A Phenomenological Study of Help Seeking Behaviours and Coping Strategies of International Students of Non-European Backgrounds

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To my mother and my partner

My mother's irrepressible spirit continues to move and amaze me and has been
a lifelong force contributing to all my achievements.

My partner's continued love and support
has kept me strong and kept me going.

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to explore the subjective experience of what are the help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies of international Students from non-European backgrounds. Eighteen students from eleven non-European countries on three sites were interviewed. Using a phenomenological approach, the study seeks to capture the knowledge of the experiential experts, i.e., the students themselves, with the hope that it can be used to enhance provision for this client group in university counselling services. The study was motivated by the distinct under-use and under-representation of such students using traditional counselling services. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed to address the research questions from a first-person-perspective, helping to shed light on the sense making of international Students of non-European backgrounds, when confronted with challenge. Themes such as culture shock, culture, family, spirituality/religion, identity, sense of justice, resistance, perceived barriers and reflections on how to improve transition were categorised, with *impact of transition, living with challenge – coping, living with challenge – seeking help; shifting identities* and *enhancing cultural engagement* as superordinate themes emerging. The study revealed that patterns of help-seeking typically followed preferential relationships, called here *hierarchy of helping*. The findings are discussed with regard to implications for individual practice and staff training in transcultural work to enhance cultural engagement in educational settings.

Preface

For eighteen years, I have worked as a counsellor in a university setting. I have always been interested in the fact that international students from Non-European backgrounds did not readily access counselling services, except when referred by medical or academic staff, often following a crisis. I wondered if they perceived counselling to be "not for them"? Were their experiences disappointing? Had there been too narrow a focus on individual or psychological issues, with inadequate attention to the complexity and impact of other external elements, including culture? For those who made it over the threshold, did they not feel sufficiently recognised, to want to return? These are questions I became interested in during my early career and which have continued to pervade my sensibilities ever since. The persistent uneasiness, curiosity and 'unknowing' that I felt about these observations, formed one of the major motivations for this study. It inspired the endeavour to explore such students' experience of help-seeking and coping patterns, at close hand and to tap a vital knowledge resource from the 'experiential experts', i.e. the students themselves, about how they understood their own experiences.

To unlock that information and find ways to disseminate it, is to make available possibilities to guide practice and policy. The ultimate aim is to contribute new insights and perspectives to the transcultural discourse, which can benefit practitioners and clients. There is the hope that the study outcomes, through

a variety of routes, can also contribute to enhancing cultural engagement in educational settings, with benefits for staff and students alike.

At the University of Ulster, where I was employed until last year, there are 4 campuses and approximately 25000 students. Of these, there are 1300 international students from at least 60 different countries. These students are my research focus and form about a third of my sample group. The remaining participants came from two other universities, one in Dublin, Republic of Ireland and the other in Hyderabad, India.

The term *international student* normally identifies those who are "domiciled outside of the EU ... who will rarely have English as their first language" (Trahar, 2007, p. 7). They are mostly postgraduate students studying for Masters and PhDs. They are often mature, highly educated in professions such as medicine, biomedical science, and education.

> "In 2012/13 there were 425,265 non-UK domicile students studying at UK HE providers. This was a fall in numbers from 435,235 the year before following a continuous year-on-year rise since HESA started collecting data in 1995. Unsurprisingly the highest numbers of students came from the world's two most populous countries, China and India." Higher Education Statistics Agency (2015).

Despite the recent fall in student numbers national and international alike, it can be assumed that with increasing globalisation the numbers of international students will stay high or even increase providing huge opportunities for engaging in cross-cultural dialogue. The recent refugee crisis reminds us of the urgency of this dialogue. Seen from the viewpoint of University counselling this new political development is currently turning an already challenging situation into an even more complex one (Bothwell, 2015). It is against this backdrop of developments that I have written this thesis. The contribution of qualitative research such as mine, is integral to the change and development that University counselling services need to undergo in order to be truly supportive to these students.

Personal context. My early experiences of alienation as discussed in my RPPL (Review of Personal and Professional Learning) of feeling different even inside my own group are a distinctive part of the motivation for my career choice. It prompted a desire to help ease that agony for others, from an empowered

position conferred by my job role. Although I have never been an international student myself, I have always strongly identified with this group. My most significant adult relationships have been with people from different backgrounds, thus prompting and feeding my curiosity in other cultures, customs, languages and travel. To be totally identified with one's own culture can prevent the self from developing and maturing (Madison, 2009), an insight that resonances and illuminates my thinking patterns, on how I want to live. Searching for alternative perspectives opened up new vistas, waiting to be discovered, both in personal and professional life. Such vantage points have been offered to me by a 'phenomenological' manner of looking at the world. The latter is a concept that has felt very natural to me for a long time, which I came to know rather well in the course of this study.

Before embarking on the training of psychotherapy, which didn't always deal well or at all with transcultural issues, I was privileged to have learnt from my international friends about issues of race, oppression, power, guilt, exclusion and belonging and in so doing, to learn about myself. I discovered that I could unwittingly collude and even contribute to these dynamics of oppression whilst at the same time identifying. In my professional life, this journey of being challenged to understand more fully and therefore become a more