’. Sports and hobbies were reported to be an important site for potential intercultural interaction, where friendship could build up slowly, and students assessed according to their talent and commitment, rather than their nationality or their English

language proficiency (Gurin & Nagda 2006: 21; Campbell & Li 2008: 386; Peacock & Harrison 2009: 490; Sawir *et al.* 2008: 173; Sakurai 2010: 184).

Language could be a source of difficulty, in particular for Chinese students, who were believed by others and by themselves to have a lower level of language (Kingston & Forland 2008: 212; Wright & Lander 2003: 247; Zhou & Todman 2009: 481). Over time it could appear that Chinese and non-Chinese students limited their efforts to communicate with each other, as their expectations of a positive response decreased, and the expectation of the effort required to maintain communication increased. This could lead to the impression that UK students were rather distant, or students of any nationality could limit their intercultural contact as a result of the belief of the effort involved, and the lack of time available to them (whether due to the pressure of their studies, or the belief that one-year was not long enough to make major changes to themselves). The stereotyping of Chinese students, in a way not reported of others, is a major concern in an institution which aims to encourage intercultural contact and understanding, and this group seemed to be considered apart to other overseas students, almost as if there were 3 groups of students - UK students, overseas students, and Chinese students, with the latter often stereotyped as being quiet, always 'sticking together', unapproachable, and who found they had to make much more effort to make non-Chinese friends.

A number of the factors noted in the literature have received support in the research, for example that some groups are thought to be more culturally similar and some more different (Van Oord 2008: 136), lack of native speaker command of English emphasising difference (Byram 2003: 56), the reliance on stereotypes and expression of negative evaluations (Fritz *et al.* 2008: 245), the presumed greater homogeneity of outgroups (Sen Gupta 2003: 165-166), viewing someone 'as a *representative* of his/her culture', and feeling the need to act as ambassador for one's home culture (Papatsiba 2006: 112-113, 126-127).

The facilitating factors reported in other research also receive support in this study, including the importance of intimate contact (Papatsiba 2006: 117; Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 112) in particular in viewing people as individuals, the attempts to create a common group identity, for example through the use of common symbols (Gurin & Nagda 2006: 21), and the need for students to be proactive in intercultural interactions (Kudo & Simkin 2003: 98).

The research indicates that even with proactive programmes and support for intercultural interaction in place, there can still be difficulties in sustained contact, in particular with students from very culturally dissimilar groups (Todd & Nesdale 1997: 64), due to a number of reasons, including time, motivation, language ability, different expectations surrounding decision-making and expected behaviour.

While a sporting team based on interest and ability may provide the classic conditions of the contact hypothesis, student organisations are very different, and attempting to use democratically run student organisations as a means to foster intercultural understanding is likely to lead to difficulties, based on students' prior experience, expectations and understanding of issues such as democracy and democratic accountability, leadership styles, organisational responsibilities, freedom of speech and communication styles. Whether it is possible to have a fully interculturally aware and functioning student (representative) organisation with a yearly turnover of students who are not only very busy with their studies but undergoing acculturation to two new cultures – the multi-cultural environment in college and the UK environment outside the university – is highly debatable, also given the understandable reluctance of students from countries with longer histories of democracy and freedom of speech to compromise those cherished principles, illustrating that tolerance need not mean approval (Bredella 2003: 237). What might be achievable would be to support students, UK and overseas, in understanding their experiences, the environments they find themselves in, and help them to understand the processes of acculturation as a group and as individuals and accept the difficulties and challenges of intercultural contact, and facilitate contact between student groupings based on nationality, whether formal, such as Greek or Chinese student societies, or informal groupings of students on the same programme.

One aspect of this study which does not appear to have been reported elsewhere is the challenges in working together in an international environment, as evidenced by negotiating working relationships on the GSA committee. While friends could agree simply not to discuss potentially divisive subjects (such as a Chinese student and their Taiwanese friend not discussing China-Taiwan relations), where the student committee were faced with a situation which needed resolving, and which touched upon some fundamental beliefs, such as freedom of speech versus the need to maintain harmonious relations, this could not be avoided, and required advanced skills of problem solving, with at times

support from college staff. These incidents indicate some of the more fundamental challenges in developing intercultural understanding, and illustrate how tolerance of difference and 'valuing diversity' can sometimes be confused with permitting cultural difference through a process of separation and segregation – for example given that freedom of speech is a strongly held cultural belief in the UK and Europe, understanding that it may not be so important in other cultures does not mean that the host culture should not maintain that belief and expect that it be respected by members, even temporary ones, of that culture. This leads us to consider in more detail in the next chapter the aspects of the research which focus more particularly in the impact of culture on the students' residential experience, considering how they perceive they are treated as members of a particular culture, the effects of using a common lingua franca (English) on how they feel and their relationships, and the impact on their identity.



## **5. Reflecting on Culture, Language & Identity**

As we have seen in the previous chapter, living together in a residential college environment can bring into focus some of the challenges that occur when students with different national and cultural backgrounds come into very close contact with each other. In this chapter, we look at how students feel they as individuals and as members of a culture are affected personally by this experience. The criticism some students experience as cultural members, and their impressions about what triggers it is considered first, which leads onto looking at generalisations and stereotyping which occurs. Whether students are able to go beyond these cultural and national stereotypes is considered, as is how students might stereotype themselves as representatives or ambassadors for their home country. How students experience living in another language and the effect of this on how they feel as an individual is next considered, followed by a consideration of how students view the culture of the college they are living in. Finally, we look at what effect the interviewees feel their time living in college has had on them as individuals.

These issues came out of students' descriptions of how they operated in the residential environment, and as less concrete items than those which occurred in the previous chapter, often came to the fore as the interviews developed, or in response to checking with interviewees, when interviewees were asked to comment on themes which had started to emerge in previous interviews or interviews with other students (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 28). This exemplifies the use of respondent validation as one tool for triangulation (Hammersley & Atkinson 2007: 183) (another being a thorough review of other research in this area) to address plausibility and credibility (Hammersley 1992: 70, in Pole & Morrison 2003: 102).

### **5.1 Criticism**

All the students interviewed, apart from one, who reported that no one had heard of her country, had encountered criticism from others to a greater or lesser extent. They report that they perceive that some other students act as if they have a right to criticise other students' backgrounds and home countries, often directly to those students. The students who have encountered this most were the students from China and others from developing countries. Some of those interviewed reported they got the impression that

some students from developed countries felt they had the right to say whatever they felt about developing countries, particularly those with political and/or religious differences, or that students were simply thoughtless, and were unaware of the possible effects of their comments.

### **5.1.1 Topics & source of criticism**

Most often, criticism is about political or religious topics or traditions, but occasionally it can be about cultural traditions such as food or whale hunting. For Chinese students, most criticism reported centres on Tibet or Taiwan, and occasionally Darfur, though it can also be directed at some other aspects of Chinese culture 'western' students find unpleasant, such as food. In Zack's case, the majority of criticism he has encountered had been about his Islamic religion (Novera 2004: 484; Delanty 2008: 81, in Holliday 2011: 74), with mostly positive attitudes expressed towards his country. His religion, on the other hand:

Z3 on a daily basis I'm defending my religion, on a daily basis. Because there are so many misunderstandings about Islam, so many different misunderstandings, so many different fictions, and there are always these different interpretations of Islam that come, like Al-Qaida, like you know, those little 100 000 people in Afghanistan that ruined it for one billion person around the world, 1 billion and 200 million.

Zack reports he has even experienced criticism of Islam from the leader of his girlfriend's church (his girlfriend being a member of an Anglican Evangelic group), a topic he found difficult to discuss. Zack gives a rather controversial example of a misunderstanding of his religion, to do with the issue of stoning. It is unclear from Zack's response whether he believes stoning has not occurred in recent times in Islamic countries, or whether he's saying that stoning is not condoned by Islam, so if it occurs, it's not for religious reasons. Zack said he was unaware of media reports claiming that stoning still took place until he came to the UK. Because of the sensitive nature of the topic, this was not explored any further, since it was unclear how to probe further without seeming to disbelieve the interviewee, and therefore damage rapport, or appear to make a negative judgement, a possible difficulty in cross-cultural research (Burnett & Gardner 2006: 76):

Z3 For example, a lot of people tell me stoning, you stoned the woman, that is not correct, because yes they've seen it on video, it happened in Afghanistan, they stoned a woman, yes, that is totally wrong, and it's not condoned by Islam. ... and because one stoning incident happened, like, honestly, I have never heard of that incident until I came here, because in Jordan we don't have, I mean Sharia has not applied, even in Saudi Arabia where Sharia is applied there isn't stoning.

Criticism appears to originate from almost every quarter. However, the students expressed some different views regarding who was most likely to criticise. For the Chinese students, they reported most criticism from westerners and other developed nations; regarding religion, criticism was again mainly from western and developed country students, however Fiona reported criticism from her Indian friends. Overall, there seemed to be a view that countries with longer histories of human rights and democratic structures felt they had the right to criticise those at an earlier or possibly different stage of development, emphasising the 'dominant ideologies of the western world' (Sen Gupta 2003: 165) and the difficulties in changing 'values and beliefs' (Bryam 2003: 57).

Complete strangers feel that they have the right to be openly critical in Gary and Hillary's experience. Both of them reported encountering criticism from customers while working in the College bar 'he's basically trying to educate me, the way that, do you know that your government control everything, you basically don't know what's going on in the West, eh, in terms of Tibet and Taiwan, ... he's criticising Chinese and China, and us being ignorant' (H2). If responding in a non-judgemental way is a prerequisite for developing intercultural understanding (Sen Gupta 2003: 167), the students who addressed Gary and Hillary in this way could not be said to be demonstrating this, and could be taken as demonstrating the arrogance it has been suggested Chinese students have encountered from UK students (Tian & Lowe 2009: 670) and the perceived prejudice against Chinese (Jackson 2006: 146), although in this case the source of the criticism was from a small number of European students.

There is some difference of opinion over whether making critical comments is justified. While the interviewees say they believe others have the right to express their viewpoints, they think they should show a greater level of sensitivity in doing so, or question whether others are well enough informed to express the views that they do ('it's their right, ... but

it's none of their business' H2). On the other hand, students from developing countries report negative reactions if they make critical comments about the West.

There is also a degree of consensus that western media is the origin of many of the topics and the attitude that direct criticism is acceptable. Some students reported they felt that students from developed countries relied on the media for their knowledge, which Gary describes as '90%' critical towards China. In Marie's opinion, students from countries with a tradition of freedom of speech confuse the freedom of the media with 'truth':

M1 they think okay since people can speak whatever they want, so they trust them. Of course they have their own opinions, because they are from some people's perspectives, not totally truth. They can take sides before they put it on TV, they will take side, so, but you know, not, not. Majority of people just take this from TV.

Asked to say how she has come to this conclusion, Marie explains that she has come to this realisation through listening to her classmates from different parts of the world 'Canada, Switzerland, Greece, Poland, Germany and Romania, everywhere, France' talking about various topics, such as 'human rights in China. Actually, from their questions I understand they got those information from the media'. From the interactions reported by these students, the impression is gained that a number of western students who they interact with have not developed critical cultural awareness (Byram 1997: 53), are 'not aware of their own worldview' (Cushner & Brislin 1977, in Sen Gupta 2003: 159), are demonstrating the lack of awareness of 'their own cultural connections' suggested as common among White western students (Johnson & Inoue 2003: 254), and the lack of intercultural awareness also suggested as common among host country students (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 502).

In Fiona's experience, freedom of speech appears to mean the freedom to criticise that which others don't agree with, but not that which is against Western orthodoxy 'a lot of people can get away with saying things about a country like mine or a religion like mine that's gotten such bad press or bad image, because everyone's saying and everyone thinks it'. She gives an example of how another student reacted when she expressed admiration for the Prime Minister of Iran, asking 'why does he get to react like that and I can't, and say

whatever he wants to me about my religion?’ and concludes that there is a degree of hypocrisy, which she calls ‘disgusting’, regarding who has the ‘right’ to criticise:

F1      yes, it’s legitimate for them to criticise us, but it’s not legitimate for us to criticise them, and that really like makes me angry, is that if you’re doing it, then you know it should go both ways, I would never do it anyway, so I don’t need that sort of both way street anyway, but it’s sort of like why do you think you have the right to do it?

This hypocritical reaction regarding political and religious differences may be linked to the assertion of the dominance of the ‘West’ in political and economic terms leading to ‘the desire to export ‘democracy’ and somehow ‘improve’ the imagined culturally deficient non-West’ (Holliday 2011: 2).

Another incident which distressed Fiona concerned a comment a friend made about most of the ‘very very bad people’ in the world being Moslem, and she was particularly upset that a friend could make such a comment. The culturally bounded nature of humour has been noted (Ujitani & Volet 2008: 295; Dunne 2009: 232; Jackson 2006: 150) as a source of misunderstanding and distress and therefore limiting intercultural interaction:

F1      I understand how people can have a bias, because they’ve never seen the good side of Islam, I understand that, but secondly, please have the intelligence to know that this is not Islam, these people don’t represent a whole religion, I wouldn’t say, because of Hitler, that all Christians or all Germans are bad, I have intelligence to know that it’s not that, it’s those people that are like this, so if you’re going to use words, be sensitive, you say extremists, don’t say Moslems, because that’s wrong. But then I didn’t have that discussion with him, I said it to someone else, but I’ve had to listen to things like that.

Fiona was asked what her reaction was to this comment to prompt further reflection, and she explained that she didn’t feel able to say how she felt to her friend, having been reminded of her position as a member of an outgroup (it has been suggested that ‘low status people are interpersonally more sensitive and attentive to high-status people during interactions (Frale, Blackstone, & Scherbaum, 1990)’ Trail *et al.* 2009: 681), although it’s

possible, as with the example of Marie before, that Fiona's friend didn't think of her in the category of 'Muslim'. Fiona attributes this attitude to a 'superiority complex' the West has (see Brewer, 1986 on in-group beliefs of moral superiority, in Sen Gupta 2003: 166). She attributes this superiority complex to the longer history of democracy western countries have, without recognising the process those countries themselves experienced in developing their democratic systems and that countries develop at their own pace, which Hillary echoes, 'everything needs time' (H2). Fiona describes the media in Pakistan as 'the freest media that I can think of', explaining this is because of coverage of topics such as Palestine.

Criticism from students from non-Western countries was also reported. For Gary, this evidences itself more as curiosity from his Japanese neighbour about some of the rumours in the national press, such as whether pandas originate from Tibet, a rumour Gary ascribes to the Tibetan exile government. In Gary's opinion, this is based on long-standing enmity between countries which share a border and some difficult history. Like Fiona, Gary himself says he would not criticise other students directly about some of their nations' practices, mentioning Japan and whale hunting 'I don't agree Japan go to hunting whales, ... you kill them and eat them is unbelievable. But you know, ... you can read from their eyes, they also hate the other people criticize in these kinds of things'. Gary explains that in Chinese culture it's not considered appropriate to criticise another family, because this can lead to disputes, though internal criticism within the family is acceptable. Given this view, Gary explains that many Chinese people think such disharmony may make good relationships more difficult to develop (Trice 2007: 115; Hostede 1986: 307).

Jenny explains why criticism about your home country feels much more personal when you're away from it, the intercultural experience having led to 'a heightened awareness of identity (Alred *et al.* 2003: 4; Papatsiba 2006: 126-127) which can lead to feelings of 'loyalty to one's own group' (Bredella 2003: 227):

J2        again a very interesting thing, how important become your, your own country matters when you are abroad. When you are in your own country you are yourself, let's say in Lithuania we are absolutely critical towards ourselves, and we, you know, criticize ourselves a lot, we hate our country, our government, everything, you know, but when you go abroad, and if you find ... that someone is critical

towards your country, it becomes, you know, more sensitive and I was very surprised, it was very different, you know. When a Lithuanian is critical towards a Lithuanian about Lithuania, it's fine. Yeah, because it becomes some kind of personal, I think that you realise, because other - it's become really personal. Why, you know, if the person says something bad about your country when you do not even know the person, it seems that you know he wants to say something bad about yourself for some reason. You know what I mean? You get these things you cannot judge these things so objectively and so you know cold-minded, and I think it's not only Lithuania, I've noticed it with other people as well.

Jenny goes on to describe how she has seen a lot of students subjected to criticism about various things about their countries, describing it as 'a big issue'. We now turn to consider how the students react when faced with criticism.

#### **5.1.2 How do the students react?**

First reactions when encountering criticism tended to include 'surprise', 'shock', 'angry', offense or distress and the need to explain, argue or defend (Sen Gupta 2003: 160). For the Chinese students, the amount of negativity towards China came as a shock (as Ruth exclaims 'why they all don't like China?'). There is a certain amount of incomprehension about the topics, but also about why some people feel they have the right to be so openly critical. While they try to account for what has caused the criticism, some of the students eventually come to the conclusion that there is simply no point in discussing the topics, because of the fixed views of those criticising. Some also find that in trying to understand the cause of the criticism, their friends back home label them as being 'westernised' (Sen Gupta 2003: 164; Brown 2009b: 191; Gareis 2000: 70; Bochner *et al.* 1977: 279).

Hillary's reaction when she first encountered criticism, from a fellow MA student before coming to Kirkton, appears typical - incomprehension followed by the need to argue back 'I always believed Taiwan is part of China', and so she challenged the European's student's right to comment on her country's political situation, and felt the need to try to change his viewpoint. This was Hillary's first encounter with the fixed opinions and lack of 'flexibility' she goes on to discuss in greater detail:

H2 do you really know the history, and you are actually talking about this? So I felt really, really offended, and I was trying to make him understand Taiwan should be part of China, and as we can expect, um, the result of the conversation is I do not agree with him and he didn't agree with me.

The need for 'flexibility of mind' in the process of intercultural understanding has been noted (Bredella 2003: 39), something Hillary suggests a number of her western interactants lack. Later on, Hillary demonstrates that she is able to consider the other students' perspective, which has also been noted as an important part of intercultural understanding (Bredella 2003: 39) when she explains that she believes most non-Chinese students are 'not criticising or something, they are, um, the main purpose for them is to tell me what they think, and eh, they may not agree with Chinese government's policy, but it does not mean that they hate China'.

A common response is to try to educate the students who are making the negative comments 'put more fact, people understand more' (G1). Zack reports some of his friends:

Z3 feeling very angry that oh they say about us men have four wives and polygamy, and I said "okay, well defend it, is that true, is that the case, do you have facts, defend it"

When faced with criticism, Zack's bases his reaction by locating his identity (Zarate 2003: 215) and therefore his response in the academic culture:

Z3 well, if it's criticised for any political decision then you discuss it just like a normal academic discussion, if it's criticised for the culture then also tell them we are an evolutionary culture, and tell them, we are evolving day and day, we are developing, and this is not the final form because you know, there's nothing in the final form.

However, Ruth and Hillary both report that they have found that others are not willing to listen to what they say 'we don't like talk, eh Tibet, problems with, eh, it's very hard to argue, people don't like it ... they insist their opinion' (R2), and feel helpless to change the situation, so may disengage from the discussion. Disengagement and withdrawal has been



reported as a reaction to an inability to express feelings of unhappiness among Chinese students (Tian & Lowe 2009: 666). Research suggesting that international students feel they should limit display of emotion has been reported (Gullekson & Vancouver 2010: 322), as has the possibility that westerners may not register emotion in others if not overt (Gullekson & Vancouver 2010: 317), which has been suggested as linked to 'guest' status (Gullekson & Vancouver 2010: 323). This defensive reaction, demonstrating little emotion, can lead others to conclude a cultural rather than situational reaction; that Chinese students are culturally 'more remote, more close into themselves' (J2), although Jenny acknowledges this could simply reflect the individual Chinese students she knows.

That stress and anxiety may be important first steps in intercultural learning (Gill 2007: 170-171) can be seen in Hillary's changing response as she has spent more time in the UK. Hillary has progressively moved from automatically arguing, to retreating, to making a decision about whether to engage depending on the person she was speaking to, recognising how hard it is for people to change:

H2      when people believe, already believe something it's hard for them to change, and depends on whom and whether I want to make the effort to help them understand myself, and if they are really close friends, or if they are wise enough, let's say, wise in a sense they know what they are talking about, you know, and then, I would actually make an effort.

The 'critical awareness of self and others' (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 111; Byram 1997: 54) and the ability to distance herself (Bredella 2003: 39) is evident in Hillary's changing response. Like Zack, Hillary identifies herself as an academic within an academic culture – referring to western students who have studied China, she criticises their methodology as being based on reading, rather than spending time in the country, believing that students should understand the role of 'qualitative data, because I know how in-depth understanding that the people's talk can give you'.

This development in Hillary's response exemplifies a feature of an ethnographic interviewing technique, in that in extending over a period of time it can provide a deeper level of understanding of participants' experience (Charmaz 2005: 529).

All the Chinese students interviewed separately stated that in addition to a lack of understanding of modern China one reason people from other countries criticised China is because they perceived it as a threat, which has been suggested leads to greater reliance on negative stereotypes (Stephan, Stephen & Gudykunst, 1999 in Fritz *et al.* 2008: 245);

M1 western media is not very friendly to China, so they always think why China, you know one day they may take over the power in the world and they may threaten the other countries.

There were differences of opinion as to whether it was appropriate to criticise one's own country. Gary and Fiona felt able to do so, but Hillary considered it inappropriate. While acknowledging she finds some things about China unpleasant, Hillary experiences conflict between her personal opinions and loyalty to her home country when she experiences it as being under attack (Gu *et al.* 2010: 11). Mostly, loyalty supersedes her personal opinions 'I'm not going to criticise my country together with you'.

Gary finds a conflict between trying to reconcile understanding the context he is living in with the views of his friends back home, who believe Chinese students abroad should be protesting the criticism of China and making westerners understand how angry Chinese people feel about it. Gary finds himself being criticised by his friends as becoming westernised (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 106), which he acknowledges with a sigh. However he believes that the protests surrounding Tibet and the Olympics helped his friends back home realise that 'after Tibetan issue they think the overseas students love China so much but in a different way' (G1).

By representing herself as a positive image of Pakistan and of Islam 'showing them that I can say my prayers and I'm not a terrorist', Fiona believes that she may have had some impact on helping her friends understand her country and religion better. For Gary and Fiona, their reaction to criticism has been to act as positive role models for their countries and religions, in order to encourage a more positive view of China and Pakistan (Papatsiba 2006: 127). This topic will be explored further in section 5.2.5 Representing your country.

The interviewee who reported a very different attitude towards criticism was Steve. While sometimes encountering criticism, for example about the Iraq war, Steve doesn't take this personally:

S2 I don't feel answerable for my country, I feel answerable for myself. Maybe embarrassed, but not answerable.

While remaining in control of the direction of the questioning (Agar 1996: 142), given Steve's response differed to the others, he was asked to say more. Steve elaborated that he doesn't understand why other students may get upset if their home country is criticised, for example over human rights, 'well that's not your responsibility, it's not your problem'. He believes this may reflect a difference in how 'affiliated' people feel to their countries, in the UK, expressing the opinion that 'you and I probably tie our affiliations to a more lower level, to yourself, to your family and friends', explaining this by saying that Britain

S2 is not a collective society, ... if one of your very close friends or your family commits a heinous crime, then yes I think I would feel – my family, my friend, I might feel pretty terrible, in some way partially ashamed. But my country invades some other country, well, it's not my problem, we're not in a collectivist society.

Steve's final comment indicates he believes the reason he doesn't feel responsible for the actions of his government is due to the influence of collectivism versus individualism, which argues that individuals and the immediate family are at the heart of individualistic societies compared to the extended families or other types of networks in collectivist cultures (Hofstede 1986: 307). Alternatively, it may be the case that Steve, being in his 'cultural comfort zone' (Robertson *et al.* 2000: 101) has not experienced sufficient stress and anxiety (Gill 2007: 171) and cultural dissonance to really be able to question his own cultural norms and expectations (Allan 2003: 98).

### **5.1.3 What have they learnt and how have they developed from encountering this criticism?**

Although this criticism is not something they were expecting or would have sought out, the interviewees felt that this had given them an insight into how others perceive the world,

and had helped them develop some useful skills, such as the ability to detach themselves personally from a situation.

Gary has found that being away from China has given him the opportunity to 'decentre' (Byram 1997: 34) and see more clearly how others view China (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 106):

G1      when you are in China, because lots of Chinese people around, and you don't know what the world think about you, but when you come here, because now we become very minority people here, and then you can see what they think about your country, about the people's behaviour.

Gary has taken the opportunity to talk to students from different countries to try to understand their view better, for example about the incidents over China hosting the 2008 Olympics, and at students expressing openly negative opinions about their own political leadership. Gary valued the 'international experience, international insight' this brought (Edwards *et al.* 2003: 185), commenting that 'we (China) need this, this is very important'. Being in the UK for a considerable amount of time has allowed Gary to improve his language skills to the point where he is able to discuss these more challenging topics. As a result, Gary feels able to acknowledge that China, like every other country, faces problems, 'there's a lot of problems remaining there. This is what I learned thinking style here'.

While the exposure to other viewpoints has led Hillary to reflect and reassess the 'structure of [her] knowledge', this did not necessarily lead her to completely change her own opinion. Hillary has begun to question whether certain assumptions she held about society in China were accurate:

H2      before, I think, before I never thought about this freedom of speech, because I actually didn't have this concept, because I always thought we have freedom of speech, and if based on western's opinions that we don't have freedom of speech I'm, I was used to it anyway. But now I think my opinion is kind of in the middle.

For Hillary, the exchanges about China have caused her to reflect on her views about politics, and to realise that she may need to develop her views on politics 'when I was in

China I'm not interested in politics at all, but over here, people talk about politics all the time, in order to fit in, I need to know a little bit'. However, her views on politics are nuanced by the belief that concepts such as 'human rights' and 'freedom of speech' are contextually based, demonstrating critical cultural awareness (Byram 1997: 64), a view with which Marie concurs:

H2 for example human right, human rights, freedom of speech, and also for example a kind of election system, eh, I don't want generalize, overgeneralize all of them into the same category but I would like to, like to understand, like these kind of stuff, let's say, developed in the context of west, is it really applicable in a Chinese context? Eh, for example, election system. If we give all the Chinese, every one, vote, right to vote, people whom they want to be chairman for China it's going to be a chaos.

Fiona concurs about democracy, commenting that it 'will take a while before democracy is actually something good in our country' (F2). For Zack, too, democracy can have its challenges due to the large number of Palestinians resident in Jordan and the popularity of certain political parties:

Z1 we find political parties that keeps always wanting to drag Jordan into war. So many times the King, I don't know what you call it, like stopped the Parliament, or eh suspended the parliament ... and that's why democracy several times had hindrance.

As the interviews proceed over time, Hillary admits to more uncertainty, and wishes that others would be less certain and fixed in their views:

H3 I have a kind of feeling that the more I know the more I'm not confident about what I know. It's basically the more I've seen people talk about stuff, and the more I know myself, for example, the more I know that my knowledge is limited, and my experience is definitely limited, and I always have a problem with – I do not always – but only had this problem only within maybe a year or so, with people too definite about their views. Because all their views are biased, see what I mean? And is limited by their own knowledge and experience.

Hillary has therefore adopted a strategy that she describes as 'relativising' herself (Byram 1997: 34), 'not personally get involved, ... stand back. So for example, China is here, and I'm here and Frank is over there, and we are commenting on the same thing'. This involves not becoming emotionally involved 'because I know to be involved is not helpful ... when I'm emotionally involved the other person will react very differently, will react emotionally, so in the end we'll end up fighting'. For Hillary, this involves adopting a calm facial expression to send out the message that she's relaxed, and to observe the other person very closely 'their eyes, or their facial expression, whether they are happy, whether they feel offended by what I'm saying'. Disappointingly, Hillary does not find this level of consideration to be very common.

Fiona also finds that dealing with the amount of criticism she has been exposed to while being 'unpleasant' has helped her learn to

F2      A defend my views, B not defend them too much, know where to be quiet, know where to not let it effect me, know where to stand up for it, and sort of just take it as in someone's going to say something it's not going to affect me too much, ... when I go back I'll teach that to my friends who've been living over there, (...) people don't know that kind of thing over there, once they come here meet people from so many countries they realise that they're so many different ways of thinking, of living and of being, so I think that's one thing I would say I've learnt over here.

This suggests that Fiona has developed some ability to use some intercultural communication skills in real-time communication (Byram 1997: 53). She also believes that she's had a positive impact on her Indian friends, mainly in seeing how a Muslim woman can be open, wear western clothes, but still observe her religion:

F1      my Indian friends were so shocked because they don't get Pakistan in the media, they don't see anything about Pakistan, they have like a completely different image of Pakistan. They were so shocked I'm wearing clothes like this, I've seen all the movies and made all the jokes, and have all the same phrases, and that I say my prayers 5 times a day and I don't drink and I don't smoke, and still I can have guy

friends. They didn't know that, they're never shown anything about our side, the funny thing is we know everything about their culture, we know more songs from their movies than they do themselves.

For Jenny, seeing the sensitive reactions of others has helped her understand the point of 'political correctness, and just you know practical issues in communication' (J2), and remaining calm, 'cold-minded approach', in order to avoid creating problems or escalating a potentially difficult situation. She has also realised that it's important not to be angry, because 'reactions of some people may be due to unawareness, and you should not, you know, be angry because of unawareness because you yourself are unaware of many things as well, so do not make a tragedy out of that' (J2) (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 127). For Marie, while she has not changed her opinion, exposure to different sides of an argument has been useful. She believes her legal background has been of particular use to her in these difficult discussions, providing her with the skills required to research and assess a situation, look for solutions, gain the trust of others, which she likens to 'play[ing] chess'.

Many of the aspects the students commented on – developing distance and becoming more detached, seeing things from a different perspective, watching others and being aware of their reactions, indicate the students' developing intercultural awareness. For example, Hillary's statement about no longer feeling confident about what she knows suggests the 'un-freezing' of her cultural identity and awareness of others (Lustig & Koestle, 1999, in Sen Gupta 2003: 167), and her comment about having reassessed 'the structure of her knowledge' suggests through the acculturation process she has learned new ways of thinking (Sen Gupta 2003: 163). Similarly, Gary's interest in learning why other cultures might have negative views of his suggests *savoir être* (Byram 1997: 34), the respect, openness and curiosity at the base of Deardorff's pyramid model of intercultural competence (2006: 244), while the knowledge he gains and the language ability he has developed over time reflect the next level up (*savoir s'engager*). Hillary's comment about 'China is here, and I'm here and Frank is over there', for which she uses the term 'relativising' herself, suggests *savoir apprendre/faire*, skills of discovery and interaction (Byram 1997: 34).

The students who commented most on how they had developed as a result of their experiences had experienced some difficulties during their time in Kirkton, possibly

reinforcing the view that stress and anxiety (Gill 2007: 170) and cultural dissonance (Allan 2003: 98) are important first steps on the way to intercultural learning.

## **5.2 Making Generalisations**

Although it has been suggested that ‘travellers should be less inclined to produce distance-maintaining judgements’ (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 127), all the students interviewed acknowledged they made generalisations to a certain extent about other students based on their nationality, a strategy noted as adopted to help people understand how a culture works and how individuals relate to that culture (Papatsiba 2006: 112), though they all denied relying on generalisations or using them as a basis for assessing an individual. Some of the students stated they arrived with certain ideas about people based on their country of origin, others said they had no such preconceptions, but all agreed that certain generalisations had either been created or reinforced during their time living in college.

Various reasons were given for making these generalisations, from ‘it’s natural’ and difficult to avoid (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 495-496) to using the information a stereotype can provide as an aid to getting to know others, though they all emphasised that relying solely on information based on a generalisation about a particular country was not fair in assessing an individual, particularly if the generalisation employed was negative.

### **5.2.1 Common generalisations**

While the interviews had some ideas of how people from other countries might behave, the one that came through strongest and seemed to affect students the most concerned Chinese students, the stereotyping in particular of Chinese students having been reported by Turner (2009: 247-250), and the particular issue of interaction between Chinese and other students having been noted in section 4.4.5.

The non-Chinese students interviewed shared strong opinions that Chinese students were quiet and gave the impression of being shy with non-Chinese, appeared to have not particularly good English language skills, nor be open to non-Chinese or approachable and liked to ‘stick together’, the tendency to do this having been linked to the influence of primary socialisation (Bochner *et al.* 1977: 280). Asked to elaborate further, they gave various reasons for this, from innate shyness, preferring to keep distant from people from



other cultures, and while 'we all find security in our own similarities', Chinese students appear to feel 'insecure about getting beyond their own circle', often due to being not 'very good with English', which has been found to limit the opportunities to take part in intercultural interaction (Brown 2009b: 184; Campbell & Li 2008: 380; Snow Andrade 2006: 20), or to unspecified 'cultural differences'. However, it was also noted that Chinese students weren't quiet and shy around other Chinese student, which could reinforce the idea that Chinese students were unapproachable:

F2 people from China are very lively but among themselves. For example the other day we were standing where the fusbal table is, they're playing Wii and they're screaming and all that, but if feels like they're the only people there and the other people might as well not be there. That I think isolates them as well.

The non-Chinese interviewees said they had tried to talk to Chinese students but that conversation had proved extremely difficult and limited, and they felt a lack of what has been termed 'cultural-emotional connectedness' (Smart *et al.* 2000: 240). They also felt Chinese students gave the impression of not requiring non-Chinese friends (Dunne 2009: 231) and were surprised to hear that the Chinese students interviewed felt they had to do a lot of work in getting to know non-Chinese students, who to the Chinese did not appear particularly friendly.

Some generalisations seem rather harmless. Ruth comments that in particular some of her Taiwanese female friends 'say Italian guys are handsome and romantic'. However, Jenny found herself in a situation she found uncomfortable when expecting particular behaviour based on gender, but instead found that techniques for approaching a girl don't appear to be the same the world over. She refers to a misunderstanding with a male student from another culture as behaviour she wasn't able to interpret based on her own cultural assumptions; first about how men in general might approach a girl, and second about how a man from another culture might do so:

J2 when the European guy does it, it is very clear and you can deal with it very easily, and there's no, you know, and you can escape from it, and you can, you know, there's no problem with that. When the guy from some other religions do that (...), well, they can do it like first of all very, you know, they can pick up such strategies

you would never, you know, think of, and when you find it out (laughs), it's like 'oh my God', and then you deliver the whole soap opera there.

She acknowledges, laughing, that this was very much a cultural experience but one she would not wish to repeat, and one she did not wish to go into more detail about, so to be sensitive to the interviewee and respect their boundaries, the subject was dropped.

Jenny's experience illustrates that 'understanding is a process of negotiation between the context in which something is said and done and the context in which it is perceived' (Bredella 2003: 39), and also the 'socio-emotional challenges', i.e. the intercultural misunderstandings which can occur if cues from another culture are not understood (Ujitani & Volet 2008: 282).

Having had little contact with other cultures before coming to the UK, Laura believes she had no previous experience to make generalisations, but had developed some ideas about certain nationalities during her time here. She doesn't view these generalisations as negative, simply as statements of truth, claiming that she doesn't think Chinese students are all the same, but at the same time making generalisations about them and using the phrase 'herd behaviour' to describe how Chinese students behave, a phrase which many might interpret as having negative connotations, but which Laura believes to be simply descriptive (see Holliday 2011: 26):

L2 I don't really particularly have negative views about China, it's not negative, it's like stereotypes, that they are just, herd behaviour, you see herd behaviour in Chinese students. It is stereotype, I don't think that they are all the same, all (??), because they are always together, they go together to classes, they sit together, they don't mix with other people, so it's like herd behaviour.

Laura feels able to make generalisations of Chinese students because there are so many, but there are fewer students from other countries so she has not tended to generalise about them. Similarly, Fiona doesn't believe she arrived with any particular preconceptions about Chinese people, and any views she may have had were positive. However, her experience in college has caused her to develop ideas that Chinese students are not approachable and don't like to communicate. Asked whether her flatmate may simply be shy or it may be her outgoing and lively nature that causes her flatmate to be quiet and

nervous around her, Fiona is at first taken aback, acknowledges the possibility, but then argues that all her friends find the same thing:

F2 it could be (*surprise*). Maybe they get intimidated by, maybe, because they're not so quick to opening up, maybe that intimidates them, but then like, everyone's like that here, everyone from every country I've seen except China is like that.

From Hillary, Marie, Gary and Ruth, the experience of Chinese students seems to be that if they want to develop friendships with or even talk to students from outside Asia for any length of time, they are required to make most of the effort, and overcome others' views of quiet, shy and non-communicative Chinese (see section 4.4.5 for more detail on this). The experience of the attitudes between non-Chinese and Chinese students indicates how from the social identity perspective some groups appear more different than others (Van Oord 2008: 136) and how less support for the contact hypothesis has been found 'when the group members belong to culturally dissimilar groups' (Todd & Nesdale 1997: 65).

### **5.2.2 How do students use generalisations?**

The use of some generalisations about certain countries, for example as a way of approaching others (Bond 1986, in Ward 2005: 24) was reported by some interviewees. For example, Hillary explains that in her opinion generalisations can be useful to 'help me understand things ... sometimes stereotypes can help me actually prepare myself before I approach to people'. She gives examples she might use when talking to Japanese, Indian and British students: in her experience, Japanese students tend to be

H2 very quiet, very polite ... so when I approach to them, my body language even is different, I'll stand there and close my hand like this, and nod my head for a little bit, you know, so I know, that they behave in certain ways, and I would love to make them feel that I'm not that different, make them feel comfortable talking to me, so that will help me make the first move to approach them. But later on I wouldn't rely on stereotype when I talk to them, because depends on this person how they interact with me.

Hillary's approach demonstrates that she believes she needs to be aware of others' reactions in order to help in relating to others cross-culturally (Kudo & Simkin 2003: 104;

Gareis 2000: 73) and of acting strategically in intercultural environments (Bredella 2003: 233). She also notes how this is an initial strategy, and not something she would rely on in continuing the relationship. Marie concurs, explaining that in order to converse with others for a lengthy period of time, she has adopted the strategy of learning something about the countries of the people she's talking to, in a strategy that could be seen as lessening the cultural distance between individuals, though she acknowledges that this can be hard work:

M1 if you want to continue the conversation then there, which needs some techniques, like if you meet Italian, you need to know something about Italy, if you meet Greek, you need to know about Greece history, and so it's kind of you need to do some homework before, and also you can ask some topics.

Unlike Hillary and Marie, Zack finds that although generalisations based on nationality immediately come to mind ('German ... their football team keeps winning, they have good Mercedes cars'), he wouldn't use these to open a conversation with a student he didn't know, instead focusing on something all students have in common, their studies:

Z2 I opened the subject that is purely academic, like oh I'm studying and doing this, and then we go into that academic area. So that while he's speaking I can get more relaxed with him, and he can get more, you know, trust and saying, oh that guy is not that bad, and then, you know, because you never know what he has in mind about me as well. Because he might have negative generalizations, or negative misconceptions.

Even though he protests that he does not use generalisations to relate to or understand other students, Zack refers to a student having a 'Czech mentality' and a 'European model' of work. When asked about this, Zack differentiates between 'generalization' and 'management of thought', distinguishing between organisations and personal attributes, and relates this to his academic identity, finally acknowledging that he has been making generalizations to help him relate to his European colleagues, but distinguishing these generalisations from those based on personal interaction:

Z2 in the literature that I've read about, for example, the German or Central European management style, ... they have characteristics, one of them is for example the five days week, like for example focus on that, the, um, the job security importance, the, like all these issues, this is something that has been found to have a pattern, and it has nothing to do with their personal attributes, you know, it's a way they do work, ... So yeah, it's a little bit of academic generalisation, but, yeah, I try to compare that kind, it is nonetheless a generalisation.

Another use of generalisations is reported by Hillary, that students sometimes use these generalisations when discussing other students' behaviour in order to help group bonding and deal with culture shock (Papatsiba 2006: 123; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland 2008: 186):

H1 people will automatically fit people into their stereotypes, it's like 'guess what, guess what, guess what that Indian cooked today?' This is what I mean, or 'oh, I was not surprised that, you know, she got drunk again, because she's from here and there', you see what I mean? So they will share kind of good experience and bad experience with each other, eh, including me with Chinese students some times.

There are some occasions where students came into contact with individuals who or situations which challenged their stereotypes, which are discussed in the next section.

### **5.2.3 Having generalisations challenged**

It has been suggested that the student residential environment provides the opportunity for students to learn enough about each other to challenge stereotyped views (Kudo & Simkin 2003: 98). Some students in college are considered to behave in ways which don't conform to generalisations. Hillary has often found that other students are surprised to find that she is Chinese because 'people will judge me based on their stereotype on Chinese', and students have found her 'so approachable or easy to become friends with', which is not what they normally expect. She believes that some of her friends have had their views on Chinese students challenged and positively developed through exposure to someone who doesn't meet their standard view of a Chinese person, but the reaction she hears most often is that she is 'not Chinese' (Holliday 2011: 5). Hillary says she didn't realise at first that her behaviour confused other students, but over time came to the

conclusion that, rather than having their notion of what a Chinese person was like, they simply defined her as 'not Chinese', with some people describing her as 'actually European'. Hillary is quite distressed by this, and believes that other students lack enough Chinese friends to realise that there is a considerable variety as to what being 'Chinese' means, 'they're judging me based on their stereotype of Chinese. I am Chinese, there are so many Chinese like me, but they just don't know yet'. In Hillary's view the difference is not that there aren't outgoing and friendly Chinese people, but that she has made a lot of effort to not only approach others but 'to make myself approachable to them ... but it doesn't mean that all the other Chinese students they would have as much time, or they would make as much effort to let them understand them'. Hillary's comments reflect the importance of individual characteristics such as sociability (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 107), being outgoing (Katsara 2004: 86), extroversion (Jang 2006: 365), the importance of affective factors in changing attitudes (Van Laar *et al.* 2005: 342), and how the impact of cultural differences diminishes 'once people move to the friendship stage' and people are treated as individuals (Gareis 2000: 72). However, they also reinforce the view that coming into contact with students who display behaviour thought to be atypical may not encourage others to reflect on their stereotypes, since they are considered solely as individuals, their behaviour is 'framed as an exception to the essentialist rule' (Holliday 2011: 7), and in particular in developing friendship with them they may associate positive characteristics to them individually (Halualani 2008: 11; Van Laar *et al.* 2005: 342; Allan 2003: 97).

Hillary believes the reason others think she's not like other Chinese students is that, as we have previously noted, she has acted strategically and behaved in certain ways in order to fit in better to the culture, be 'less glaringly visible' (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 113) and be successful socially, and that this is a reaction to her context, not representative of how she would behave if she was in China:

H2     behave differently when I'm in China, you see what I mean? Because that's what I call learned how to behave appropriately, like, in a way which I believe is appropriate, in certain contexts, right, so when I'm in China, I wouldn't chair a meeting like that. Eh, when I'm in China I wouldn't talk to a Principal like that ... So if I'm in China I would, how to say, I would talk to my friends differently as well, topic would be different, but here, I found based on my experience if I behave in

this way I will have more friends. And, I will, make my things, it's very easy for me to get things done.

Hillary's success in developing a '*dual identity*' (Gurin & Nagda 2006: 21, emphasis in original) in understanding how to adapt her behaviour (Berry 2005: 707) to the context and adopt a culturally appropriate communication style based on her skills of discovery and interaction (Byram 1997: 53) has led to her being successful socially, but in having her national identity questioned by Chinese and non-Chinese students. While not as obviously outgoing and friendly, Marie has also found that her friends and flatmates don't consider her as 'Chinese', instead thinking of her as 'Marie', which she finds amusing:

M1 my friends said about this many times. He said 'I don't think you are Chinese, you are very different, yeah, you are very different, anyway, we don't think you are woman or or or Chinese woman, you are just Marie' (laughs).

Jenny finds that some of her stereotypes have been challenged, while others have remained. For example, she still finds that Chinese and East Asian students tend to be less communicative, which she partly ascribes to them being less confident with their English; on the other hand, she initially found them 'quite remote ... and this stereotype has changed completely, at the end, because I find them very friendly', which has happened as Jenny has spent time working with students from East Asia and South East Asia on college projects, and found these students to have far better organisational and teamwork skills than she had expected. Unlike with her experience of meeting overseas men, Jenny has had the opportunity to get to know and work with a number of students from East Asia, so has been able to change her stereotyped view, emphasising the importance of close contact as well as continuing to be aware of others' cultural identity.

#### **5.2.4 Moving beyond generalisations**

As Zack says 'as someone said all generalizations are dangerous, including this one' (Z2). While admitting making assumptions based on nationality, the students interviewed denied that they would normally let these generalisations influence their view of an individual. Jenny acknowledges that it is

J2 impossible to avoid the assumptions .... You cannot say that stereotypes do not work, they work. Of course, you cannot rely on them, you cannot ... divide people into the person from this country you say 'bye!' No, no, no, no, it doesn't work like this .... The question is how do you give up to this stereotypes. They should not be stronger than you.

Jenny therefore makes a considerable effort not to make assumptions about individuals based on nationality and vice-versa, again protesting 'no, no, no, no, no, never', emphasising that in such an international environment, the 'personal level' of individual difference becomes crucial. She does acknowledge that making assumptions based on nationality can lead to blinkered thinking about individuals, in that behaviour which is outside that stereotype maybe 'we will never see simply because we do not want to see them', but tries very hard to overcome this. Jenny's comments reflect that from the social identity perspective interaction is on an interpersonal as well as an intergroup level (Van Oord 2008: 136), and how at the friendship stage interaction has a more personal focus, with cultural difference less salient (Gareis 2000: 72). However, she also recognises that seeing those individual differences among members of other groups may be difficult if characteristics are not expected to be present (Sen Gupta 2003: 165; Papatsiba 2006: 112), which Holliday refers to as 'sociological blindness' (2011: 177).

Ruth also says she tries to resist making judgements about a whole country based on a few individuals, saying 'it's unfair ... actually every country has good people and bad people, it depends who you meet, ... I don't want to judge people like that'. She acknowledges that she may carry over a positive impression of an individual to their cultural group 'if I meet very nice British guy, very friendly, ... maybe, I think British are so nice'. On further reflection Ruth admits she may also carry over a negative individual impression to a whole national group 'if I saw a British guy throw eggs to me, "oh, I hate British!"'

Zack has found that students from the Middle East are often thought of as being rather 'volatile', though he prefers the term 'fragile', which he believes may have some basis in truth. However, Zack is at pains to emphasise that personality differences are down to the individual, not cultural traits, although if certain individuals' personality traits fulfil people's stereotypes, this can lead to the stereotype being reinforced, and attributed to those who do not display it. As in other things, Zack contextualises his approach to making



generalisations about groups by relating it to his emerging identity as an academic, explaining the point of research is to generalise 'but unfortunately if you don't do you research well, you'll end up with the wrong generalization' (Z2). He links this to a situation in college with students making assumptions about whole cultural groups based on a small number of noticeable individuals who confirm their negative stereotypes about people from the Middle East. Zack emphasises that, while generalisations can be useful 'so that we can reach a kind of understanding of how people behave, or how companies behave, or how different things work, so that we can come to terms with it, or know how to interface, or to deal with it', they are 'short-hands' and 'dangerous when you go and start acting upon them without actually studying the case'.

### **5.2.5 Representing your country/culture**

The pressure on overseas students to 'maintain and rehearse their national and cultural identity' (Bochner *et al.* 1977: 280) has been noted. One of the effects of students' national, cultural and in some cases religious identity being highlighted is that students can feel that they are tagged as not being themselves, but as being representatives of their country or in some cases religion (Papatsiba 2006: 126). As Ruth explains 'they won't say "Ruth", they just say "that Chinese girl"', as a result, Ruth and her friends feel the need to represent their country positively 'all of my friends are very good Chinese, we are very friendly, so I think we give very positive impression' (R2). Ruth's Korean friends comment that "Ruth, you're the first Chinese I know", which strengthens Ruth's view that she and her friends have the opportunity to change their view about the Chinese, which the comments of her Korean friends confirm. For Gary, creating a positive impression of Chinese people might lead to greater friendship between 'western British people to Chinese ... like my neighbour, they will feel, what you treat them will think what other Chinese people will treat them' (G2). As a result, Gary feels his identity as a Chinese person is strengthened (Papatsiba 2006: 126-127).

The two students who felt most strongly the need to give a positive impression were Zack and Fiona, both of whom felt the pressure not only to give a positive representation of their country, but also of their religion. Both felt that Islam had such a negative image that it is 'hard for us to integrate, he [Bin Laden] made it hard for us to go into any discussion without opening up the subject of terrorism, or the subject of female treatment ...'. Zack always tries to open up the discussion with something innocuous "I made very nice

biscuits”, but finds that even then people can take the subject back to their preconceptions “ah, do you put in the biscuits some nice stuff?” (laughs), illustrating how humour may backfire in intercultural situations (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 496; Dunne 2009: 232; Ujitani & Volet 2008: 295; Jackson 2006: 150). As a result, Zack feels the need to be an ‘ambassador’ (Papatsiba 2006: 126) for his country and religion:

Z3 every single Muslim is feeling targeted ... and because we’re feeling targeted we want to reassure people, and reassure the country that we’re living in that actually, we are not like that. We are simply people who want to move along, just like you, earn money, have a decent house, decent car, you know, enjoy the pleasures of life, and you can leave me alone to live my life and you live alone, leave you alone to live your life. Yes, we do feel the need to represent in a way.

Some students Zack describes as ‘careless, they still cause problems for people, they still actually didn’t put any effort to represent us well ... no matter how much we try to tell them that this is affecting bad on all of us’. In order to fit in, Zack has felt the need ‘not to enforce your way of thinking’, and gives examples of buying soft drinks from the bar and making the best choice of food if halal meat is not available. He reports that some students argue the need to ‘defend our rights’, reflecting the ‘group consciousness’ that members of less powerful groups may feel (Tajfel 1974: 88; Gurin & Nagda 2006: 21) but he believes in assessing what he can compromise on and what he is not willing to compromise on ‘you do compromise a lot the values, but not to the extent that we feel, that you know it’s gonna (...)’ the inability to complete the sentence reflecting the challenges Zack encounters adapting his behaviour to fit in while maintaining a boundary in his values (Gu *et al.* 2010: 11; Byram 2003: 57).

Fiona was initially surprised to hear that a UK student (Steve) had said he didn’t feel the need to create a good impression of UK culture:

S2 you tend to think of ambassadors as being elsewhere to their home culture, ... take me elsewhere in the world and yeah, I think I maybe would be aware that I was conforming or otherwise to a particular stereotype. I think when you’re in your home country, you tend to have an element of “well, this is the way I am, this is the way we are, like it or lump it”.

However, in reflecting on why this could be, she recognises that 'you have to get opposition to your identity in order to want to assert it, but I guess people in the UK don't feel that', noting that identity becomes an issue when there is uncertainty (Sen Gupta 2003: 167; Tajfel 1974: 88). This illustrates how in using an ethnographic interviewing technique, involving interviewees can help strengthen the research process (LeCompte & Schensul 1999: 198). In the next section, we consider the overt display of cultural identity which takes place in an annual college event.

### **5.2.6 Cultural Festival**

One of the big events of the year is the Cultural Festival, which is held in June, and is organised by a society supported by the College, the Intercultural Association (IA), whose task it is to help promote understanding and integration among the student body. Events such as the Cultural Festival have been criticised as focusing on the 'exotic and peripheral 'saris, samosas and steel bands' components (Pasternak, 1998, p.260)' (Cambridge & Thompson 2004: 171; Holliday 2011: 82). The majority of students interviewed had attended the event at least once. All thought it was valuable to some extent, particularly in terms of encouraging curiosity and openness to other cultures (Byram 1997: 50), though none of them had any illusions that it promoted a deep level of intercultural understanding. Common descriptions of the Cultural Festival include 'surface', 'exhibition', 'first step to understanding', 'generate interest', 'catalyse interest', 'important for self-expression', 'need to go deeper'.

Gary's response is typical. He sees the role of the Cultural Festival as providing a showcase for the different cultures in the college, a showcase for the best aspects of their traditions and cultures. Like Jenny, he feels this experience brings him closer to these cultures 'this bring me the chance to watch a real thing' (G2). For Jenny, the Cultural Festival helps students to understand 'the world is very diverse and big' and your own part of it is not the centre, psychologically you think that Europe is the biggest part of the world, ... and then you see that it's like the world objectively is quite different than you imagine' (J2). However, both, like the other students interviewed, are perfectly aware that 'in this half day event you cannot expect too much ...This is trigger your interest, and then push yourself to discover more things' (G2). Jenny also comments that 'all such events, ... they show just the surface, the costumes, I mean do not work every day in the costumes, and of course real life is something different' (J2). These events provide an impact that might be

described as touristy, 'to have a deeper understanding, and to realise how complicated it is sometimes, you need everyday environment, that's true, like normal life' (J2).

For those who participate, they gain the opportunity to display the best parts of their own culture, which is important in giving a reference point to others in attempting to understand other cultures:

J2 it's very important for self-expression, ... in the international environment ... you can feel the tendency that people start putting more emphasis on their own cultural identity because this is the way to represent themselves to others and your own culture starts playing more important role actually to you when you go abroad, ... Because the first judgement is about where you come from, what is the place, what is the, how the place is specific, special or something, so of course the self expression in the international environment is important for everyone, and then, yeah, you get this basic knowledge at least at such events.

Jenny recognises that the multicultural environment in the college underlines to students their own cultural identity (Sen Gupta 2003: 166; Tajfel 1974: 88). She goes on to consider the difference between representing one's culture, which may be reasonably straightforward, and the 'understanding part [which] is definitely more complicated and difficult', and notes:

J2 you know, I am wondering myself to what extent this understanding part works actually. Of course, we try to understand, we try to be tolerant, etc., etc., but how like very often it's the surface I think, it's inevitable.

As has been mentioned above, understanding requires close personal relationships 'if you get really good friends from other cultures'. Jenny recognises the importance of affective mediators over knowledge in developing intercultural understanding (Pettigrew & Tropp 2008: 190; Van Laar *et al.* 2005: 330:

J2 if you have close friends from different cultures of course it changes you a lot, but if you just participate in those events, you know get the knowledge, however your personal, say personal contacts are the ones from your own country or your own

continent, I don't think that it – well, it changes something, but it doesn't make you suddenly, you know the citizen of the world.

Like Jenny, Zack reflects on the importance of creating a positive impression to counteract common misconceptions:

Z2 for a girl who was born in Hertfordshire and for her the word 'Saudi' is an acronym for 'terrorist', and then she finds these nice Saudi men presenting coffee and sweets and nice pictures of their country and the Saudi girls, that is a cultural breakthrough, because you're getting over that barrier, that generalisation, that stereotype.

An interesting feature of the Cultural Festival is how few UK students attend, which all the interviewees commented on, and there are usually no UK students on the organising committee (Dunne 2009: 231), which Laura suggests is because UK students 'don't like to be involved with international students', before correcting herself, 'not don't like, most of them they're just friends with their own nationality' (L1). They gave various reasons for this, for example that UK students were probably busy, they had other things to do, that they already have a lot of exposure to other cultures through travel 'this experience is definitely much better than just a small cultural festival' (G2), that there aren't many UK students around, that 'they have their own life here' outside of college, or are uninterested (Kudo & Simkin 2003: 109) and so can 'escape' the 'intercultural environment' in a way overseas students are unable to (J2). Laura suggests that UK students may feel that 'there are so many international students and their own country and internationals are invading their country' (Todd & Nesdale 1997: 65).

Zack believes that British students may think that they don't have to represent themselves to other cultures 'they think that these people are here coming us to tell us about themselves, we don't have to tell them about us, ... which is a shame', whereas 'with minority thinking they want to show you, you know. In a majority you say I have a whole institution ... they still identify themselves as the majority because the undergraduates, the overall student body, 90% is British, white, middle-class' (Z2), and suggests that UK students think 'I'll go and travel in the gap year, and that will be my cultural experience'.

Steve didn't attend the Cultural Festival either year he was resident in college because he was busy, 'it wasn't because I didn't want to go'. He's not surprised that many UK students didn't attend, and in reasoning similar to Zack's, questions whether UK students might see their own culture as innate, naturalised (Sen Gupta 2003: 161), not strange (Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 108), and wonders what could be on a British stand to represent Britishness:

S2       do they see the UK culture as the norm, other cultures as, in a positive sense of the word, deviant from the norm, different to the norm, so they don't see their culture as (...) almost having a part? (...) If they have this culture that's present all the time, it doesn't need, displaying or parading. And is it not maybe just a very kind of British thing?

Steve also wonders whether there may be no need to go the Cultural Festival as a UK resident at Smith for an international cultural experience 'do I really need to go to Bayne House to sample Chinese food say, when I've got a girl who gets mortally offended if I turn down food in my own kitchen?', and questions whether there is a need to 'celebrate' culture in such a multicultural environment.

Although it has been suggested that 'intercultural' type events 'reinforced a sense of alienation and marginalisation' (Tian & Lowe 2009: 669) among international students, the responses didn't indicate this to be the case, with students focusing on the positive experience of the festival in terms of presenting their own culture and having the opportunity to learn more about others.

### **5.3       Language and Identity**

Unsurprisingly, given the fact that English is not the first language for the majority of residents and interviewees, language can cause a number of problems. These range from the more straightforward, using the wrong words, to the more conceptual, with students wondering whether the use of a second language changes who they perceive themselves to be. The topic of language problems was common across all the interviews and interviewees, and was identified in the initial analysis, and further discussed in later interviews (Agar 1996: 153-154).

### 5.3.1 Language Problems

All the non-native speakers interviewed made mistakes with English language, and the native speakers also expressed the view that language can cause difficulties. For example, Gary used hostile to mean hospitable, and Ruth used ethic to mean ethnic and objection to mean objective. The first and last of these could certainly lead to miscommunication, and in fact there was some initial confusion in the interview. Ruth acknowledges that 'I often use the simplest words to express my feelings', she will try to explain what she means, but sometimes just gives up. The irritation this can cause students is seen in their use of words such as 'bothers', 'aggravated', 'stress', 'worry', 'afraid', 'isolate', 'scared', 'vicious circle', 'frustrating', 'embarrassed'.

Hillary explains that in taking part in activities in multi-cultural teams, 'they have limited choice of vocabulary, and then misunderstandings occur because of the misuse – not misuse, like inappropriate choice of words, or even tenses, like past tense, future tense' (H1). As a result, trying to accurately convey the right message can take a considerable amount of time and energy, the effort involved (Dunne 2009: 232) and need for 'particularly well-developed skills' in working 'collaboratively *and* interculturally' having been noted by Wright & Lander (2003: 39, emphasis in original). By contrast a reduction in skills levels when working in multicultural groups has also been reported (Soontiens 2004: 313), as has how intercultural interactions are 'cognitively exhausting' (Trail *et al.* 2009: 673). However, not only can the literal meaning of words cause confusion, but also how they are used. Hillary reports a particular communication issue she has found with students from the Middle East, 'the communication was more difficult than the communication with people from other cultures'. In organising activities, Hillary reports that she feels

H1 with people from that region, I need to be extremely careful, which I was not aware at the beginning, ... if I say something, if I want to propose something, ... I need to be careful, I need to think twice, which makes me feel a little tired.

Hillary explains that in arranging events with students from other cultures:

H1 I say, "okay, could you please do this?" Or "is it okay if we do this?" ... if they say "yes", and this person will do that. If the person say "no", they will not do it. So I

know clear message, what is yes, what is no. But with Middle East, ... sometimes they say "oh yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, I'll do this, you're right", you know, but it turns out not like that.

This perceived lack of reliability Hillary finds confusing, since she appreciates the warmth and openness of many students from the Middle East, and the enthusiasm with which they greet an idea and agree to do something 'they are very vocal, they say "yes, yes, yes!", which when they then don't carry it out means she feels unable to trust students from that part of the world. In a subsequent interview, Hillary explains that Chinese people may appear to agree with others in order to not offend anyone, but would not sound so enthusiastic 'in social life, ... we wouldn't want to risk offend anybody by being direct in terms of my own opinion, especially when I have different view with you, so we always so "oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, mmm", but it doesn't mean that we agree with you' (H3). She explains the difference between what she calls 'information exchange' and giving an opinion, the former 'hold my bag' is not considered too direct in Chinese, but giving, or not giving, an opinion may require tactics to be indirect or save face (see Ujitani & Volet 2008: 285 for similar confusion between Australian and Japanese students). She is aware though that in academic terms in English she needs to be more direct in giving her opinion 'I know in this country I need to speak' (H3).

This example illustrates the 'socio-emotional challenges' of misunderstandings caused by not understanding the cues from another culture (Ujitani & Volet 2008: 282) and the extent to which understanding 'is a context of negotiation between the context in which something is said and done and the context in which it is perceived' (Bredella 2003: 39) and how the students involved may be using their own cultural contexts to interpret the situation (Holmes 2006: 28). If intercultural understanding involves 'the background required effectively to 'read' a second culture', the multicultural nature of the college and college activities underlines that students are often not attempting to read only the host culture, but the home culture of many other residents.

Another issue which concerned some students was whether they came across as being rude in English, which may even limit how much they communicate. Ruth explains



R3 when I'm talking with British I always feel worry about if I use a very rude words, or some impolite words in some impolite, talking in impolite method, so sometimes when I talk with my previous English flatmate, we feel sometimes we misunderstand each other. If that happens more, the result is we talk less and less.

This was particularly the case with native speakers (Kingston & Forland 2008: 212), but less of an issue when speaking to non-native speakers, 'if I talk with Korean or Thai I think English is not our mother language, so it doesn't matter if we made a mistake'. Ruth and Laura both worry about this problem, but don't know how to resolve it.

Hillary is also concerned about sounding rude, particularly since she considers her English to be better than the majority of Chinese students so may unwittingly cause even more offence (Pearson-Evans 2006: 52). Hillary explains that she tries to express herself with greater subtlety in English, but lacks the language skills 'I'm much more direct than when I speak in Chinese, because that's the only way I know'. She finds her friends may think her rude due to the words she uses, the tone of her voice may make her friends think she's angry with them, and the effort of concentrating on speaking English means she speaks more loudly than in Chinese.

Hillary gives an example of the difference in use of 'please' and 'thank you' between English and Chinese which upset two former non-Chinese boyfriends. Both eventually said to her "Hillary, sometimes you are a little bit rude, you know" because she didn't say 'please' or 'thank you' if she asked them to do something, such as hold her bag. She explained that in Chinese

H3 we have this kind of intimate relationship, we have power relationship, as well as, eh, kinship kind of, you know this kind of relationship. For example, if I'm with my parents I will never say "thank you", because not to say "thank you" sign of closeness, is a sign of trust, is a sign of intimacy, but me and my teacher I would say "thank you" every time, because it's a sign of respect, so we use it differently, so if I say thank you to my boyfriend that means I feel I keep a distance from him.

The different need for expressing verbal appreciation has been suggested to be due to contributions in collectivist cultures being 'a normal and expected contribution to the

group and therefore unremarkable', and to do so could even imply that the person was not contributing as much as they should have been or could be seen as insulting, compared to in individualistic cultures, where expressions of appreciation could be seen as critical in maintaining good relationships, and not doing so could lead to difficulties in developing and maintaining relationships (Bello *et al.* 2010: 296-298; Jackson 2006: 145). However, the situation is more complex than that, since one of the people who made the comment to Hillary was Japanese, suggesting a difference either between Japanese and Chinese culture, a difference in personal relationships in those cultures, an essentialist interpretation of the situation culturally, and that the exchange could be interpreted from a 'small culture' perspective ('the composite of cohesive behaviour within any social grouping', in which other 'small culture *residues*' may influence behaviour within any other small culture situation, Holliday 1999: 247-248), and that Hillary's behaviour in not expressing thanks may not have met the small culture expectations of the particular social grouping. In addition to expectations from students of other cultures, Hillary has to remind herself of co-national expectations (Bochner *et al.* 1977: 280; Ayano 2006: 25), to say 'thank you' with non-Chinese, but not with Chinese 'if I say "thank you" to Chinese they will be like "who are you trying to be, you are Chinese, you shouldn't speak like this" so sometimes with Chinese I will not say thank you', however this situation is further complicated in that sometimes Chinese students appreciate when others say 'thank you', 'because they feel, ooh, being respected, you know'. Because of the closeness of the relationships, both her previous and then current boyfriends felt able to explain how they felt, otherwise Hillary believes she may never have been aware of this problem. However, she now pays attention to this aspect of how Chinese students communicate in English:

H3        sometimes when I listen to other Chinese students talking to European students, the way actually they're trying so hard to be polite, you know, but because of our, simply because of our language difference and the order of words and everything, they sound rude, but their attitude, if you look at their eyes, they're very polite, but the language sound rude, and they sometimes really cause some misunderstandings.

Hillary feels that over time she has developed what she calls a 'British' way of being indirect, demonstrating skills in discovery and interaction (Byram 1997: 52):

H3 a little bit laid back, indirect, like British way, depends on whom I'm writing the email to, if I'm writing to British people like my supervisor, I will try to follow the British structure. What I mean by British structure is "it would be great if you could do this", you know "oh thank you very much", you know because I think it's a kind of mixture of British structure but my Chinese way of being polite.

Like Hillary, Zack also has a very good command of English, but even he finds expressing himself in English difficult, in order to 'send across the right message', but he finds his translation skills lacking, particularly in giving the correct force to his message:

Z2 when you try to translate it, it loses its meaning and it gives such either a lame meaning, or either a negative, or sometimes either very positive, like in Arabic it's very normal to say that's very, very good, in the UK you just say that's good, and it will give the same meaning, and if you say very, very good then that is extremely exaggerating and people will either not take it seriously or will take it overly excellent.

When communicating 'sophisticated' meanings, Zack finds he gets 'emotional, because you have that barrier that you cannot cross, you feel a little bit like constrained, how can I send across this feeling that I am feeling like disdained, aggravated, I can't agree with you on these concepts', and thus his self-expression is hampered, leading to feelings of 'disempowerment and frustration' (Grimshaw & Sears 2008: 268; see also Brown 2009b: 188; Jackson 2006: 147). Zack's strategy for addressing this has been to join 'the debate society, because they give courses on how to dialogue, and how to basically be able to get over that emotional barrier, you know, when you don't know the words'.

For other students normal conversation is the biggest difficulty. Ruth explains she would like the opportunity to practise her English language skills by talking to native speakers, but doesn't have many opportunities, acknowledging 'I just want to know how English people talk in their daily life, but I don't have many opportunities. Maybe we're not really trying to find those opportunities, because we seldom go to bars or cafés, and sometimes we feel shy'. Ruth can now hold lengthy conversations with her non-native English speaking friends. Steve believes that he is partly the cause of some of his non-native speaker flatmates language problems, because he mumbles and speaks indistinctly, although he

tries to speak more clearly to assist communication with non-native speakers (Brown 2009a: 444; Leask 2009: 206; Kudo & Simkin 2003: 106), commenting his Chinese flatmate 'doesn't stand a cat in hell's chance with me', and indeed Steve was the most challenging interviewee to transcribe for this reason, but believes that the non-native speaker blames him/herself for not understanding (Tian & Lowe 2009: 666):

S3 I might ask something and she would say "pardon", and I'll repeat, then she will become flustered, frustrated and annoyed because she attributes that to her English skills, whereas I readily attribute to the fact that, you know, I'm speaking with my hand over my mouth or something.

Marie, Laura and Gary appear to have done what Steve recommended doing and Ruth was to an extent unable to do, that is taking the opportunity to speak as much as possible. They all acknowledge that at first language was a problem, but again perseverance and resilience were important factors:

M1 a little bit scared, because at the beginning I was very nervous, everybody was listening to me, ... I felt nervous, then I may have a little bit difficulty, but after that much, much better. Even I remember when they talk about something I couldn't understand completely, but I tried, I tried, especially you need to talk.

In spite of taking as many opportunities as possible to speak in English, Laura is still disappointed by her progress 'I thought that it would be better, I think it has improved but I expected more' (L1). Gary believes it takes about 18 months to 2 years to feel comfortable with expressing himself in English, which is longer than most masters' students are in the UK for.

Fiona is the only person interviewed who said that she and her friends used language as both a tool to bond and to exclude, through code switching, as an 'act of identity' and 'to create privacy and power' (Pearson-Evans 2006: 50; Pavlenko & Blackledge 2004: 8). Although 'Urdish' (a mix of English and Urdu) is her first language, Fiona finds talking 'pure English' all the time tiring, 'my mouth hurts after a while' and explains how 'I think the first thing that one of us said when we met an Indian friend was "oh my God, thank God someone can understand me in my language"' (F1). She describes:

F1 the funnest part for us is that we're standing with people who don't know our language, we can talk in our language and say stuff, and that's been a bonding experience for us, because obviously in our own countries we speak in Urdu or Hindi, and everyone can hear us, so there's no bond there, everyone knows. Here it's like a bit of a like a bond that we can speak in a language that no one else understand.

Laura on the other hand, while having Russian speaking friends, is happy to speak in English as much as possible, and 'when we are in a company where some people don't know Russian and then another Russian speaking guy comes and starts talking Russian I don't like it, because other people don't understand, I prefer to answer in English'.

For many Chinese students in Marie's opinion, the 'worse circle' (vicious circle) of feeling their English is not good enough and not taking the opportunity to practice and their English further deteriorating exists (see e.g. Brown 2009b: 184; Campbell & Li 2008: 380). This appears a common view, as Laura comments 'if you know English less you prefer not to talk, you're afraid you'll make mistakes, ... most of the time they speak Chinese, they don't improve their English'. Indeed, there appears to be a cline of language ability, with many students believing Chinese students are at the bottom, 'Taiwanese ... English language ability competence ... is slightly higher than Chinese students, ... both of these groups they're not good at integrating themselves with other groups, let's say, but compared the those two together, Taiwanese slightly better' (H2). There is a concern that 'even the most profoundly ... excellent English speaker, Chinese, will always have this problem with thinking that, "do I fit in?"' (Z2) to the general college environment. For the more proficient Chinese speaker of English, there may also be a concern that 'if I speak English too well when I'm among Chinese they may not find I can fit, not I can fit in, they may feel distant from me among Chinese students' (H2) (Jackson 2006: 147).

Zack's comment that Chinese students may find difficulty with their status as a group in college reflects the argument that language ability forms 'cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1991, in Pearson-Evans 2006: 49), and therefore impacts on individual and group status and power according to their proficiency in the host language, while Hillary's comment about how students with poorer language ability are less able to integrate reflects the suggestion that language ability has been used as a proxy for cultural similarity by UK students

(Peacock & Harrison 2009: 490). Both these comments recall Berry's contention that some groups are not accepted as well as others, and these groups 'often experience hostility, rejection, and discrimination, one factor that is predictive of poor long-term adaptation' (2005: 704).

In discussing language, some of the students reflected on how as a person they felt different when speaking in another language. The theme of identity, starting with the role of language in identity, is discussed in the next section.

### **5.3.2 Identity**

In expressing themselves in English students can feel that who they appear to be and what they are able to express can differ (Alred 2003: 24) to their native language. Academic concepts may have been learned in English, so are easier explained in that language, and students may struggle to explain them at all in their first language. However, students can also feel that in English they are not speaking their 'own' language, in the sense that they have learned English from a textbook 'how to open a conversation, how to end a conversation, how to say good morning, how to say goodbye' (H1). Some students report that they even sound different in English to in their first language. The effect is that students feel that they are projecting themselves differently, and often not how they would like to (Alred 2003: 22; Grimshaw & Sears 2008: 264; Brown 2009b: 188). Gary finds that he is often concerned about 'say(ing) what I really want', and feels 'limited' in expressing himself, but has persevered to establish himself, which he feels he has been successful in doing in his third year in college,

G2     try to build up the image you want to show, what kind of person you are, ... when I come here I find that at first you almost cannot say, cannot get the image what you want to show others, you cannot exactly to show them, but eh, with the time, with time going I think it's alright.

In addition to language issues, some of the students also felt their identity as someone from their home culture had been brought into focus through their intercultural experience (Alred *et al.* 2003: 4). Gary is still aware after 3 years of how different things are in Kirkton, how he feels 'you are minority, not like majority in China'. This feeling of being a minority has been heightened by media coverage of China 'every time they talk about China, I will

very interested to watch it carefully in detail. I will watch what's Britain's point, what's the media's point, towards my home country, you know' (G2). Although initially disconcerted by the media coverage of China in the UK, over time Gary realises he can learn from these different perspectives, which intensifies his feelings of being 'Chinese' in outlook 'every people have different opinions, but I'm interested to learn why they are different, ... it's very different, so you think you are more Chinese'.

For Ruth, it's being aware that the community is mostly British which makes her feel her Chinese identity most strongly. Both Ruth and Hillary had travelled in Asia before coming to the UK, but this didn't cause either of them to reflect on their Chinese identity. Hillary exclaims she realised on first arriving in the UK 'I am so Chinese, because I look different, and the food, ... that is when I have this huge cultural shock, because of that it reminds me about my own identity'. After studying in the UK, she then returned to China, where she felt more aware of certain aspects of her culture:

H2 I didn't feel I was the same when I was in Beijing. Actually, it further enhanced my awareness of being a Chinese when I was in China, because studying abroad that one year for example makes me understand the particular kind of strengths I have as a Chinese, or particular kind of, aspects or cultural thing, as a Chinese, many different aspects, the way of thinking, my behaviour, why I make certain decisions, which are different with other people, and, eh, my values.

She notes, however, that she hadn't had time to reflect on her experience when she was in the UK, because she was too busy with her studies 'but when I went back to China to work for one year I unconsciously been reflecting, because by living in Beijing, and working over there, interacting with Chinese people, make me understand more my behaviour, in the UK' (H2).

Hillary intended to return to the UK, and felt in order to adapt better she had to prepare (Chirkov *et al.* 2008: 438), exert control of the situation (McLeod & Wainwright 2009: 67-69), raise her awareness of herself and her cultural identity and how that impacted on her experience, and as a result, she believes she has found integration easier the second time around. Identity has become a complex issue for Hillary. She feels herself very strongly Chinese 'I am definitely not British', but that her experience in the UK has changed her.

Previously, she had been unable to express this change, but can now see that the experiences she has 'accumulated' have enabled her to 'accept some things in this country' which she reflected on when she was in China. She feels able to be more emotionally detached ('decentre', Byram 1997: 34), to stand back and observe, and thinks this means she is able 'to understand both, like why Chinese people behave in this way, why British people behave in this way' (H2).

One example she gives of this is of people queuing. In China she would have accepted queue jumping as normal, but after being in the UK, her attitude has changed, and she would now look on queue jumpers in a critical way. However, she would not try to stop people from doing so, because she worries about other people accusing her of taking on foreign 'sophistications'. Having said that, she would no longer queue jump herself, 'I would automatically stand in the queue, behave like a British' (Gill 2010: 366-371).

For Fiona, the unpleasant experience of being in line for criticism has strengthened her identity as a Pakistani woman, and she explains how her 'patriotism' has evidenced itself in the UK (Tian & Lowe 668; Brown 2009b: 189):

F2 I have the flag in my room over my bed, I made Pakistani flag cupcakes on the 14<sup>th</sup>, so just things like that which I really wouldn't do at home, like on our Independence Day at home we're just sitting inside, because we know there's going to be a really big rush outside, we don't get out, so we're just sitting watching TV. Here I was around, you know passing every cupcakes, so I think in that sense, I had to express it in different ways, that maybe strengthened it somehow. Same for religious festivals, um, we had to make the effort to bring people together or do something on our own, at home our family, everyone's doing it anyway, you take it for granted, so here you get to feel it in a different way.

For Fiona, changing when you go abroad is natural, 'either you're going to just sit in your room and not get to know anyone, and you're going to go back having learned nothing', and thinks it's important to be willing to 'grow, or just be open' (Byram 1997: 50), otherwise 'you really shouldn't come abroad at all (laughs)'. Zack echoes the notion of being 'open' and goes on to explain in greater detail what he feels he is able to change, and



what remains constant. He says he now defines himself as 'a global citizen', and is aware this sounds

Z3        maybe a cliché, but that's truly how I feel. ... when I first arrived I came with the very open, that I want to rethink things, I want to learn as much as I can about the others, and I want to develop myself. Because I came with that mentality, not necessarily I define myself as a global citizen, but I define myself as in the exploration stage. I'm yet undefined, I'm yet undecided, let's see what happens.

For Zack, living in the college environment does not mean that he has to compromise his identity, though he has focused on the more positive aspects particularly of his national and religious identity:

Z3        that is, that is essential for identifying what are the beliefs, like, the beliefs that I believe in in my identity as a Muslim, as a Arab, as a Middle-Easterner, as a third-world country, as a southerner, you know from the southern hemisphere (...) almost, middle hemisphere, um, are basically the beliefs that I kept are the beliefs that are widely, generally accepted all over. ... That doesn't mean that I am giving up stuff that others don't believe in, no.

When reflecting on how he feels as a Jordanian when in the UK, Zack explains how this has helped him understand the situation of minority groups in his own country:

Z2        I didn't understand the Christian minority in Jordan until I came here, because you start thinking like a minority, and you start thinking like I'm not the majority, I'm the minority here, and, the facilities don't cater for me. In Jordan, of course, if you go to any shop there's halal meat, you know it's like the whole country is halal. So, that is something taken for granted. ... So, these little practical things like the food, the dress code, the things that are taken for granted back home, don't mean anything here.

In discussing how they feel about themselves as related to their national identity, the awareness that they have a group as well as an individual identity and that these interact comes through, which has been noted as a key component in developing intercultural

competence, if it leads to the 'deeper, more complex, sense of belonging to groups, communities, societies and nationalities' (Alred *et al.* 2003: 5).

In the last part of this chapter, how the students experienced the culture of the college will be discussed.

#### **5.4 College culture**

Two main themes emerged in discussing the culture of the college, these revolved around whether the college culture was western or international, and the feeling that living in college was like living in a bubble (Gu *et al.* 2010: 16). For Steve and others, these two notions were linked.

Notwithstanding the low percentage of UK residents in college (20% of the total), Steve doesn't feel himself to be in an alien culture; however, nor does he feel he's in the UK, describing it as 'a bit of a bubble kind of thing, almost slightly suspended reality, because here you have cultural balances that are not at all representative of anywhere else in the north-east' and comments 'I almost don't have my British hat on when I'm in college'. Asked to explain what he means by this statement, he says he feels 'just a student in college'. This primary identity of a student comes through in most of the interviews, not surprisingly since it's one thing all interviewees have in common. In some ways, Steve sees his national identity as being less relevant, though 'not ... like I've had my identity stripped from me in any way. It's something I probably leave at the door because I don't see it as relevant, almost I don't feel the need to differentiate myself'. Not that Steve doesn't see some others as being 'foreigners', but his notion of his own national identity has changed to be more European than British 'I think you somehow affiliate yourself in broader groupings', giving as evidence the way students from various parts of the world seem 'to move round together, ... European students together, Chinese again, eh, I notice quite often a lot of the ones from the Asian subcontinent, India and so on form their own groups', suggesting they feel 'cultural-emotional connectedness' (Wright & Lander 2003: 240) with groups from nearer by, but 'cultural distance' (Ward, Bochner & Furnham 2001: 169 in Forbes-Mewett & Nyland 2008: 200) with groups from further distant. For Steve, this very broad cultural mix means that differences in cultures from nearby countries become less relevant:

S2      so I think that ... my being English and Giovanni's being Italian becomes almost immaterial when you are faced – that makes it sound like a problem, I don't mean it to sound like that – when you are faced with seemingly more stark cultural ... and if this college was only for English and French people, ... I think the English and French students would polarise themselves. But I think the English see themselves as having more in common with the eh, Italians than they do with the Chinese and therefore ... there's a few broad poles and you affiliate yourself to the one, and so hence when I say I don't feel British (...).

Steve summarises this by commenting 'the definition of who you are ... comes from who or what surrounds you'. The 'unhurried kind of atmosphere' Steve believes is 'quite conducive to, not so much liberation, but ...'. Neil, who had attended Kirkton as an undergraduate and Masters student as a member of another college, concurs with this notion of liberation, something it has been suggested overseas students might experience (Gill 2007: 172):

N1      it felt like a much easier place to be yourself, probably because there's a much wider variety of people, ... people are quite tolerant of other people, people from different backgrounds, I mean, so it was kind of like almost the fact that it's less homogenous made it easier to be yourself. Maybe it made you feel more like an individual, but not individual and marginalised, more kind of individual within a kind of like a friendly society.

Neil describes how there was much more pressure to conform at his undergraduate college, and have a particular identity, giving the example of a friend of his who was always identified according to his role and persona as captain of the football team. The multi-national nature of the college in Neil's view had an impact on UK residents, in permitting them not to feel bound to personality traits they may prefer to distance themselves from (Gill 2007: 172).

According to Fiona 'it's like home, walking around. In fact we take it for granted some times that we're so at home over here' (F1). Fiona acknowledges that 'obviously the basics will be western, it's a western country, but I think it's pretty much international'. Fiona acknowledges she's very familiar with the UK, having visited many times, but finds that

visiting cafes, bars and 'hanging out' are not simply western notions, but pretty much universal 'yes it's a western concept but I don't see it as being a western way of socialising, it's a very international way of socialising'.

Like a number of the others, both Fiona and Marie describe their time in college as being almost like a holiday. Fiona comments like Steve on the pace of life being quite relaxed and furthermore finds that she's had more freedom as a Pakistani woman on her own than she would have back home, 'you have a little bit more independence, so you feel like you can get up and go on a road trip or go on a hiking trip' (F2). Fiona says she's now so familiar with the place and at home that she's trying to stop taking the college for granted 'because I want to treasure the fact that I was here'. Marie also comments on the importance to her of remembering her time in college and being remembered 'I want my foot prints to be you know left, it's like I want to find some link to let me remember this place.'

While none of the students interviewed said they thought of themselves as overseas students in college, they sometimes felt 'foreign' in town or in other parts of the UK. As Laura puts it 'because I'm surrounded by international students, so I don't feel like international student, ...I don't feel like I am outsider' (L1); similarly Ruth comments 'I just feel like I'm a student here, not a foreigner ... If around me there are all English people I will have very strong feeling that I'm a foreigner'. Hillary believes that the college has been successful in creating a culture which accepts all students, and all the students interviewed described themselves as feeling at home in college.

Zack explains that he doesn't believe that students identify themselves as 'overseas' students, but without another term to describe themselves, they had no option but to use that as the most obvious description. Zack therefore adopted the Kirkton norm of a 'college' identity, by introducing the term 'Smithsonian', as a reference point, a group identity which home and overseas students could share:

Z2        it means that there is a reference point for you, it means that there is security, there is protection, it means that there is a group that you can relate to, they have the same problems as you are, because they are students, they are also from countries, and they feel also that they are a minority here, even though that might

not be a bad thing, but it means that there are difficulties, and it makes us, you know, strength in numbers.

Hillary is surprised by how some UK, European and American students talk to college staff and managers, in a very direct manner that even after a number of years in the UK and in college she doesn't feel she would be able to. She attributes this to notions of equality in the UK, which she understands, but 'although I've been here for many years, I'm still Chinese, and eh, I still feel it quite hard for me to actually be really, behave like what British students do, or Americans, or European students do, you know, to talk to you know, teacher or Principals or their Professor like that'. She feels it might not be a lack of respect, but that 'the respect does not involve how they talk to you'.

Over time, Hillary has come to realise that this notion of 'equality' and sameness is more complex than she initially thought. She explains:

H3 at the very beginning when I came here I felt everybody is the same, everybody is the same, yes, we are different in terms of languages, but we are same because we are students, it's okay for us to talk to each other, it's not difficult, however now I feel that, first of all I think culture does play a role, like where you're from, and also your religion plays a role, and also actually this person, more like individual. Because for me it's very easy for me to relate to Asian students, because they look similar, all of this, but it does not mean I will be good friends with them, actually most of my friends they are not Asians, however I find several individuals, let's say from America and um, from Europe very hard to actually communicate with them, eh I don't know why, I still couldn't, you know, figure out why. Because we know each other for 3 years already and I still feel a little bit intim, intimated?

Hillary feels this has had some impact on who she can make friends with, that it's easier to make friends with Asian students, but harder with others, because she doesn't know how to react to this.

Steve also comments on this notion of 'equality' in the college. He feels there is an expectation that:

S3 everyone's all got to be best friends with each other, equal in this wonderful college of equity and everything will be fine ..., I think at some level, some groups of people are probably going to be incompatible, at a certain deeper level, certain fundamental level some things just don't change.

However, he also believes that 'I don't think for one minute that means we can't get along, I think people can get along, I think you can be incompatible but get along in a funny sense of the word'. Steve is at times reluctant to speak about difference 'we've made difference a dirty word', since he believes 'British people are terrified of asking, questioning, or engaging with alien elements of other cultures, because it's seen as unPC, or we're terrified of breaking some political correctness'. He finds that other cultures are not so shy to ask questions, for example, about why some Muslim women wear headscarves - he asked this question and found that the person he asked and the others around were open to discussing this.

Two examples of the fundamental incompatibilities Steve refers to involve alcohol and 'the roles of women', and this is something Hillary comments on when dealing with men from the Middle East, 'I think male tend to be a little bit, I don't want to use this word, but sometimes can be a little bit intimidating, and um, aggressive? They didn't threaten me but I felt a little bit "oh, one second! You know we should be equal" is what I mean'.

That the college has to an extent been successful in encouraging cultural pluralism (Berry 2005: 703), which is linked to a more positive outcome for sojourners due to being more likely to foster an integrationist culture and providing support from the various communities in college, is supported by the students' statements, and this has enabled the students to feel themselves, but realise who they are is linked to their environment. The students commented on the tolerance of the student body, and while on occasions this appeared closer to the negative notion of tolerance (putting up with, Odora Hoppers 2009: 605; Bredella 2003: 232), in general the students felt a real effort was being made to accommodate difference. In some ways, it could be argued that the college constituted a 'third place', an 'individual and moveable hybrid space rather than acculturation' (Burnapp 2006: 91), 'a meeting point between different cultures where there is recognition of the manifestation of cultural difference' (Leask 2009: 217).

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has extended the previous chapter's consideration of the challenges students faced in living and socialising in such close proximity to students from countries which are often distant geographically and appear so culturally. Opportunities for students to develop skills in intercultural understanding appeared to occur, but these often involved conflict, or at least misunderstanding. The criticism many students felt their national or religious groups were subject to, and by extension the students as members of those groups, often provoked anger or righteous indignation. The feeling of unfairness in holding people from (arguably) less democratic societies responsible for the actions or attitudes of their (often non-elected) governments, while at the same time western students shrugged off responsibility for their elected representatives, is evident. In addition, that such criticism might originate from friends proved upsetting, and suggests that the influence of affective ties in facilitating friendship and viewing others as individuals (Papatsiba 2006: 117; Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 112; Pettigrew & Tropp 2008: 190; Van Laar *et al.* 2005: 342) could lead to their national identity being 'forgotten', and therefore prejudiced or stereotypic views about groups not being challenged – witness Marie's friends who said they thought of her as 'just Marie', and her flatmate who joked with a friend about having 'survived' living with 4 Chinese students. The intercultural contact, and in particular the criticism some students felt subjected to, appeared to bring into sharp focus for students their own cultural identity (Alred *et al.* 2003: 4; Papatsiba 2006: 126-127) and engender feelings of group loyalty (Bredella 2003: 227).

While some students felt more equal than others, some cultures also appear more distant than others, and the assumed homogeneity of less known groups (Sen Gupta 2003: 165-166) could lead to individuals being stereotyped according to their group membership, and non-UK students feeling they had to represent or be an ambassador for their home country, in Ruth's description, a 'good Chinese'. The need to be able to 'read' a whole range of cultures, not just the host country culture, added to the socio-emotional challenge of multiple possible cultural misunderstandings (Ujitali & Volet 2008: 282). To overcome these difficulties, the resilience, flexibility and perseverance referred to and demonstrated by interviewees such as Hillary and Marie were critical (Dimmock & Ong Soon Leong 2010: 32; Wang 2009: 22; Gu *et al.* 2010: 18; Kudo & Simkin 2003: 106; Bredella 2003: 39; Deardorff 2006: 244; Ryan 2003: 133; Murphy-Lejeune 2003: 108). On the other hand, the

college could be a site for liberation (Gill 2007: 172), with some students feeling released from ascribed identities, an aspect of college life which was in particular referred to by a UK student, Neil. The sheer diversity of the student body appeared to give some students permission to not conform. To be a 'Smithsonian' by definition was to be diverse.

Group factors in acculturation appeared the most significant for students from East Asia. The clear differences in language, appearance and cultural practices (Byram 2003: 56; Forbes-Mewett & Nyland 2008: 184) (such as private socialising in kitchens) appeared to mark this group out more than any other, although religion, in particular Islam, was also reported as a mark of division. The effect appeared to be that rather than attempting integration, many East Asian students were seen as having separated themselves in order to avoid intercultural contact. The Chinese students interviewed did not see the situation in this way, and believed their friends were keen to integrate, but it would appear that for them the 'social structures and institutions and cultural practices' (Berry 2005: 698-699) had not shifted in ways that would enable East Asian students as a group to integrate. This led to confusion among students from other cultures, including from the UK, since the culture of the college aimed to be welcoming to all, and was apparently successful in encouraging integration among most other groups of students, widening the definition of 'one of us' to include students from other developing countries, such as Fiona from Pakistan, Zack from Jordan or Laura from Azerbaijan. This difficulty of acculturation at the group level could account for the impression that Chinese students have to try harder to integrate and have non-Chinese friends.

Some students found themselves in the uncomfortable position of being criticised for becoming too 'westernised', often from friends back home, when they tried to understand the environment they were living in. However, in many cases it was through actively trying to bridge this gap in understanding that a number of interviewees developed the skills needed to feel comfortable in both worlds. One thing all the interviewees had in common was that they were all Kirkton students, and this academic identity was a fundamental part of who they felt themselves to be, and asserting this identity could be a coping strategy at one level, or, in particular for Hillary and Zack, an integral part of their identity.

As noted by one of the interviewees, academics carry out research in order to generalise, however one of the potential limitations of ethnography involves the possible difficulties of



generalisation, and indeed one of the most notable findings of the research was how individual differences in life experience, personality, interests, motivation, among many other factors, impacted on the interviewees' college experiences. Consequently, in addition to treating the interviews as a corpus for the purposes of analysis and reporting, in the final part of this chapter we therefore consider how the interviewees felt their time in college and in Kirkton had impacted on them as individuals.

### **5.5.1 Impact on individuals**

Living in college for the various amount of time that the interviewees have appears to have had different degrees of impact on the students as individuals, positive, negative, and often both. Words used to describe the impact of college life include that they have 'changed', been 'transformed', and the impact of those changes in terms of 'self-awareness', being 'happier', 'rational', 'logical', feeling 'equal', 'respected', 'richer', more 'open-minded', more 'relaxed', 'patient', 'calm,' 'objective', 'brave', 'mature', 'independent', 'confident', like an individual, have gained 'insight', and can see certain things more 'clearly', that they have 'learned' or 'improved' skills including 'perseverance,' to 'keep fighting', to 'enjoy life', to 'smile' more, 'academic' skills such as 'critical thinking', to be 'objective', to focus on 'solving problems', more 'organised', 'systematic', and that they have 'benefited a lot' from this 'diamond/valuable experience'. Some of the interviewees, particularly those who have been in college longer and been very involved in college life, such as Hillary, Steve and Zack, were at times quite emotional when discussing the impact of their time in college.

On the more negative side, they have also talked about 'difficult' situations, their 'mixed feelings', 'ups and down' of their time, 'making huge mistakes', having 'misjudged' others or situations, and are now more 'cautious', that they have been 'unfairly treated', and become 'upset' at someone's 'unreasonable' behaviour or felt 'insecure' in knowing how to handle a 'stressful' situation, how they sometimes feel 'beaten down' or 'offended' by others who 'impose' their views on others, and been exposed to 'bickering' in unexpected situations.

All those interviewed were exposed to new situations to greater or lesser degrees. While Ruth hadn't been so actively involved in college life, she had presented at a college seminar, attended events, and volunteered to help out on occasions. Others experienced

far greater involvement in college life. Zack explained how his reaction to being exposed to new things had gradually changed over time:

Z1 I actually changed a lot in the way I handled things. I used to be very angry when things don't go, when things don't work. ... Coming to Smith, you can be competitive but still be relaxed, you can make huge successes but still be, you know, um, calm and quiet, you can be a big achiever, an overachiever even, but taking it in a systematic way. ... this changed me a lot ... I appreciate how long it takes ... and it does make you a patient person (both laugh).

These aspects of being calm, being relaxed yet still achieving in a systematic way are echoed by others, including Gary, Jenny, Hillary and Ruth. Jenny explains how she admires the 'calm, relaxed' way students from Asia have of dealing with situations, and how 'British people ... remain more rational while facing the challenges and problems'. Jenny acknowledges that her more 'emotional' reaction may not be cultural, but individual, or a combination. Jenny also reports that one of her friends has commented "you're so changed since the beginning", which she says is because 'I became more relaxed, more confident, more happy, ... the environment is really very relaxing' (J1). For Ruth, this 'more relaxed life' is linked to the taking breaks and enjoying life 'I think British people enjoy their holidays, ... so I think we should live like British people' (R3). Other more concrete outcomes include feeling 'more independent of my parents ... I understood I can manage my own life without any support from outside' (L2), which is perhaps most significant for Fiona 'I've become an adult here' (F2), who may not otherwise have had the opportunity to live outside the family home before she got married.

Gary focuses on how 'systematic' he believes the UK is as a country 'every system, they have people who's responsible and run very well system, and it is kind of team, every people need to put input there' (G3), and how he feels this has influenced his thinking. Hillary gives an example of how she believes she has become more systematic in terms of chairing and managing a meeting 'I introduced some new systems in the committee, ... my team managing has improved a lot, managing a team, multi-cultural team, ... because I introduced systems, and I can talk in English in a very systematic way, very systematic, logical, convincing, basically ... in my first year, there were meetings not very well organised' (H1).

Both Jenny and Gary explicitly remark on the UK education system, which Gary described in his first year as 'a big shock, ... they don't give you any homework, they don't leave you anything, ... they assume masters students is mature, is responsible for themselves'. Gary appreciated this system enough to remain for a PhD. For Jenny 'UK approach, educational system benefit (?), which makes you just see the world', she goes on to explain:

J1 all that openness to the world, it's British, all that openness, and ability to accept people from different cultures, different backgrounds, eh, it's British. ... Kirkton is quite small, ... law department is again, small department ... the environment is very international, and this you find only in the UK, I guess. Other, in any other country it would be much more national.

There was a view that in order to fully learn from the experience it was important to personally engage 'work together, I think, solve everyday issues, ... it's very important to become a participant, not just be the watcher, ... if all Smith events are for you just like TV programmes, ... it's very difficult to see if you can get more from TV shows' (J2). Zack agrees that students 'have to integrate in terms of student activities, so that they actually can grasp the essence of the experience. ... I believe the universities are much more like a training centre that prepares you for the future' (Z3).

The most profound influences on the students interviewed appeared to involve situations when beliefs they held on arrival were brought into question, or if they found themselves in a difficult situation.

### **Zack**

Zack gives the example of his attitudes towards homosexuality, where he has tried to be understanding. Similar to many other situations, the key to his reaction is in his developing identity as an academic 'it's always the best way to do is academic, in that situation, be methodological, be academic, don't just shut yourself'. Zack acknowledges that in his first few years in the UK he may have reacted in a more emotional way, but has come to the conclusion that it would be better not to do so 'because it might be translated in a different way, and it might be misunderstood'. Again, Zack relates this to being 'academic' 'as an academic, you have to, I mean I'm a positivist, so I always detach myself from the phenomenon, I like to look at myself as an outsider'.

Zack believes, after initial lack of understanding, he has also learned to be more patient, and understand how structures and systems influence the pace of change, which he considers less threatening than how change may occur back home, 'nothing can happen in a quick pace ... they like to give things their normal discourse, evolution, so basically when the tipping point arrives people will say this is not nice, and we will change it' (Z2).

### **Hillary**

Hillary believes her experience in college means she is now 'able to work with people from different cultures, for example, Britain, like, Arabic culture, let's say'. Hillary feels she has learned some important skills in teamwork and leadership by being involved in college activities:

H1      when I chair a meeting in English in this country, because context plays a lot of important roles, because people aware that I am in this country, this country is democratic country, you know, and everybody is equal, so I automatically have more confidence to speak up, coz I know people respect me.

Not long before the third interview, Hillary experienced a difficult situation where someone complained to various university staff about loud music at an event she was organising. Hillary reports that she had learned over time not to respond in an angry manner, but 'to be patient, and to actually calm down, you know to be really calm, because like what I mentioned earlier to be emotionally involved is never helpful, because I will lose my objectivity'. Although Hillary had been involved in various college activities for 3 years, she was unsure how to respond, so sought advice 'because I don't know about the procedure in this university... I'm part of Kirkton University, so I want to do things by your rules', and acknowledges that:

H4      three years ago I would definitely argue with him, black and white, black and white, you know, let's fight, let's reason, but now I wouldn't argue with him, ... and I think somebody has to be the bigger person over here, and he is the visitor, I'm the organiser, so I need to be a bigger person.

Although initially unhappy with the advice she received, to start with an apology, Hillary realised this was 'most helpful in terms of the approach, how to deal with this most in a very effective way. ...The purpose is to solve the problem'.

However, Hillary feels that in making an effort to provide an interesting and useful experience for students she has opened herself up to criticism and possible problems, which she finds disconcerting and unfair 'I felt being unfairly treated.' The situation was disconcerting because Hillary reports such an eventuality would not occur in China 'no one would complain, no one would complain. People will not challenge authority ... they wouldn't risk anything to influence their study, or their peaceful life over there' (H3).

Hillary reflects that 'I started being reflective ever since I started making mistakes' (H4). She believes that as a result of her time in the UK and her involvement in college activities she has 'been transformed', and refers to three ways:

H2      academic first, I felt that my academic skills have improved dramatically, second of all is my is my is the growth as a person. Um, I am still learning, but I think I've become much tougher ... So one is confidence, the other one is multi-tasking. Third one is my English language ability. ... The speed and the degree my English has improved within these 2 years is undescrivable. ... if I want to put up an argument, I can put up better argument in English than in Chinese let's say. ... Because I developed this critical thinking, which is not part of Chinese thinking style, in here, and critical thinking in a multicultural environment. ... I can use English better than Chinese in this sense.

### **Gary**

Gary's comments provide support for Hillary's view of different approaches to organisation and people management, although he acknowledges in China 'it is change a lot, but in my mind it is still authority speak louder' whereas in the UK 'your leader, your manager will ... ask more opinions'. Gary gives an example of committee meetings his girlfriend has attended 'every people in the meeting, you put agenda there, it is not like some people always control the meeting, just speak one people'. Gary says his girlfriend said she has 'benefit a lot' from attending meetings in college.

As a result of his time in the UK, Gary feels he can evaluate his home country more clearly, which some others may say means he has become 'westernised', nonetheless he believes in the importance of exposing himself to different experiences at a time in life when they may influence him. He, too, has experienced some difficult situations. One such concerned an event which was organised jointly by a college society, the Graduate Students Association and the Chinese Scholars and Students Association (CSSA), to celebrate Chinese New Year and Valentine's Day. That year there were a large number of Taiwanese students in college, and they asked if they could be involved in organising the event. The College Officers said it wouldn't be possible to exclude them without a good reason, 'I feel a bit surprised ... I think your opinion push me to think more. Why my Principal think is, eh, you should talk with them? And I think this is a valuable experience for me' (G1):

G1 I think it's important have this different opinion, because when strong different opinion means there is a gap in understanding, I will learn, yes, because, we, even, actually your talking is bring me to think about it. We should not, because, they are also people here, they have any right to join anything, to do anything.

However, the problem for Gary was not only with dealing with the Taiwanese Society or the college authorities, but with the CSSA, of which he was then Vice-President, some of whose members would strongly object to the involvement of the 'Taiwanese' society, thus he came face to face with the different cultural expectations between the university and college culture which was heavily influenced by UK cultural expectations of freedom of assembly and democracy, and a difficult situation from back home on which UK cultural expectations impinged. Through dealing with this difficult situation Gary was forced to consider to what extent his own expectations were culturally based, and whether he was prepared to view the situation as an opportunity to develop intercultural understanding or retreat to a safe position of ethnocentrism.

Gary believes that one of the things he has learned from being in the UK is 'culture', and gives the example of politeness 'you hold doors for people, it is a pleasure, and eh, the thing is, you hold a door, and the people feel so good, and you feel so good, because people smile with you'. In contrast, in China 'because we have such huge population ... if you hold the door in a shopping mall or somewhere they think you are the doorkeeper'

(G3). He also discusses apologising, explaining that the majority of Chinese students 'think to apologise sometimes lose face', and that apologising is a 'measure of this country's civilization, because, like I say hold the door, do things politely, say thank you frequently, it is a mirror (measure?) of country's civilization'. From Gary's experience, levels of politeness in China vary in different areas. He ascribes politeness in the UK to the effects of population size and the importance of individuals in European culture, and what he refers to as 'the cultural revolution?', by which he appears to mean the European Enlightenment or Renaissance 'I think from 14<sup>th</sup> century, eh, there what we call the cultural revolution? (G3).

Gary has also found that through playing Table Tennis he has gotten to know a number of Indian students, and in so doing has begun to understand more how Indians view China, and how much they have in common, including considering how both countries treat their minority populations. To an extent Gary thinks he knows enough now about certain nationalities to make some assumptions about how they view the world, mentioning Indians, Asians, and how they might behave. However, he finds it much harder with westerners to know how they might react to political events 'every people have a different very different opinions, ... I find lots of difference' (G2).

### **Jenny**

Jenny explains how she likes 'working with people ... from such countries like Thailand, China, like all that Eastern, south-east Asia, they are like very calm, they are very relaxed, they are very, very often they are very silent, they do their jobs silently', an attitude she would like to learn 'I would love to learn the attitude, yes, that some people, that calm attitude towards some issues, I would like to learn that, but I guess I have to grow up according to some Buddhist philosophers' (J1), ascribing their calm exterior to cultural and historic teachings.

For Jenny, her difficult experiences were of a more personal nature. She found her initial openness to other cultures was shaken after an unexpected encounter with a male student from another culture 'I was very open to many exotic cultures, and I was very interested, very tolerant, very friendly, and my own personal experience was that ... I started to be cautious about certain places in the world, say it like this'. Jenny concluded that:

J2      you just understand how different can things be treated in other religions let's say, in other, you are just not aware ... sometimes you do the things that are very normal in your own environment, and you even have no idea about the certain, well, I cannot call it like risks, it's not something serious, but certain you know certain things you have to be cautious about.

Jenny explains that 'if I communicate with person, let's say from, let's call it European culture, something which is close to me, for me it's very easy to identify what the person wants from you'. Jenny acknowledges she has difficulty expressing these ideas in English:

J2      it's very difficult for me to speak in the sophisticated way so, but, say if to speak very you know 'kid' language, it's easier to say who is a bad person, who is a good person, things like this, you can say more about the person you see for the first time if it's your own religion, your own culture, especially if it's your own country, but from absolutely different religions and other cultures where they have absolutely different understandings of the world, you cannot say, you can be very, you can make huge mistakes actually about the judgements. ... you can totally misjudge the situation.

Jenny is evidently embarrassed, so the topic was dropped.

### **Fiona**

Fiona sums up her time as 'a lovely experience ... made this feel like home' (F1), and is 'dreading' leaving college and feels she is 'really going to miss it' (F2).

Fiona also feels that she has learned to be more prudent and reserved as a result of meeting people from other cultures, which she sees as being both positive and negative:

F2      once they come here meet people from so many countries they realise that there are so many different ways of thinking, or living and of being ... I mean in a ways it's negative that it's beaten me down and now I don't have a positive view on life, but it's positive because life is not technically so protected, obviously there's going to be different people, even maybe in my own country, it's prepared me for different people in my own country that I haven't come across yet.



Fiona's main concern though are others who have tried to 'impose' their view on her. This refers both to students of different (see 5.1 Criticism) and of the same religion. During the second interview it was Ramadan and 'the point of Ramazan is that we're all going to come together and there's going to be harmony and peace, but I've just seen people bickering about this should happen at this time' (F2), and certain individuals trying to impose their views on others.

However, Fiona has also realised that religion is complex, explaining that she now realises that:

F2 I thought that once I came here, I'm coming to sort of like a society which you know is not godless, but that people aren't particularly religious, but I've seen that religion doesn't always have to be, um formal, religion, that someone can be god-fearing and have the memories of god in their hearts and not be practising, and that is a very good thing I've learned about people, because that connects you with them.

Fiona has found this politeness and friendliness to be affecting 'here everyone social, even when passing will smile and say hello, which is not normal in Pakistan, ... so I wouldn't smile at someone in Pakistan because they'd get the wrong opinion, but like, I'll be a lot more talkative maybe, and just general just chit chat maybe, be more confident, independent'.

There are some more prosaic changes, as Fiona notes 'I hadn't cooked for myself, my own Pakistani food, I hadn't washed clothes like this, I hadn't sort of cleaned things like that ... I feel like a complete grown up living here, I think it's an essential experience' (F2).

Fiona expressed herself less happy with her studies, finding that for her and an Indian student the teacher 'wasn't able to understand the thing we said ... we're good at English, we're good at expressing ourselves, all of that. But I felt every time I made a point my professor was sort of like, 'yeah, yeah, good, but what', you know he'd just sort of shift over to the student who he heard what he wanted to hear. .... I made a really good point, but because it's not what you want to hear you're not giving it any credit' (F1). However, she felt her experience in college made up for the disappointing academic experience, and that the possession of a Kirkton degree would help her find a good job.

## Steve

Steve has 'met some really, really just kind people' who have shown 'encouragement' and 'patience' in helping him get involved in college life, for example in joining the Boat Club, and feels that 'everyone here is incredibly committed to getting people involved ...I think people genuinely want to share' (S3). Steve also values the opportunity to have met 'people from other cultures who have been completely open', mentioning a conversation with some Muslim women about the wearing of headscarves 'that's another pretty cool thing about this place, that we've got such a mix of people who are prepared to ask question and who are prepared to answer questions, also explaining that he has become 'more adept' at 'engaging with race as a notion' (S3).

Steve has made some adjustments to his behaviour in being 'a little more aware of ... the impact that I have on others, ... it's not just like saying "oh right, when I see a Chinese person I'll be cleaner", that's not what I'm trying to say, (...) I think I'm self-aware, (...) I don't think I can say "I have learned this, this and this", but I think when you look at you know the rise of the far right who say that people from overseas have nothing to contribute to our way of life, I think that's absolute nonsense'. As a result, for Steve, valuing other cultures is no longer an abstract notion:

S3 I would have always said so as a value position, and I could never conceive of saying otherwise, but living here with people, you in a sense know it, not just believe it, you just know it to be true (...) I've got friends from all over the place. (...) I'm a richer person for being here.

Steve believes that everyone gains from more cultural mixing, acknowledging 'different cultures I probably believe at some level have differences which can't be reconciled, that's no bad thing, difference is no bad thing, but we actually demonstrate that people can, at some fundamental level live and work together, and play together ... and bit by bit Smith almost demonstrates certain myths can be dispelled' (S3).

Steve believes his time in college has helped with his work as a social worker, as he's become aware how things which are taken for granted as 'normal' are in fact culturally based:

S3 in a generalistic sense it's the impact of a largely alcohol-based social culture in Britain, and the impact that has on others who then feel marginalised or excluded from that. And I think that kind of awareness is pretty crucial to social work, you know, that's, when you think about the impact of say, you know, in a sense if you see a bar as a service, it's not quite, but if you see it like that, for some people it's an appropriate service, for me it's fine, but for other people it's an inappropriate service, it doesn't fit in with what we want, but social workers in a sense we develop service which are very ... white British, that are inappropriate for people who don't identify with the dominant home culture and so, say, (...) for some people it might be very, very important for them to stay at home and look after their children, whereas we might be a bit more (??) they can go into nursery and the parents stay at work, and so what you've got there is you've got this idea that we, but we design all our services around the assumption that all parents will want to work – I'm saying it's not the best example, our services, when you begin to just unpick them a bit, you see how they are designed very much to fit a cultural framework, a particular cultural framework, and I think I've become much, much more aware of that, because it's something they keep telling you in social work, it's called 'anti-racist practice', and it's actually only (...) But when suddenly if what you've got is by living in college, this idealised thing called anti-racist practice or what you might call inclusive practice, has actually become real, or it makes sense, and it's not just a value standpoint, because I actually now see here that, yeah we live in a culture which is designed to suit some and in doing so exclude others.

### **Ruth**

Ruth's experience with some students living in college has been less positive, leading her to recommend to her friends not to share with Indian students. She says 'it's not discrimination, I think it's because our living style is so different and I'm afraid my friends cannot accept it' (R2). She notes that this is something Chinese students discuss often, and they find that Indian students are often not used to cleaning up 'I think it's because they're from very wealthy backgrounds, they never do housework by themselves, ...I think most Chinese students cannot accept it'. Ruth has also become more aware of certain differences in countries she previously thought very similar, explaining 'I think Korea, this country is become more western, so I think my friends like western people more, she likes

talk with western people, and my Thai friends, we are quite similar, and eh, I think Thailand, because this country is not, they keep their own cultures’.

Ruth believes that by spending this time in Britain she understands the country a little more, ‘the feeling of the country (...) at first I watched the movie I found, I saw Harry Potter’s uncle’s, aunt’s house, I thought this is a house in the UK, but now after I living here for one year and I watched Harry Potter and the Phoenix, I saw that house again, I think it’s so British, this house is so British I’m so familiar with it now’. However, Ruth feels less knowledgeable about British people since she’s not had much contact with them ‘I know only a few British, I cannot say how is British like’. She thinks her time in the UK would make it easier to speak to someone from Britain visiting China ‘we have some talk about things we both know, we both interested’. Ruth also values how rules are applied in the UK ‘people can follow the regulations very strictly’ (R2), which she considers fair. Ruth has taken following rules to heart, because she values feeling safe ‘I don’t want to make any mistakes, I don’t want to have any troubles ... if we have accident maybe we have a lot of trouble, so just keep yourself in a very safe place’ (R2).

Ruth states that the most important thing she has learned while in Kirkton is to be brave and to persevere, that students will find themselves very busy, but in the end they will feel they have been successful.

Notwithstanding these positive changes, most students intend to return home, and Ruth for one admits that she (and her friends)

R3 find it very difficult to live in Britain, it’s difficult to join in life here. Mm, so for the people who want try to find jobs in Britain I really, really admire them, I mean I think they really have the brave to continue the life here.

### **Neil**

Neil describes the UK’s attitude to cultural difference as ‘I just think we’re nicer (laughs)’, describing the UK as ‘quite a welcoming culture, you know, we’re made up of goodness knows how many random invasions, and we’ve been assimilating all sorts of different kinds of cultures, our language comes from all the world of languages, we just beg, steal and borrow from cultures, our national dish is Chicken Tikka Masala’. However, Neil believes

that it's important not to 'go down that road to the extreme, you're capitulating to the, you're losing your own culture, uh, to make sure that others aren't offended by it, which is ridiculous'. An issue that had occurred when Neil was GSA President concerned censorship and whether to ratify a new society. While against censorship 'personally, but with my GSA President's hat on, you kind of you feel that sometimes you would have to censor a little bit', Neil considers that

N1 as a personal principle I believe in free speech and you should be able to do and say what you want (...) as long as you're not actively harming other people, and certainly I feel that if people are offended by UK drinking culture then they shouldn't come and study in the UK, um so, but at the same time, there's no point in actively going round trying to rile people, and there's no harm in, I don't think you should actively try and, you know, annoy people, um, and I'm always more for compromise than I am for going, you know, trying to stick up for some principle I'm not especially bothered by.

Neil thinks he has changed himself to an extent, and has been particularly influenced by his close friends, including

N1 well my best friend and now my girlfriend is from a very, very different background to me, and she's from a very conservative background, and the way I've related to her has changed my views a lot, on, you know, how I interact with other people with different expectations, different cultural expectations, for example I'm like, if I'm around other friends I might drink more heavily or eh, or not see too much of a problem in making a rude joke, whereas I might tone it down, and that makes me think about well what do other people expect? Um, I've got friends like Fatima, who don't, wouldn't want to be touched by a male friend who she's not romantically involved with or something like that, so you know, it doesn't cost me anything to to, or it doesn't harm me at all to observe that, and so probably at Smith you do come into contact with all these different things and it doesn't really, I've never really seen a problem in going, well okay this is what this person believes or feels or what they expect, and it's not really any skin off my nose to kind of um, make them feel more comfortable, if that will make them feel more comfortable fair enough, I'll do it

In terms of his work on the GSA committee, this has helped Neil understand 'the political aspect of things, um, that sometimes it's ... you know, sometimes you've got to be cagey about what you say because it's going out to a lot of different people and things like that, yeah, from different, people from different places', and acknowledges that there is a tendency 'just for kind of ease of your own mental shop keeping' to think in terms of cultural groups 'which obviously does kind of eliminate the fact that people within a culture will be very, very different to each other'.

### **Marie**

Marie had initially wanted to transfer to a college with a majority of UK students, to have more of a 'British' experience, and get a feeling for life in the UK, however, after meeting her flat mates decided to stay 'I couldn't imagine there was such a college!' From her work as a lawyer, Marie had developed a focus on how to solve problems, in addition to good time management skills, and she believed this had a positive impact on her ability to cope with life in college and her studies. Perseverance and the ability and willingness to detach herself from challenging situations or comments, and having a hobby, dancing, which was very important to her and which brought her into contact with a variety of students, contributed to Marie's student life. Marie believes that the college brings students together, and 'because when people are closer, they have more conflict, but besides they also, know more each other'. Marie developed very good friendships with her flat mates in Kirkton, and they helped her learn more about different parts of the world, and in particular she became more aware of the Israel-Palestine situation.

### **Laura**

Laura has great memories of her time in Kirkton, mostly of spending time just hanging out with her friends 'cooking together, playing pool together, or just sitting in the coffee shop talking, or shopping together, travelling together, I have great memories. IA I have great memories ... it was a good experience' (L2).

Laura is concerned that she will find it difficult to apply what she has learned back home:

L2 everything is more organized and my country is more chaotic ... it's important to bring new knowledge and new experience back home, but I have communicated with other students abroad and coming back, most of them are very disappointed when they went back home, they cannot apply the new knowledge in my country,

because the high positions are still employed with elder generation, way of thinking and behaviour is different, and new generation studied abroad and came here, but (the times?) are changing

She has also 'realised already that the time here was amazing without these interviews' (L2).

In the final chapter, we consider the key points which have emerged from the study, and the implications for research and practice in this area.

### **Summary of staff interviews**

Robertson *et al.* point to the need for staff to understand the high degree of stress many overseas students experience, for a greater 'consideration for the emotional and psychological dilemmas faced by international students' (2000: 100), to recognise that, unlike many host country students, overseas students are often outwith their 'cultural comfort zone' (2000: 101). In order to gain an additional perspective on the residential community, two members of staff who have close contact with residents were interviewed. As non-residents their comments have not been included in the main findings text, so their comments are summarised below.

### **Caitlin**

Caitlin comes into frequent contact with residents, from overseas and the UK, specifically for accommodation issues, and also for general student support issues. Coming from a background of dealing with mainly UK undergraduates, what first struck her about the Smith College community was the heterogeneity among the international student body, having previously thought in terms of 'international students' as a group. She is aware of the role that culture can have on residents' living experience, giving examples such as many students appearing to feel the need for close emotional support from co-nationals, particularly where their language skills may be less strong than other students' and in this case they may feel the need for academic support from co-nationals, and the challenges of being exposed to such a degree of cultural difference to a student's identity 'you try and keep what's yours, while, it takes a while for you to learn that you have to compromise and slot into the system that's in place', finding that for Chinese students in particular, this can be quite challenging. While, for example, Greek and Italian students may also have a

strong cultural identity, since they are 'good at being sociable and adaptable to different situations' and there are a fairly small number of them, they find it easier to integrate. She acknowledges that some students, in particular those who are older or in college for a longer period than one year, are able 'to put a foot in both camps, and they manage to touch base with their own home group, but equally have the confidence, knowing that that's there, to step out and experience the UK side of things'. Regarding specific cultural differences which have caused difficulties among the student body, she mentions attitudes towards and the consumption of alcohol, cooking habits, private and public socialising, smoking, and lifestyle differences. Some of the problems mentioned Caitlin acknowledges may well demonstrate individual differences, reflect the high stakes of being funded for an expensive degree by the family, or be associated with life stages, such as the nervousness and freedom of being away from home for the first time – the majority of UK and US students having already lived away for their undergraduate degrees, for many students from overseas this may not be the case. For some students the reaction can be to seek security among co-nationals, for others it could be an opportunity to develop a wide social network of students from around the world. If this leads to a number of romantic relationships, this can lead to difficulties from flatmates with more conservative backgrounds.

Caitlin also comments on the make-up of the committee of the Graduate Students' Association being mostly UK, EU or from the US, and how this differs to the Intercultural Association. She acknowledges that as far as she can see the GSA make a lot of attempts to involve students from other parts of the world but that the make-up of the committee will probably influence organisation and events. Caitlin notes how popular the Cultural Festival and events such as the Tutor Dinners and College Barbeque are with students who often aren't involved with GSA events, and how infrequently students from outside the UK, Europe and US are involved in the actual organisation of events.

Caitlin mentions finding some negotiating strategies can be challenging to deal with, such as being offered a gift in return for resolving a problem, which in her experience can occur in particular with Chinese students, and a 'bartering' approach which a number of Middle Eastern students can adopt 'it's not seen as rude or discourteous to stand for 40 minutes, and, what's the word?, persevere with an argument strongly that you've already said no to



4 or 5 times, I think that's considered you're first position isn't your final position', and tendency to 'go over your head' to someone more senior.

In terms of having made adjustments to work better with such a diverse community, behaviourally Caitlin no longer offers automatically to shake a student's hand, doesn't wear any jewellery or other signs which might indicate a Christian faith (such as a crucifix, although Caitlin describes herself as agnostic), in order not 'to put them [students] in a position where they would feel I wasn't neutral'. In terms of attitudes, Caitlin believes she has much more sympathy for students from overseas, realising how difficult it must be to be so far away from what they know. She acknowledges that 'it's reinforced a lot of the cultural, um, beliefs and expectations I had about certain cultures, but equally it's [...] it's maybe relaxed a few of them as well. ... I hope it take students as students, although I'm more conscious culturally if there's a strong cultural context to it'. Caitlin also believes that

C1 the negative perceptions I have are individuals and I don't apply it to a culture, but they're always borne out, they're always balanced out then by a really, really positive encounter with perhaps someone from the same nationality, same cultural group, same course, same group, whatever, it balances out, they're all just people.

Some perceptions of countries have been challenged, particularly where there have been negative media reports, as Caitlin has met students from those countries, for example Iraq or African countries 'they've given me a completely different perspective on their country, and they're often very proud of their country and actually want to go back, whereas in reality I might be sitting here thinking they're probably glad they're here and they don't want to actually want to be at home, and in reality they're looking forward to going home'.

### **Peter**

Like Caitlin, Peter comes into frequent contact with residents, from overseas and the UK, specifically for maintenance issues, and also for general enquiries, directions, mail collection, etc, and when working on weekends, saw the students when there were fewer staff around and more social activity taking place. Coming from outside higher education, what first struck him about Smith College was the diversity of the student body, expecting this to be more UK and European. Peter is aware of issues such as certain groups of students seeming to 'stick together' for support when they go to the Porters' Lodge to ask

for help, like Caitlin, in particular where their language skills may not be as strong, and that some overseas students don't always manage to convey the message they intended to, so return later. Peter finds that many UK and European students approach the Porters' Lodge with specific questions about their rooms, but for many students from outside the UK and Europe

P1 a lot of them come and say "I have one question" and it ends up with 3 or 4 [...]. All kinds of different things, um, and I think it's just initially when they come until they've found their feet, they tend to come to the porters. [...] I think overseas students are actually trying to get used to our way of life as well, how we, how this country works.

The majority of students are very polite and grateful for the help they receive, and where there may be some issues, Peter attributes this to individual personality, comparing two students from the same country and commenting 'that in itself proves that there's a mixture of personalities and people whatever country you go to'.

Peter also thinks that many overseas students feel lonely, miss their friends and families when they are so far from home, or ask about something in the news, for example, and will often go to a particular porter 'they see a friendly face, and they come and spend some time', although they don't tend to discuss particular problems. Peter mentions the groups of students who either socialise or work in the coffee shop, observing that it's unusual to see a sole Chinese student sitting or working there, that these students tend to be in groups, 'Europeans [...] they tend to sit individually doing their work, or sitting in the central areas, pull the sofas in, eh, the coffee shop. They tend to be working more than anything else, and I think that's why the Chinese stick together, um, where you would see one European on a table with a computer, you would probably see two or three tables pulled together and 5 or 6 Chinese students'. He acknowledges he's not aware whether the groups are mixed Asian groups, and that Chinese students are often studying on the same programmes, whereas he may not make the same assumption about groups of western students all being the same nationality, and acknowledges other nationalities of students, for example Kazakhstan, also tend to be seen together.

Peter is aware that the bar and alcohol can be issues, but not in the sense that students whose religion forbids alcohol might avoid the bar. 'My ideas before I came here of Moslem people, they were very religious, um, they didn't drink, they wouldn't be happy (here?). It's completely the opposite, I think they're more controlled, they don't drink and enjoy themselves just as much', and believes that it may be the Chinese, Taiwanese and other East Asian students who might feel excluded from Bayne House because they don't drink alcohol, so prefer to socialise in their kitchens, coming to the bar to watch sporting events or similar.

Peter notes how popular the Cultural Festival and events such as the Tutor Dinners and College Barbeque are with students who often aren't involved with GSA events, and that more Asian students seem to be involved with the Intercultural Association 'they don't tend to be Europeans, whether they see that as a group for anybody else except Europeans, I don't know'.

In terms of making adjustments to work better with students from other countries and cultures, Peter mentions since language can be a problem, he tries to 'slow down, I tend to break things down into easy, understandable phrases [...] you tend to take them out and explain and show, and point in the right direction' (P1). With students from so many different countries, Peter is aware he needs to be careful if he has to go to students' rooms, for example to knock on the door and perhaps allow a female resident to put on her headscarf, in particular at the family accommodation site. Dealing with people from very different backgrounds and levels of English language ability and understanding of the local culture, Peter believes he has become more relaxed and calmer and 'more positive about other cultures', noting in particular the Middle East and Islam, and he has subsequently visited some students in Jordan.

## 6. Discussion & Conclusion

At the start of the study, the initial aspects of interest were noted to include considering students' experience of interaction in flats, whether students felt they learned anything about themselves or their cultures as a result of those interactions, to what extent the espoused values of the colleges, to value diversity, and the university strategy to internationalise its student body were felt to be in evidence, and whether students felt any impact or benefit from their time in college. The last of these has been discussed in the conclusion of Chapter 5, the others feed into the overall conclusions from the study presented below.

In considering students' perspectives on their experiences as residents in the college community under consideration the aim was to gain a better understanding of the dynamics of student interaction and integration in a multi-national residence, in particular one with an espoused goal of fostering and facilitating the appreciation of diversity. The use of an ethnographic interviewing approach (Agar 1996, Spradley 1979), together with numerous casual exchanges and observations from a lengthy period of time working in the environment, provided the opportunity to gain an insight into the students' experience and analyse and interpret this within an academic context, facilitated by the careful transcribing, reading, rereading, coding and analysis of transcripts, checking with interviewees, in an iterative process, and placed within a context of theory and research on the themes which emerged, including the contact hypothesis (Allport 1954), social identity theory (Tajfel 1974), friendship networks (Bochner *et al.* 1977, and others) and intercultural understanding (Byram 1997, and others).

With such rich and complex data, it is difficult to make generalisations or come to simple conclusions, nevertheless, for the purpose of reporting on the study some key themes have been discussed, and the individuality of experience has also been identified through the summary of individual impact in the previous chapter. In this last chapter, we consider the key points of learning and implications to have emerged from the study, including reflecting on the efficacy of the methodology and choice of theoretical perspectives, limitations and recommendations for further research.

## **6.1 Living Together**

### **6.1.1 The illusion of intercultural interaction**

Halualani in her research in the US reported on the belief by students that they were engaging in intercultural interaction almost by osmosis, simply by being in a multi-cultural environment, and cautioned that this misapprehension could inhibit genuine intercultural interaction (2008: 11). In October 2009 to March 2010 research was commissioned from an anthropology PhD student resident in college to investigate intercultural interaction and understanding among college members. Before conducting the research, the student noted 'the existence of an invisible barrier that seems to divide two parts of the Smith community: the Far-Eastern, mainly Chinese, group from the remaining' (Fontefrancesco 2010: 1), and a lack of integration due to group membership being mainly based on nationality with interaction taking place almost by serendipitous happenstance ('spots of ludic informality'). The student approached with the idea of the research, and permission was given to carry it out as part of a scholarship programme offered by the college to encourage involvement in college life, in order to better understand membership dynamics from a resident perspective, and with the secondary aim of providing additional information for the current research to increase validity.

The research project sought to investigate why students chose this particular university and college, and what importance they gave to the opportunities of intercultural experience in choosing Smith College, and was conducted through observations at college events, formal and informal, and through one-off interviews with 30 respondents. The research study confirmed many of the findings of the current research study – the influence of shared language and the numerical concentration of a small number of nationalities on friendship networks, the differing levels of English language and confidence in its use, the challenges in interaction in kitchens, for example the dual impact of cooking home country food, which could both attract other students to join, and repel them due to overpowering smell and unusual cooking hours, leading variously to strategies of discussion, alienation or avoidance. In addition to sport, the study identified music and the music room as another promising location for the development of intercultural interaction and friendship, and acknowledged individual inclination and motivation as a key factor in friendship development.

Participants described the colleges as somewhere “almost everything is intercultural” (Fontefrancesco 2010: 12), due to the high number of students from outside the UK, with many opportunities both casually and in college-supported activities for students to engage in intercultural interaction. However, students struggled to define intercultural experience, other than being surrounded by students from other cultures. In part, this confirms Halualani’s (2008) findings, and also confirms the efficacy of the research method used in the current study of repeated in-depth interviews, transcribed, analysed and commented on by respondents during the research process, to illuminate at a much deeper level students’ experience in a way one-off interviews might struggle to – students may find difficulty in defining intercultural interaction, however as rapport and relationships develop through interviews, and findings are fed in for comment, this can prompt deeper reflection, and provide more opportunities for respondents to describe their experience, from which themes can emerge.

#### **6.1.2 Support is necessary, but not sufficient**

Contact which leads to greater cultural awareness and reduces prejudice has been found to have the following conditions – that it is sustained, of equal status, interdependent and has institutional support (Allport 1954, among others). The importance of affective factors in reducing prejudice is reported in Pettigrew & Tropp’s meta-analysis (2008: 190), leading to the conclusion that friendship is an important factor in reducing prejudice and encouraging intercultural understanding. Small changes, such as only allocating 2 Chinese students per flat to encourage mixing, could be implemented in a straightforward way. However, friendship and sharing accommodation are only two aspects of community living. Cultural differences came into sharpest focus and led to situations which respondents reported as being very difficult to reconcile while working together with students from other countries on college projects, which by definition had institutional and structural support. The difference in importance and interpretation of concepts and values such as freedom of speech, democracy, ideas of appropriate leadership styles, appeared most irreconcilable, since they touched on deeply held beliefs and values which go to the core of many cultures, and often would not be compromised. While students from the UK were more used to interacting with people from other cultures and more accustomed to tolerating differences in beliefs, students from countries with less of a history of immigration, or with separationist or assimilationist expectations, were reported to find it challenging to accept differing views on some fundamental values, particularly those often thought to be

markers of advanced civilisations (Holliday 2011: 2). In these cases, the support provided by the community ethos of intercultural understanding and tolerance (Fontefrancesco 2010: 13), and by college staff and structures, was often insufficient to overcome these difficulties. Discussion to achieve pragmatic solutions, which permitted, as far as possible, the beliefs and sensitivities of all those involved to be respected, was required. An example of this concerned the desire for the Taiwanese Society to join in organising the Chinese New Year and Valentine's Party along with the ISA, the GSA and the CSSA, objections to which were raised by members of the CSSA. The culture of the UK could not permit their exclusion from organising the event because it might offend some of the Chinese students, but the event would have been cancelled without a solution. The eventual solution was financial – all the participant organisations were providing an equal amount of funding, however, the Taiwanese student society have no funds to contribute towards organisation, so weren't able to join as organisers. They were thanked for their interest, informed the societies looked forward to working with them in future events, and invited to attend.

The low level of involvement of international students in student representation and organisation (Ward 2005: 20; Robertson *et al.* 2000: 96) may be why this finding has not been widely reported.

### **6.1.3 The meaning of multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism has been confused with separation and integration with assimilation (e.g. see David Cameron's speech February 2011 about multiculturalism fostering separation, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-12371994>). As we have seen, integration is the corresponding strategy by minority groups in a larger host culture which adopts a multicultural approach, and involves both the minority and the majority culture making adjustments (Berry 2005: 705). These adjustments may involve recognizing that in order to involve Chinese students and start to gain their trust, directly approaching them, and handing out name cards to individuals may be a more appropriate strategy, or not making physical contact with a female Moslem friend, or considering whether a college bar could be defined as a necessary 'service'. However, understanding of cultures also applies to the host culture, not only that students from other cultures should recognize the norms and values of the host culture, but that host culture members should not feel they need to tolerate what would be considered intolerant beliefs (Bredella 2003: 232) – for example,

while a male student may complain that an action taken on behalf of his wife was taken without his permission and by not obtaining his permission demonstrated cultural insensitivity, it would be against host country norms and values to treat the female student differently to any other student. Knowing where to make the distinction between what can be adjusted to and what must not, can be difficult, particularly in a country and institution which, after the MacPherson report, defines racial discrimination as ‘any incident which is perceived to be racist by the victim or any other person’ (Respect at Work Study, Policy & Practice, <http://www.dur.ac.uk/diversity.equality/contact/respect/>). While policies on harassment and discrimination refer to a ‘reasonable person’ agreeing the definition of a particular behaviour as harassment, the definition of what is reasonable may differ in different cultures, leading to different interpretations of the meaning of regulations and whether a discriminatory interpretation of an action would be considered so by a ‘reasonable person’.

#### **6.1.4 Providing opportunities for reflection**

The importance of students having the opportunity to engage in structured reflection on their experiences has been found to be important in facilitating change, adjustment and understanding (Burnapp 2006: 91). This can include students taking part in studies such as this one, which can provide an opportunity to reflect and make sense of their experience (Gill 2007: 177), help them release some of the stress they have experienced (Ayano 2006: 26), and facilitate reflection on intercultural interactions (Peacock & Harrison 2009: 582).

The students interviewed felt that the interviews had been a positive experience for them. Common descriptions included ‘you helped me question myself, why do I behave in a certain way?’ (H2), ‘a great opportunity ... a chance to talk in English and express my feelings about studying here’ (R3), ‘helpful to let local people know how overseas students feeling’ (R3), ‘a way to express some part of Chinese students’ feelings’ (R3), ‘encourage yourself to clear your mind ... I would like if the college can bring more opportunity for other students to talk, it’s really important, I think they will benefit their whole life’ (G3), ‘letting you know what I actually felt during the last 4 years I was here’ (Z3), ‘things I told you that I usually cannot say it for you in a normal, you as Senior Tutor, me as a student ... yeah actually it might be a therapy, ... not a therapy, an opportunity to say what you really wanted to say a long time ago’ (Z3), ‘doing conclusion about this year ... systematic’ (M2), ‘a good opportunity to let people know things’ (F2), ‘said certain things that I hadn’t



thought about much maybe and, or things that I'd been dying to say that I haven't really said to anyone from another culture' (F2), 'I wasn't this reflective before' (H4). Fiona is concerned that she came across rather negatively in the first interview and over-critical, and hopes 'I have not hurt any feelings or sentiments by saying anything' (F2).

For Steve, the interviews in some ways have been quite challenging, and he has felt

S3       awkward, ... I'm white British, and we don't like talking about race, we don't like talking about culture, and we certainly don't like talking about difference, and at times I've stopped myself, and I've really tried to think about how I word things, or the term I used to describe. Because I don't want to be branded a racist, and I think that's symptomatic of a lot of British culture, ... it's a taboo thing in British culture ... I mean you may as well have invited me here to talk about death or sex or something, it's just one of those things that British people don't like to talk about.

Steve believes he will be able to reflect more on his experience after he leaves 'sometimes you only ever understand the significance of something or the impact of something after you've stepped out of it or away from it, and with the benefit of hindsight, the benefit of time, you can then see a holistic sense of actually what it does mean' (S3).

In fact, the interviews appeared to allow the students the opportunity to reflect, and with an informed 'outsider' (i.e. not a friend), in a way which significantly influenced their ability to make sense of their experience and benefit from the international environment in the college. It would be easy, but facile, to suggest that such opportunities should be made available to all students, since spending 2-3 hours discussing with ten students may be achievable, but having a structure and staffing which would enable each member to have even one hour of discussion would require 2000 staff hours per year if made available to all students, and 670 if solely available to residents. The College Tutor system in some way could help make this more manageable, but providing training to 45 volunteers and expecting similar levels of interest and competence is always a challenge.

The impact was not solely on the interviewees. Having worked with people from outside the UK for 20 years, and considering myself to be interculturally able, I found that as I talked to and learned more about the individuals I was interviewing, my attitude changed

not only to those individuals but also to the national groups they were members of. While I didn't believe myself to be prejudiced towards students from certain parts of the world, the affective factor of increased understanding of an individual's experience, coupled with the cognitive factor of increased knowledge of theories of acculturation, social identity and the challenges students from overseas may face, led me to reflect on the extent of my intercultural understanding, and in so doing, develop it further. While this had some impact on my day-to-day work responsibilities, the greater impact is in being able to convey to others the nature of the challenge presented by internationalising the student body. In particular, this takes the form of understanding how university structures or practices may appear or be experienced by students from overseas, while challenging some naïve notions that showing understanding towards other cultures involves separate provision or undermining host culture values (the confusion of multiculturalism with separation having been noted in Section 6.1.3).

## **6.2 Strengthening institutional support**

At a Graduate Strategy Awayday in September 2010, the then Dean of Internationalisation at Kirkton University asked the researcher how the Smith 'miracle' could be repeated in other colleges at the university. By this he was referring to the perceived success that Smith College had achieved in developing a multi-national, multi-cultural community. This research report indicates that the multi-cultural community ethos at Smith is not the result of a 'miracle', but the product of hard work and commitment by students and staff. In spite of the successes Smith has experienced in achieving a reasonable level of engagement from the many different nationalities resident, the challenging nature of that engagement is evident, and, as we have seen in particular with Hillary, Zack and Steve, higher levels of engagement may result in higher levels of emotional and intercultural challenge. This is an important point which needs to be widely understood inside the college and more importantly by senior university management. One key difference between Smith and other colleges at Kirkton is that the majority of Smith residents have not chosen Kirkton because of its college structure and may not even be aware of this feature, therefore they have not bought in advance into the notion of community and involvement. The same could be said of state school and students from low participation neighbourhoods at undergraduate level, who do not form the traditional Kirkton demographic – in this regard, international students could be said to be non-traditional Kirkton students, and a number

of the issues they face regarding college involvement may be a result of this feature, as alluded to by Gary 'college life is new to us', rather than their nationality.

Rather than an assumption that international students bring 'problems', the perspective should perhaps be adopted that bringing together any group of individuals out of whom a community is to be formed will result in inevitable growing pains, which will be further impacted by the complexity of the college community, in terms of age, socio-economic background, previous engagement in (UK) higher education, nationality, educational background, level of study and perhaps even marital status of college members inasmuch as these differ substantially from the mainly undergraduate colleges at Kirkton. A result of these additional complexities could be lower scores of 'student satisfaction' on surveys used to evaluate the student experience, which reinforces the need for senior management understanding.

As mentioned above, the possibility of providing the opportunity for some training on the realities of living in such close proximity with students of other cultures could be considered, though at what point such training would be beneficial, or indeed whether it would assist students to process their experience is open to question. Information on culture shock and similar issues is widely available, but for many it is the day-to-day reality of living with such a disparate group of students which may, even while being understood cognitively, be difficult to process emotionally.

Some practical actions could be taken, and many already have been. As mentioned earlier, efforts are made to limit the number of Chinese students to two per flat of six in order to facilitate interaction in kitchens. The same College Mentor is now assigned to each kitchen, which means that the College Mentor is able to invite all the students in that kitchen to college events, such as Mentor Dinners. Other low key initiatives include the Intercultural Association organising a flat cooking competition, with the aim of encouraging engagement in the kitchens; a walking club around the local area, which attracts a multi-national group of students who meet regularly while exploring the town and countryside, and doesn't require any high level sports skills; an initiative to encourage short-term volunteering outside the college; arts workshops to explore visual arts and poetry cross-culturally. The importance of sport in encouraging intercultural understanding and integration was emphasised by the college in bidding for funding for a sport court on site, which after a number of years has eventually come to fruition. One of the findings of the study

concerned how residents experienced the different social spaces and how some felt that the coffee shop and bar 'belonged' to certain groups of students and therefore they felt excluded from them. Additional facilities, such as the sports court, and a hoped-for study centre would provide alternative meeting areas.

The issue of the mix of students in flats raises considerations lying outside the college itself. While 44% of Kirkton students at postgraduate level are home (UK) fee status, they are more likely to 'live out' (in private accommodation), or be members of other colleges. The latter is partly because Kirkton attracts a high level of Kirkton undergraduates to stay on as postgraduates and traditionally about 60% have remained members of their undergraduate colleges. However, a significant factor concerns the random, in the sense of not according to a pre-determined model, distribution of postgraduate applicants who do not express a college preference (80%) across colleges. The high level of postgraduate applicants not expressing a college preference is largely due to a lack of understanding of the college system by applicants new to Kirkton, as mentioned above, and partly due to the early stage in the postgraduate application process that applicants are asked to state a college preference. After sustained representations on this issue, the researcher was fortunate that in 2010 she was able to propose a solution to a different problem, the delay in the admission process engendered by the need for a decision on college membership at offer stage, and in implementing this solution, was able to introduce a system which both enhanced the opportunity for applicants to express a college preference and achieved an agreement to distribute postgraduate applicants more evenly across colleges. As a result, the very high proportion of residents of one nationality (China) and in one department (the Business School) at Smith has now been reduced, thus leading to the opportunity of more 'mixed' flats, though it should be noted that the percentage of UK residents has remained static. Whether this initiative will continue, or in what form, however, is, at the time of writing, under question.

### **6.3 Methodological and theoretical reflections**

As noted in 6.1.1, the use of in-depth ethnographic interview methodology (Spradley 1979) facilitated access to accounts of every day experience which were rich, rooted in the context, based on participants' own understanding, polyvocal, and provided data on which an understanding of a complex cultural environment can be developed (LeCompte &

Schensul 1999: 8; Pole & Morrison 2003: 3), and has been recommended as an appropriate method to investigate the study abroad experience (Jackson 2006: 137). Initial analysis of over 400 pages of data from interviews was clarified and further commented and expanded on by the respondents, harnessing the insights of interviewees as fellow researchers, and thus enhancing the plausibility and credibility (Hammersley 1992: in Pole & Morrison 2003: 102) of the research. Researcher reactivity was addressed through triangulation with other relevant research, including a research project carried out by another researcher on the same site, taking a critical approach to the data, and the polyvocality and respondent validation referred to above. The power of the interviewing technique to help participants reflect on their experience in a positive way has been mentioned in 6.1.4, and the contribution to richness of data that the ethnographic interviewing approach facilitates noted in 6.1.1.

At the heart of this study is the thirty-five hours of interviews reflecting the time so generously given by the respondents. As noted in Section 3.2, for interview-based research to establish credibility, it needs to be based on sound methodology and interpreted within a theoretical framework 'putting the study in the context of professional literature' (Rubin & Rubin 1995: 263). In this study, the theoretical framework is provided by the contact hypothesis (Allport 1954), social identity theory (Tajfel 1974), models of acculturation (Berry 2005) and models of intercultural understanding (Byram 1997). These frameworks provided appropriate focusing lenses to interpret the students' experiences as individuals and from the community perspective. Regarding the contact hypothesis, the applicability of this hypothesis could be most clearly seen when accounting for the success of sports clubs in encouraging friendship, where the frequent meetings to practice (sustained), the need to be reasonably proficient in order to take part (of equal status), the need to work together to be successful (interdependent) and the opportunity to represent the college (institutional support) are all in evidence. However, the limitations could be seen when students entered into other types of student organisations. When committees had to make decisions, elements of difference became clear. In this instance, an individual's social identity may take on salience. If a largely western student committee forms the in-group, and western norms are taken as the norms and presumed 'natural' behaviour, then the expectations of non-western students, for example in terms of how meetings are conducted and whether censorship is acceptable, mark those students very clearly as out-group members in a way which might not be expected – given the national diversity of the

college students may consciously make an effort not to make assumptions based on language or appearance, but may find themselves surprised to encounter such fundamental differences in what are assumed by in-group western students to be universal values, thus compromising the notion of 'equal status' contact. The attitudes towards Chinese students in particular underline from the social identity perspective how some groups may appear more different than others, leading to this group of students forming a particular source of comment and criticism. The attempts made by some respondents, such as Marie, Hillary and Steve regarding their socialising habits, to feel better connected to the society indicate that socio-cultural adjustments can be made over time, but cultural conflict may still occur, as indicated by Fiona's experience with singing Christian-oriented songs in the Choir, or with expected behaviour in the kitchens, where psychological adaptations may not have occurred.

In considering the culture and prevailing ethos of the college, there is some evidence that the notion of acculturation taking place at institutional and at individual level is significant, reflecting the multi-culturalist, integrationist approach. Both Neil and Zack refer to the need for college structures to adapt to the diverse membership in a way which residents find helpful and welcoming, in addition to the need for residents to adjust to the college. We also encounter numerous instances of students reflecting on their attitudes of openness and curiosity towards people from other cultures (at the base of Deardorff's 2006 pyramid model of intercultural competence), a smaller number reflecting knowledge, communication and necessary communication and analytical skills. Those students who have made the most efforts to engage and in many ways encountered the greatest challenges, such as Hillary, Zack and Steve, reflect on how they have become more adaptable, have greater empathy, and the ability to adapt behaviour according to context, including the ability to 'decentre', which reflects the higher levels of Deardorff's model.

#### **6.4 Limitations**

The study was small, and took place on one site. Therefore the limits to generalisability are clear, as are the implications for validity and reliability of the findings. This may misunderstand the purpose of ethnographic research, where 'fuzzy generalisations' (Bassey 1999: 52 in Pole & Morrison 2003: 114) may be produced, supported by the provision of rich, clear and detailed descriptions (Cohen *et al.* 2005: 109). However, these descriptions

should not be confused with 'truth', since they are based on participant reports and researcher representation, so an element of subjectivity must be assumed.

The influence of researcher reactivity must be taken into account – as a member of staff and resident at the college main site, there was the possibility of not being able to adopt the 'stranger' part of the role of 'professional stranger' (Agar 1980). In addition, some of the interviewees' comments, such as the incidence or otherwise of stoning of women in the Middle East or the situation in Tibet had the potential to challenge the distance required for the 'professional' part of the role. Being aware of the enhanced possibility of researcher reactivity meant that these issues were addressed through close attention to the research process, adopting a non-directive approach to interviewing, encouraging lengthy responses, and demonstrating interest while not reacting to more potentially problematic comments. The respondents' enthusiasm to be involved and requests for further interviews, the increasing length of interviews, along with topics being discussed that had not been reported to college staff, such as the cooking habits of Indian students, provide some support that the respondents were able to distinguish between my role in the college and my role as a researcher, as well as demonstrating rapport.

While there are many student residences with high numbers of international students, there are fewer with the high level of support and emphasis on community of the research site, therefore the limits of generalisability must be mentioned. In particular, this could impact on the findings regarding intercultural contact in student organisations, since the model of encouragement of involvement of all nationalities of students, include home country students with international students, may not be common. The size of the residence, with approximately 550 residents, may also limit generalizations to smaller or larger 'student village' type arrangements. In this regard, the number of students interviewed must also be mentioned, since 10 respondents represents a small number from 550.

## **6.5 Recommendations for further research**

The small number of studies considering the residential experience underlines the need for more research in this area in order to provide a greater understanding of the experience of being in such close proximity to cultural and linguistic otherness. In addition, studies into other postgraduate residences would be helpful in building up a body of knowledge, and

elucidating whether there is any potential for generalizability of the findings or whether they are site specific.

While there is an increasing number of studies including the perspectives of home country students, these represent a small percentage in the overall research literature, and an even smaller percentage consider the experience of home and overseas students from a community perspective. In addition, studies tend to focus on 'international' students as a body, or one nationality of students, e.g. Greek students, and consider interaction with co-and/or host nationals, therefore studies considering interaction within an internationalised student body would be beneficial, as would clear acknowledgment that the label of 'international' student assumes a commonality of experience for students whether from Australia or Malaysia, New Guinea or Zambia which may not be in evidence.

## **6.6 Closing Summary**

Given the unusual level of support available to students at the research site, one might ask whether this study might not represent an interesting portrait of a unique setting. However, this would be to fail to take into account the current and continuing interest in internationalising the student experience in the majority of higher education institutions, the recognition of the importance of intercultural understanding in a much more interconnected world, and therefore the interest in learning from the experience of others. Smith provides a number of learning points for other institutions which wish to achieve greater integration between students of all nationalities, and indeed some of the pitfalls of trying to do so. The interest in the college is evidenced through the researcher being invited to contribute on this topic to a UKCISA 'Best Practice' report, a colleague being invited to speak at an NUS internationalisation conference, and the college having been visited by a number of higher education institutions, from the UK and overseas.

The majority of interaction most people engage in on a day-to-day basis could be described as being at surface level – deep friendships in any context take time and considerable effort. Given the surface nature of daily life, in general the residential environment leads to positive contact, although making judgements at the surface level, in this case including making assumptions about individuals based on their appearance and national group membership, can lead to misjudgement – not all Chinese students are quiet and have poor



English, not all European students are uninterested in making friends with students from Asia.

Where an individual for their own purposes is interested in engaging in more profound contact with other cultures, there are opportunities to do so. While it is acknowledged that intercultural learning may require intercultural challenge (Allan 2003: 75), in contrast to Allan (2003: 98) I would suggest that it is those individuals who seek deeper levels of engagement, rather than those who shrink into segregated groups when faced with cultural differences, where significant cultural dissonance may occur. For this small group of individuals, their personal motivation and interest can overcome the discomfort and consternation they feel when faced with differing cultural expectations. These difficulties often occur when fundamental values are brought into focus, which in this study we have seen has occurred in student representation and organisations.

Whether these considerations mean that the college could be described as a 'third place', 'a meeting point between different cultures where there is recognition of the manifestation of cultural difference' (Leask 2009: 217) is open to question. There is certainly evidence in the support for cultural diversity and multi-cultural student organisations and events, and the belief and attempts at inclusiveness. However, expecting any community where 85% of the membership is renewed each year and in which the institutions which support the community and provide some degree of stability, on the staff and student sides, are mainly comprised of host country and other developed world members, within an organisation placed within the traditions of UK higher education to be fully intercultural is probably unrealistic, and indeed may negate the sense of place which attracts many overseas students in the first place. This does not mean ignoring the needs of the diverse community, or settling for the situation in which students from East Asia feel marginalised, but rather signifies the acceptance of the difficulties involved in encouraging genuine and meaningful intercultural interaction and the limits on what can realistically be achieved in a short time. While the cultural models of writers such as Hofstede (1986) are open to criticism, they appear to hold common currency, and indeed are often taught in the business modules many of the residents study, in particular those from China and India, possibly reinforcing to the students that their behaviours and preferences, for example in terms of group preferences and communication styles, may be cultural, innate, and therefore part of who they are as a member or representative of their

culture. Thus Chinese students 'stick together' because of the influence of in-groups in a collectivist society rather than, or in addition to, due to the effect of primary socialisation (Bochner 1977: 280) the effect of which is to draw people with obvious similarities together, which Hillary's friends acknowledge when she challenges them 'don't you stick together?' The relative ease of interacting with people who share 'cultural-emotional connectedness' and with whom it is easier to anticipate and understand their reactions (Wright & Lander 2003: 240) is a far simpler and easier proposition for tired students at the end of a long day of demanding study, in what for everyone, UK students included, may be an unfamiliar environment in college.

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## Appendix A Consent Form

**Project Title:** Exploring the development of intercultural awareness and competence and cultural identity among resident postgraduate students in a mixed nationality college in the UK.

**Researcher:** Theresa McKinven

I am researching students' perceptions of the experience of living in a multicultural community, and whether and to what extent the activities, events and encounters students take part in result in developing intercultural understanding, competence or identity as part of the degree of Doctor of Education at Durham University.

In order to obtain more information on students' experiences, I would like to carry out some interviews of college members. This information could lead to a greater understanding of the impact on students of university internationalisation.

Please note, the research is primarily being conducted in a personal capacity, as a research student. However, it is acknowledged that college members may be aware that I am Senior Tutor at Smith College. Students should not feel that they are required to take part in the research because they are being asked to by a College Officer. Participants should be aware that the Doctorate of Education is a professional degree, which aims to develop students' educational practice by researching areas of relevance to their employment. Insights obtained as a result of conducting the research may therefore suggest areas in which the college can improve and develop the services offered to its members.

Each interview will last approximately 1 hour and there will be 2-3 interviews over the course of the year. You will be asked questions about contact and interactions with students from other countries, and whether you believe you have developed any awareness of other cultures as a result.

The interview will be recorded on a digital recorder. These recordings will only be listened to by myself and my supervisor in the School of Education, if requested. The recordings will be transcribed and held securely.



Please note, no other members of staff or students at Smith College will have access to the recordings, notes or transcripts, nor will anyone else be aware of the identity of anyone taking part.

The interviews will be completely anonymous and your comments confidential. The thesis may contain some comments taken from the interviews, but you will not be identified.

You can decide not to take part in the interview at any point, even after it has started. You can refuse to answer any questions. There will be no advantage or disadvantage to anyone who takes part or refuses to take part.

**Interview Consent**

I have read the Participant Information Sheet. Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

I have had the opportunity to ask questions and discuss the study. Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions. Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

I have received enough information about the study. Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Name of person you spoke to about the study. \_\_\_\_\_

I understand I am free to withdraw from the study at any time without having to give a reason for withdrawing and without affecting my position in the university Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

I consent to participate in the study. Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

**Interviews Recording & Transcription**

I understand and agree to the following:  
The interviews will be recorded and then transcribed. Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

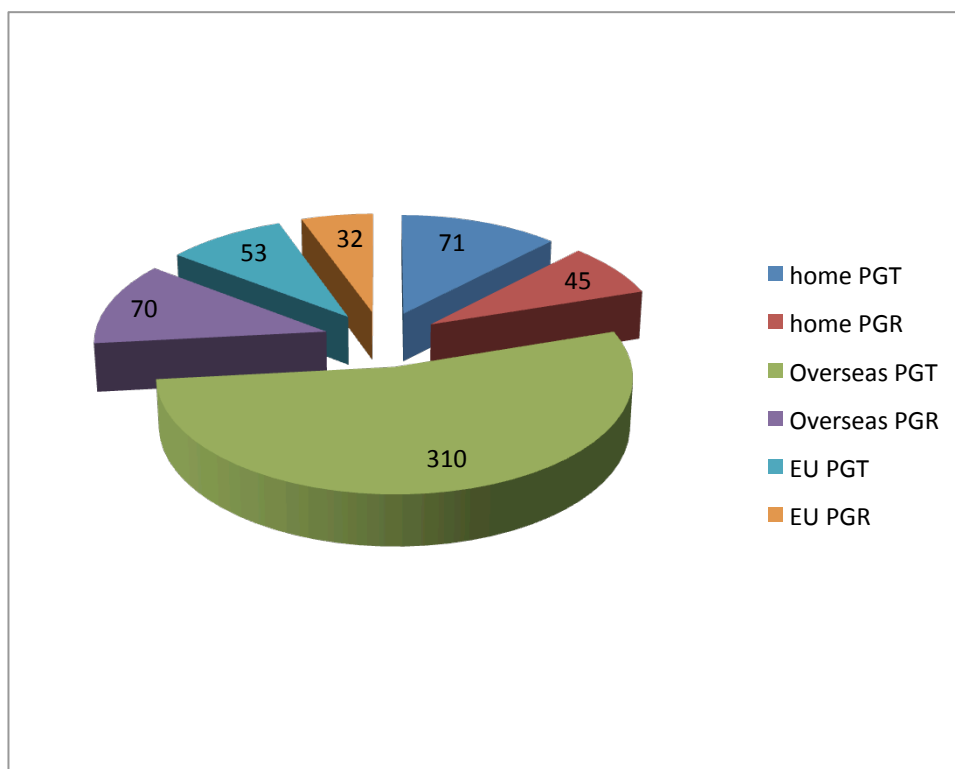
I will not be identified in the study. Yes \_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_

Signed \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(NAME IN BLOCK CAPITALS)  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B Residence by Fee status and level 2008-2009



### College Admissions (resident and non-resident) by nationality and percentage of university PG admissions total

2008 & 2009 (top 10 nationalities)

	2009	University	%	2008	Total	%
		Total	Total		Total	Total
<b>China</b>	343	407	84%	307	409	75%
<b>UK</b>	340	1144	30%	347	913	38%
<b>USA</b>	66	110	60%	23	50	46%
<b>India</b>	56	82	68%	23	34	68%
<b>Thailand</b>	38	44	86%	25	32	78%
<b>Nigeria</b>	25	33	76%	14	18	78%
<b>Germany</b>	21	42	54%	13	24	54%
<b>France</b>	15	25	60%	12	18	67%
<b>Canada</b>	13	19	68%	13	16	81%
<b>Greece</b>	12	23	52%	22	30	73%

## Appendix C Sample Interviews

**Ruth, 24-year-old Masters student in Finance from north-west China. First Interview 4<sup>th</sup>**

**June 2008**

T right, okay. Where do you live now?

R Smith

T whereabouts?

R Kielder D.

T Kielder. And who else is in you flat in Kielder?

R eh, Thailand, English - English guy, Indian guy - Indian girl.

T are they on your course or on different courses?

R um, the English guy major is in law department and he's PhD, and the Thai girl is also in Law department, and Indian girl is also in the Business School, but her major is management, I think, and the two others are from China, yeah.

T so are they your friends, or are they just people in the kitchen?

R to be honest, the Chinese people and the Thai girl are my friends, we are really friends, and the English guy actually we seldom talk, and, eh, Indian girl I have some quarrels with her, so we cannot get along with each other very well.

T oh right, what was the quarrel about?

R it's about cleaning.

T oh right.

R yeah, because at first we, at first I want to get along with each other very well, I help her to move the luggages, but after a few weeks I found she doesn't like cleaning, just leave all the used dishes beside basin, so I ask her to clean them, to keep the kitchen clean  
so she was not happy with that, so we had quarrels.

T do you think, did she say why she didn't want to clean?

R no, because I said I think I'm not very, I didn't express myself in the correct way, I said your lifestyle has bothered others, and she was not happy with that, because she doesn't think she bothered others.

T is that how you would have said it to a Chinese person?

R sorry?

T would you have said that to a Chinese person, the same way?

R you mean if the same thing happened to another ...?

T yes, a Chinese person

R I think I still will talk with them.

T the same thing? So is that how you think you would talk to a Chinese person?

R yeah.

T but it didn't work with the Indian girl.

R yes.

T any idea why?

R I think, um, I don't know how to, it's hard to say.

T have a try.

R maybe she is from a rich family, never do this kind of housework, yes, I guess so.

T right, okay.

R she's still young, I think.

T so is she the only person you've had a quarrel with?

R yeah

T and everybody else is okay. But the English guy doesn't speak to you.

R no, he is very friendly, but I think every time we ask him something, (??) would like to talk with me, talk with anyone in our flat. But, I think, the culture is different, I think, anyway, and, eh, he seldom show up in the kitchen, so that's why I think we have, don't have much communication.

T why do you think he's not in the kitchen?

R hmm, our living style is different, yes, because Chinese, when Chinese in kitchen we cook together and, eh, talk a lot, but maybe he just be in his room, we have different times to eat.

T so, do you, did you join any clubs or societies here?

R no

T no. Why not, any reason?

R mmm, I want to join, I just think, if I'm interested in that I will go, like yoga society, I want to do yoga this week, so I just go there, pay, I didn't join any special society.

T so in terms of meeting people, you have your friends from the pre-sessional, you have some friends from now, so what kind of activities do you do?

R eh, cook together, go out travelling, yeah, that's all.

T and do they tend to be mostly other Chinese people, or with people from other places also?

R you mean (???), it's okay, it doesn't matter.

T but who do you, who do you cook with, just Chinese people or ...

R cook with sometimes together, I just invite them, invite Spring Festival, we cook dumplings, I just invite them to our kitchen.

T just Chinese students?

R no, also

T other students

R yeah, yeah

T and who came?

R who came from, friends from Japan, Greece, Korea, Thailand, yeah.

T um, and what other kind of things, you cook together, what else do you do?

R go travelling.

T like what, for example?

R during Christmas holiday I went to Manchester and Liverpool with my Korean sister, yeah and another Chinese boy, we go two days, and we are also planning, we will go travelling to Switzerland in July with my Thai flatmate and another Chinese guy.

T in organizing these trips, or in going on these trips, has anything happened that you thought 'oh, that's a bit strange, I wonder if that's because they're from somewhere different?'

R no, I don't think so. Because I think it's because we are all from Asian countries, we have very similar background, from Korea, and Thailand. I think our culture to some extent is similar, we can ... Anyway, we can become friends, most important thing is we have the same habits or ...

T like what, for example?

R like what our interests in, all like visiting galleries, we like sports, we can do the same sports together

T what sports do you do?

R that's why ... like, eh, badminton, and eh, only play badminton here.

T where?

R in the Fenwick building, or outside, and eh, when it's snowing after new years day, we go out taking pictures together, we all feel excited about that, so

T but it snows where you're from

R yeah, not quite often, no, it's quite dry there

T so but your Greek friend isn't from Asia, your Greek friend  
R ah, yeah, but to be honest we have fewer contact now, but anyway we still  
remember each other and we still ask friends, oh how is he now, and sometimes  
we leave a message on facebook to each other.

**Steve, 25-year old Masters student in Social Work from north-east England.**

**Third interview, 28<sup>th</sup> June 2009**

T I thought I'd just start off by asking how you feel about college now that it comes time to leave.

S College generally?

T uh huh

S well you've probably seen the article

T I have, it's very good, it's excellent actually, it's very well written.

S I actually don't really want to go, eh, but it's time to go. Eh I think there's nothing more annoying than when you are, when you're part of something other people have previously been part of but they in a sense refuse to go, and you just look at them and you think 'you're really sad, just go away and let me enjoy the space', and I'm conscious of that, and, I think to cling on so desperately to here is to assume that ... there's going to be nothing good away. You know, I've got a job, I will at some point have a flat when I pull my finger out, and, I think to say that, I mean, I think to say that it will never be Smith, that may or may not be the case, but to say that it's just a bit pessimistic. It's you know what people say when you're young it's the best years of your life. Maybe so, when you're (child?) the best years of your life it denies any, you're not very optimistic or hopeful about the future and you don't look forward to the future. So I don't want to go but it's time to go, eh, there's only so long you can hang around, especially when, you know, the highlights of your day are glasses of wine and Sudoku and crosswords, that's it. But I really, really have enjoyed it. I stayed the second time, for the second year because it just works, it's a nice place to be.

T what are the things that make it a nice place to be?

S seriously the people. I've met some really, really just kind people, (??), well I would be, I guess, then ... I don't know, it's really, really hard to say, but like I said in the article that they've been generally open, kind, generous people, who you know when I rock up, incredibly unfit and vehemently, vehemently against sport in any of its ugly, ugly manifestations and then through the encouragement I guess and patience of others, suddenly twice a week I'm rowing, I'm running half marathons. I mean it scares my parents, it scares me. I really don't know how, and like I said in



the article, I genuinely do not know how it has happened. But, and I think it probably would only happen in Smith.

T because?

S yes, we're competitive, but we're competitive in a very uncompetitive way, I think as a college we don't take ourselves too seriously. ... And you know I think you look at say some of the, for example, take the Boat Club, yes, we have trained hard, but also we're not going to say someone can't row because they're not at absolute peak athletic standard, because I think taking part is what, is actually more important than winning. And again, I think with the Boat Club I think that's probably a good example.

T isn't that a very British thing to say, it's not the winning it's the taking part?

S maybe it's a very British thing, but I think it's true of the college, that everyone here is incredibly committed to getting people involved. I mean I don't know how many colleges do Cultural Days.

T some of them do

S you know, and you've got, sorry, I'll speak up. You get things like, I, it's, I'm finding it really hard to articulate, like, eh, ... I think people genuinely want to share, you know share what they've got, what they have, what they know and who they are, and, you know, even if that is dancing at the Intercultural Association or ... anything else, I think that's probably what characterises the college quite (??). I'm not making any sense, am I? You've got a look on your face (??)

T no the look on my face is what's the next question!

S okay, right.

T that's a good question, what is the next question? Um, because you talked last year, a fair bit about the people on your floor, because you're in Dalby, aren't you?

S yeah, I'm in Dalby

T many of those will have moved on

S this year, yeah, they have. This year's been, well, with the wonderful administration of the college I got moved down to first floor, because they said they were making the second floor an all girls floor, but then they moved Dan Moore into it. Confuses the hell out of me, but

T that was a mistake

S there we go, so I moved for nothing, so be it. Then, yeah, wound up on a floor with, well, in a kitchen block with a Chinese girl, a Chinese guy, a Greek guy, and the

other room was generally emptyish, it was a Taiwanese girl was in, but she moved out because she just didn't like it, or didn't like us, it was very, very strange, and then an American came in briefly before moving off to another place. That was much, much quieter, there's been a lot less sense of block cohesion, and actually I think there've been a lot less white British, well there have been a lot less white British people in the block, I'm not sure how that plays out. Last year there were quite a large contingent I guess of, of British men who, right, let's go to the bar, let's go and do some drinking. That's been less the case and so there's less shared idea of what to do together as a block, and so I think everyone just does their own thing. I ... kind of graduated, what's the word I want? I kind of moved towards the people who were here last year so again I've remained very friendly with Graham, I'm friendly with Dieter and Joseph and Frank and so on, and so ... for instance I've been here, and in a sense there hasn't been the impetus for me to go and make friends in my block because I already had friends. You know, you don't have to do that propping your door open and being nice to everyone, that can be miserable, and can end up being miserable. Eh, say I guess, can't remember what the question was

T who was on the floor in your block

S Um, yeah, it's been diff, in a sense we really don't seem to have that much in common, and the Chinese girl, we really only spoke properly for the first time about a week ago, we actually only had a conversation, I mean we actually had a conversation, I'm thinking 'christ', because normally it's very ..., conversation tends to be functional like to achieve something, like 'excuse me' or something, this was the first time, you know like she just got chatting, and she was saying quite a bit why she actually didn't like go to Bayne House and so on, and she said it, she almost felt it wasn't kind of hers, and it does seem to belong to certain people in that sense, and you know I guess that differentiates this year's block obviously from last year.

T why did she think it wasn't hers?

S it was actually her language skills, she's very, very unconfident in her English, although her English is much better than my Mandarin or my Cantonese, no she felt ... she felt the lack of English skills prevented her from taking part

T in anything?

S yeah

T even in the space?

S almost, yeah, because I think to use the space is to, I'm not sure, but yeah she felt she really couldn't go there, and it was easier for her and a couple of her friends to go down to a pub in town, but which strikes me as odd, but she really didn't want to use Bayne House. For one of the Greek guys I lived with he associated it with very much with drinking culture, he wasn't a drinker, therefore

T he didn't go at all?

S he went occasionally, but would often say come in, get a Coke, and then go away, he would never, you know, occupy the space, or use the space in a lasting sense. I guess that's kind of sad there's almost an element that, you had to speak English, you had to drink to use Bayne House, and we all know that's not the case but the fact is people obviously think it is the case and so ... I don't know

T why do you think they think that's what they have to do?

S probably because they live with me! I'm off to the pub, I'll be back at one! Eh, yeah, it could have something to do with the fact they're living with me, and for me going out, down to the bar with people and drinking beer is time excellently well spent, very good fun, um, ... so you maybe in that sense I don't set the best example, but, I think there's prob, there's also I think ... I think for some of them there's a conception of what happens in Britain, that we all go and we get absolutely smashed, ooh, quite possibly true, eh, I think for others there's, I think there's cultural things about pu – I think we did touch on this, for some of them there's ideas of public and private socialising, and for many of them, especially I see with a lot of students say from China, Taiwan or Japan, and I think for some of them socialising's almost done in private, and whereas I would very, very quite happily go to the bar and drink beer, they will quite often share a meal in the kitchen.

T Karaoke's incredibly popular in China and Japan

S yes, but we don't do Karaoke, do we?

T in pubs, in bars

S yeah, but we don't do karaoke

T why don't we?

S I don't know

T do you think we should?

- S it might work. I actually think it would work, and I think some of the bar staff would be more receptive to it than others, some of them would moan on, but some of them would be well up for it
- T why?
- S and I think especially if it was seen as a way to get more people involved that would be good, but I think I've seen some of them, this notion of private socialising, of share a meal in the kitchen, and for me eating is not a social thing it's a functional thing that has to be done occasionally and I'll go in, cook something horrendous, then retreat to my room, you know, it's something to be done rather than something I thoroughly enjoy. Eh, ... so I think there's different ideas of what socialising is. Some of them I think there's maybe elements of what they're at university for, some of them see themselves 'I'm here to study', I'm more of the opinion I'm here to study but maybe have a bit of fun while I'm here, we all know that's a bit too much fun, I don't know. Eh, maybe not guilt, but maybe is going to the bar what I should be doing? You know?
- T do you think there's any element of time and pressure?
- S I think some of the courses are incredibly pressured, and ... if, if perhaps you're from overseas there's much, much greater financial commitment you've had to make to do the course and so, ultimately, yeah.
- T if you just do the degree in a year
- S if I had however many tens of thousands of pounds resting on me I would probably have taken my studies a little bit more seriously, but I was funded, knew I was going to pass, I was never not going to pass really, so I wasn't too worried either way, but I think for some people there's either financial pressure or they actually do need to put in a lot of work to make sure they actually can pass the course, but I'm not sure again how that ties in with cultural
- T it might not, but I think that might be part of the point, that people assume certain things are cultural and actually they're financial. Um, the girl that you were saying you were talking to her um, and she was saying, she was saying that she felt that her language skills weren't all that good, what did you think of her language skills?
- S I'm wary because I speak in an incredibly unclear and muffled way, eh. And so when someone, so when I say something and, I mean 99% of the time they immediate reply will be pardon, or pardon me, or excuse me, and so she, I might ask something and she would say 'pardon', and I'll repeat then she will become

flustered, frustrated and annoyed because she attributes that to her English skills, whereas I readily attribute to the fact that, you know, I'm speaking with my hand over my mouth or something. And I think there's probably a bit of both in there, but when you speak so, it's almost guilt, and shame

T what she feels?

S yeah, and I'm 'no, trust me, your English is really, you're more articulate than half the people I know', ... and if it is shame, is it embarrassment that stops her coming to the bar, because she doesn't want to be in, you know, ... that's, and I think that is sad, I really do, it's very sad, because her English is reasonable I guess, and if she wants to improve it, the best thing she can do to improve it would be to immerse herself in casual English, you know, um, speaking English on a casual basis, but you know for her it's

T what do you think about the coffee shop, people go there

S well again, that's the same. By and large we've, we all seem to have, you know, roll up there about half elevenish, sit there till about 4, that's fine for me, but they should be working, but we don't. So again you've got, and you don't see lots of other people coming in and using it. You see, I mean you see more, you see more Chinese and Japanese students than you would in the bar. I'm careful I'm making generalisation because there are pretty big exceptions to the rule when you look at you know Jie, Saraworn and Hillary and so on, but again by and large, it's, it's, it's a white British (??). When you look at the bar, when you look at the bar staff ... and, you know, well, there was Gary before, in my first year, but apart from that all your staff are European, or American, eh, the, eh, Taiwanese girl from my floor, eh, who moved out, she worked behind the bar but that didn't last because I understand it, she just couldn't get up to speed as it were. And so, I think it almost comes across as, it might almost come across as elitist, like saying that this is our bar, send that kind of message that maybe you're not welcome, and if people don't perceive themselves as having any stake in it, they ain't gonna show.

T so who's responsibility do you think it is to do anything about it? Or, does anyone have responsibility to do anything about it, is that just the way it is?

S I think yeah it is the way it is, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't attempt to change it. That's a bit of a loaded question, though, eh, in the sense it's all of our responsibilities, every single GSA President we have ever had, we have and we will ever have will always say ' I want to make the GSA more inclusive. Every Principal,

every Vice-Principal, Senior Tutor, will always say they want to make the college as accessible as we can. Great, but ... some level it still isn't working, and some people feel incredibly excluded

T who are the people who feel excluded?

S this is moving a bit away from culture. It's a bit

**Fiona, 24-year old Masters student in English Literary Studies from Lahore, Pakistan.**

**Second interview, 27<sup>th</sup> August 2009**

T What I've done since we last met is I've transcribed probably 24 interviews, all in all, I've looked through them, I've picked out some things from different people's interviews. Some of them agree with each other and some of them disagree with each other

F okay

T um, and some are similar points but made differently, um, I've got quite a few (?) things here, that I've pulled out, um, and I'd like if you've got any comments, anything you want to add, anything you want to agree with, anything you want to disagree with, anything else you think should be said about that topic. You don't need to comment on everything, it's just the ones that you think are most pertinent. I'll let you have a look at it.

F yeah, I think I would probably agree with like with the making friends section, mostly with everything. Um, except, similar interests can be from the same country, if you're from the same country you end up having similar interests more than if you were not from the same country

T why would that be?

F um, because obviously for example Pakistan and India are neighbours, so we have similar cultural interests that we can't really compare with people from the west, so our wedding process is similar, so we can discuss that, someone from the west would not have any idea of

T couldn't you discuss the things that are different, in that case?

F we could discuss things that are different, but there is, there is like a kinship with the fact that they know what you're talking about, if someone doesn't get what you're saying it's really exciting to make them understand, but they will only understand from another point of view, they're never going to be on the same page, which is not bad obviously, you get to know people from different cultures, but there's still a bit of a distance that's been put because of that. So I think being from the same country or from neighbouring areas definitely helps. Um, even know we're neighbours with China though I suppose I would say the similar culture as well, like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, um, I think these countries have a lot in common, as I said it's very easy to get along with them, and, um

- T some people have said that if they have friends from the same country their friendship may be based more on the fact that they're from the same country, speak the same language, and
- F yeah, um it is, this is what I was actually wondering, my friends from Pakistan, it's going to be very different because here we're all in a different context, also we're all in the same boat, because we all left Pakistan and came here, when we go back it's going to be, like we're going to be friends but it's not going to be the same, like if I call them up we don't have the same thing, we all coming here to Bayne every night, so we have the same context, you know, at home we'll have different lives, we'll probably have different views at home as well, so it's not going to be the same thing
- T that's your friends here when you're back in
- F exactly, my friends here that I made friends, I would not have made friends these guys back in Pakistan, I'm pretty sure of that, we're very different in our backgrounds and upbringing, but here because you're from the same country we just gelled together and it just became like a little family, but back home I think this one year probably cemented it more, otherwise it would not have been that. Anything else, um, yeah, personality definitely very important, because the only reason we get along with in think Greeks is that we have similar, uh, personalities with the Greeks, culturally I suppose, I don't know, but we're loud, they're loud, we all have like weird sense of humour, I mean I think that's one reason why we're getting along with them a lot, even though language is a barrier but we try to learn each others' language, we pick it up quickly, um, and I think that's important that our personalities are like that, we're open to learning about other cultures and having them learn about ours, and we're all very sort of outgoing and you know we're into all the social activities and I think that is an important part in getting to know people from other countries
- T Do you think your friendships are as deep here as they are (??)
- F I wouldn't say that, um, I would say that I have been able to get that with people from India and Pakistan, because again I'd say it's because we're from the same place, we don't have the same issues about personal space, we don't have a lot of personal space, basically, we're together all the time, and there's no problem with that, but I think people from other countries are not like that really, they need space after a while, so I don't think we can get as deep as we would with people



from similar areas, so deep on another level, as far as you can go with someone from the west, but deep from what I'm used to, no I don't think so

T but in terms of your friends from say Pakistan or India, are those friendships as deep?

F I would say they're not as deep, but they're much deeper than I thought I would be able to get in this one year over here, yeah.

Yeah, if you want to have a conversation with someone from another country you need to know something about that country in order to, or ask questions about that country, otherwise there's not a lot of topics of conversation between people from different countries. It's easy to talk to people from America or England because we're exposed to their cultures so much that it's basically whatever they know we know, so you don't have to know a lot about, um, countries, but I think with, um, Greece and all these other countries we had to ask questions for how things are and get to know that, and that was one of the ways we got to be friends with them.

T did you find that was a useful strategy?

F yeah I think it was, well for lack of any other strategy, I mean I don't think there was any other way to communicate, because like part of the reason why the groups that you see here are the groups mostly from the same country, have the same language, Cypriots and the Greeks are together, um, Pakistanis and Indians are together, it's just because of language that people are sticking together, so in order to get past that the other way you can connect is ask about their culture or about the country, and that's one way that I think you break the ice

T how do you go beyond that?

F the language barrier?

T no, how do you go beyond – you asked about a person's country, how do you move beyond that?

F well, you find some similarities and you find some differences, or you express interest in something that you didn't know about, and you want to know more. For example, I did not know about Greek music. I came here to the Greek party, I listened to one or two songs, there was one of my friends who I didn't know very well, he's Greek, and I was like 'I heard the music, it was fantastic and I want to know more', and then he was like 'I'm not into this, I'm into rock', and basically,

that's one way you get beyond that, it's the similarities and the differences I think,  
um

T are similarities more important than differences?

F um, I'd say they are in some way, differences are better for growth, and for expanding something, similarities are better for stability and for already cementing a relationship I suppose, so I think both are integral, you couldn't do it without either, yeah

Yes, I would definitely agree that Chinese students are very quiet and like to keep together and are not interesting in making - I don't think they're not interested, I think they're just really insecure about getting beyond their own circle. I would say that's true for every country technically, because we all find security in our own similarities in our own country or culture, but I think they're a lot more scared to go out of it because of the fact that they're not very good with English also, that would be one big reason

T one of the things that's said in the comments above that you need to make an effort to get to know people, particularly if you're Chinese, one of the things that people I've talked to have said 'actually, people came to me and talked to me', no Chinese person has said that, they've all said 'I had to go to other people, I had to make the effort'

F really?

T yes. Does that surprise you?

F that does surprise me because my flatmates basically they don't like to talk much, and I've had to make any effort to talk to them. One reason I assumed they don't want to talk is because they're not very good with communicating, and that's why we tried to talk to them in English, thought maybe they'll improve their English or maybe that's why they're shy, but sometimes I feel it's just, maybe it's a cultural thing, it's just maybe they're just shy, I don't know, that's what I thought, maybe they just like to keep their distance from people from other cultures, I don't know, but I don't find them very approachable if I see them in groups, not approachable at all

T why do you think Chinese people might say 'it's harder for us'?

F um, I don't know, maybe it's some cultural difference, I really can't see why, I just think they're not very open to, to letting people in, that's why

T do you think there might be an element that people assume that because they're Chinese they're not going to be very friendly and they're not going to have very good English? And there's so many of them, that they don't make an effort

F right. Coming from Pakistan I only had very good opinions about people from China, when I came here they became a little negative I'd say in the sense that they're not communicating, and we have very good relationship with them so, I've never really interacted with people from China before, this is the first time, and um, yeah I guess I would have an assumption that they don't know how to communicate really good in English, but my flatmates know better English than I would have assumed them to know, and still on that level they don't really communicate. So I don't know if it's only about language either, there's one girl who knows English really well, but she prefers not to talk much, she just comes and cooks her food and goes

T for her it could be personality

F it could be, but then everyone I know says that, so it can't just be my personality

T (that)

F for her personality? But then everyone complains that about all of their flatmates, so. I have heard that people from East Asia, from other countries, not China, Thailand or uh, Japan, are still a little more different than people from China, they're a lot more meek, I'd say.

T (?) Have you wondered if maybe, you said that you're very lively, outgoing, have you wondered if maybe that is impacting on students from China who are a little bit quieter?

F it could be (*surprise*). Maybe they get intimidated by, maybe, because they're not so quick to opening up, maybe that intimidates them, but then like, everyone's like that here, everyone from every country I've seen except China is like that. No people from China are very lively but amongst themselves. For example the other day we were standing where the futsal table is, they're playing Wii and they're screaming and all of that, but it just feels like they're the only people there and the other people could might as well not be there. That I think isolates them as well as other people

Yes!, the food has strong smell, they invite people for dinner, maybe from the same nationality but they don't invite people of other. Not even other nationalities, like again my flatmates will have dinner, never once have they asked me to join

them. Once there were all the flatmates, all 4 of them, sitting together having dinner, invited friends, I was standing in the kitchen, no one was talking to me, I felt invisible. If they invite people from outside that's their friends, fair enough, but they invited all the other flatmates and not, and I was standing there like I'm not there, so I just thought that was a little rude because whenever I cook I offer, I know it's too spicy, they'll never eat it, but once or twice I have offered for them to join.

T do you know the interesting thing about that is that the reason it doesn't say the nationality is because a number of students have said this about Chinese students, Chinese students say this about Indian and Pakistani students

F really? Wow.

T does that surprise you?

F I mean, I guess it would look like that. The only reason we don't approach others is first of all we feel that they somehow don't want us to communicate with them, we feel they get like intimidated, because actually I was telling someone, that one of my flatmates was standing who does not talk much to me, she was standing next to my cabinet, and I just came forward to take something, she jumped a foot away, and sometimes we just feel that maybe they don't want us to talk to them, so we don't, otherwise we're inviting everyone, like otherwise, people from downstairs, from Trinidad, from England, we're always inviting them for Pakistani food, we know most people can't take it because it's really spicy, exactly, so, otherwise we're always offering, because we make food in huge quantities, we are actually begging people to finish it, so, I don't know maybe there are people who don't invite them but I wouldn't invite because I would be like maybe they think we're intruding, so.

## Appendix D Analysing the Data

1. Interviews transcribed (see Appendix C)
2. Interviews were read several times. Notes were taken by longhand in a note book to become familiar with the content, and then on index cards to summarise content
3. Interview were reread and notes taken on the transcript to identify areas of possible interest (see 3 below)
4. Interviews were then transferred into tabular format (see 4 below) and topics and subtopics identified
5. A first set of topics and subtopics were drawn up (see 5 below)
6. An initial organisation of interview data was made according to topic and subtopic

### 3. Hillary interview 2 example of annotated transcript

H2	<p>and the stereotype about British would be drinking, wine and everything, (laughs) going out, party) so when I talk to first time talk to British people, depends on is men or women, if it's women I would, how to say, [t's weird I never approach any British girl before] both laugh). Can I tell you something? I find they are very difficult to approach because they, they just make themselves look really distant, I don't know why, seriously, I mean I find American girls are easier to approach because once if you talk to the (makes high pitched noise), you see what I mean? They will be like, that fits my stereotype, oh, Americans are so easy approachable, and so open, and I'll say 'oh America I love, for example KFC, I like you know McDonalds, McDonalds is very popular in China', so all of this we can say stereotyping people, or their culture, or their products, all of this stuff can be grouped into stereotype, I think at least for me. So all of those kind of knowledge within my stereotype, I can use to actually build up this first rapport, kind of relationship with them, how to start conversation, yeah, British girls are very difficult to approach, I know they're warm inside, but (laughs), seriously, I find it's a little bit hard. Yeah, British people, I think British people give me a kind of feeling that um, how to say, [t's very gas, it's very difficult to become friends with them, once you become friends with them they stay with you forever.]</p>	<p>Comment [A1]: UK stereotype (drinking, partying)</p> <p>Comment [A2]: Never approached UK girl</p> <p>Comment [A3]: Finds UK females difficult to approach</p> <p>Comment [A4]: US girls easier, fit US stereotype of being approachable</p> <p>Comment [A5]: Would talk about something to do with US</p>
T	<p>someone commented on that before, it's, the initial barriers is the hard bit.</p>	<p>Comment [A6]: Aware these are all stereotypes</p> <p>Comment [A7]: Stereotype helpful to start a conversation</p> <p>Comment [A8]: British girls had to approach</p> <p>Comment [A9]: Difficult to start a friendship with UK people, but once you become friends you stay friends</p>
L	<p>why? I don't understand.</p>	
T	<p>I don't know. Do you think sometimes maybe you confuse them? Because they're expecting, they're using a stereotype on you, what they expect of a Chinese person, and you don't fit into that.</p>	<p>Comment [A10]: Does she think it doesn't appear to fit Chinese stereotype?</p>
L	<p>really? Probably (sharp intake of breath) let me think. You know I, actually I can't remember who, um, but several of my friends, including Natalya, she said that you are not Chinese, oh, including Joseph. Joseph went back to China, eh, to Shanghai for like 4, 3 months, for his research, and after he came back he said 'Hillary, are you', like before he went to China, he said 'are you Chinese? Are you, like, can you represent Chinese?' And I said 'I don't know, you go back to China and find out'. And then after he came back he told Jenny, his girlfriend, Hillary is not Chinese, she</p>	<p>Comment [A11]: Her friends have said she's not Chinese</p> <p>Comment [A12]: Her friend went to fieldwork in China and asked her if she represented Chinese before going</p> <p>Comment [A13]: She said go to China and find out</p>

is European. But then Natalya said 'Hillary, you are not Chinese', but I think, okay, they're judging me based on their stereotype of Chinese. I am Chinese, there are so many Chinese like me, but they just don't know yet. I mean they they don't have Chinese friends. I mean like, I am outgoing, so I actually made a lot of effort to actually have these friends, because I actually make myself approachable to them, 'hey, understand me, this is me', see what I mean? But it doesn't mean that all the other Chinese students they would have as much as time, or they would make as much effort to let them understand them, see what I mean?

**Comment [A14]:** On his return, he said she was European, not Chinese

**Comment [A15]:** Another friend said she was not Chinese

**Comment [A16]:** Thinks people judging her based on their stereotype of Chinese

**Comment [A17]:** There are lots of Chinese like her

T so do you think that maybe you confuse people, that they're expecting, they don't know how to even start to approach you?

**Comment [A18]:** Her friends don't know, they don't have many Chinese friends

L probably. Probably, I think - but seriously, I mean, oh, I see what you mean.

**Comment [A19]:** Has made a lot of effort to have non Chinese friends

Actually, if people don't think, um, this is my experience, like sometimes people find me, like people will judge me based on their stereotype on Chinese, where are you from? China, but while we are talking, they will find easier to approach to me. Do you see what I mean? For example, Natalya, she will, when she met me she knew I was Chinese, and then, but this is what she told me, but when we approached to each other she found oh, you are so different, you are so different, in a way is I'm so easy, I'm so approachable or easy to become friends with, and, eh, easy to understand, do you see what I mean? So, I may confuse people in a way that they don't know how to approach to me, but I'm not aware of that at this stage.

**Comment [A20]:** Made herself approachable

**Comment [A21]:** Not all Chinese will have made this effort to be understandable and approachable

**Comment [A22]:** Sometimes people will prejudge her based on where she's from

**Comment [A23]:** But when talking will find her more approachable

**Comment [A24]:** Gives example of friend who thought of her as 'Chinese', then changed her view as she got to know her, realized she was approachable and easy to be a friend

**Comment [A25]:** Agrees it's possible she may confuse people, though not something she's aware of

**Comment [A26]:** Hadn't realized she confuses people

#### 4. Hillary interview 2, interview data in tabular format

H2 p16	and the stereotype about British would be drinking, wine and everything, (laughs) going out, party, so when I talk to first time talk to British people, depends on is men or women, if it's women I would, how to say, it's weird I never approach any British girl before (both laugh). Can I tell you something? I find they are very difficult to approach because they, they just make themselves look really distant, I don't know why, seriously,	Stereotype – example British	Language and culture
H2 p16	I mean I find American girls are easier to approach because once if you talk to the (makes high pitched noise), you see what I mean?, they will be like, that fits my stereotype, oh, Americans are so easy approachable, and so open, and I'll say 'oh America I love, for example KFC, I like you know McDonalds, McDonalds is very popular in China',	Stereotype example Americans	Language and culture
H2 p16	so all of this we can say stereotyping people, or their culture, or their products, all of this stuff can be grouped into stereotype, I think at least for me. So all of those kind of knowledge within my stereotype, I can use to actually build up this first rapport, kind of relationship with them, how to start conversation, yeah.	Use of stereotypes	Language and culture
H2 p16-17	British girls are very difficult to approach, I know they're warm inside, but (laughs), seriously, I find it's a little bit hard. Yeah, British people, I think British people give me a kind of feeling that um, how to say, it's very eas, it's very difficult to become friends with them, once you become friends with them they stay with you forever.	British girls difficult to get to know	Language and culture
H2 p17	You know I, actually I can't remember who, um, but several of my friends, including Natalya, she said that you are not Chinese, oh, including Joseph. Joseph went back to China, eh, to Shanghai for like 4, 3 months, for his research, and after he came back he said 'Hillary, are you', like before he went to China, he said 'are you Chinese? Are you, like, can you represent Chinese?' and I said 'I don't know, you go back to China and find out'. And then after he came back he told Jenny, his girlfriend, Hilary is not Chinese, she is European. But then Natalya said 'Hilary, you are not Chinese',	Others don't think she's Chinese because she doesn't fit their stereotype	Language and culture
H2 p17	but I think, okay, they're judging me based on their stereotype of Chinese. I am Chinese, there are so many Chinese like me, but they just don't know yet. I mean they they don't have Chinese friends. I mean like, I am outgoing, so I actually made a lot of effort to actually have these friends, because I actually make myself approachable to them, 'hey, understand me, this is me', see what I mean, but it doesn't mean that all the other Chinese students they would have as much as time, or they would make as much effort to let them understand them, see what I mean.	Being judged on others' stereotype – Chinese sts quiet	Language and culture
H2 p17-18	like sometimes people find me, like people will judge me based on their stereotype on Chinese, where are you from? China, but while we are talking, they will find easier to approach to me. Do you see what I mean? For example, Natalya she will, when she met me she knew I was Chinese, and then, but this is what she told me, but when we approached to each other she found oh, you are so different, you are so different, in a way is I'm so easy, I'm so approachable or easy to become friends with, and, eh, easy to understand, do you see what I mean? So, I may confuse people in a way that they don't know how to approach to me, but I'm not aware of that at this stage.	Different to stereotype of Chinese  Confuses people	Language and culture

## 5. Initial set of topics, example Language & Culture

- Media influence
- Language issues
- Reactions to other cultures
- Identity
- Integration
- 'Home'
- Cultural Day
- Representing culture
- Criticisms
- Stereotypes
- Individuals versus generalising
- Attitudes to learning languages
- Change
- Fixed opinions
- Attitudes to authority
- Communication
- Interest in other cultures
- Studying abroad = willingness to change?
- Close personal relationships – influence most

### Notes on individual topics, example extract 'the Chinese'

L1, F1 in the kitchen

F1 upset about number of Chinese in flat

Comment [A27]: accommodation

R, H, eating in the middle of the night

R, H Chinese & Indian students

Comment [A28]: food/eating habits

F1 don't talk

F1 don't make the effort to speak English

Comment [A29]: English language skills

F1 why not stay in China?

F1 Chinatown/little China

F1 Chinese are foreigners here

Comment [A30]: Chinese don't really belong or fit in

M, H 'you're not Chinese' because different to stereotypes

M1 Chinese student not remembered, just another Chinese

R work hard/find studies boring

Comment [A31]: Stereotyping of Chinese

L1 has friends from all other places, so the problem not Laura

L1 Chinese don't need friends from elsewhere, there are lots of Chinese

L1 90% Chinese population

F1 don't want to know people from other countries

F1 often meet together outside Bayne House, see them around

Comment [A32]: Chinese students and friendship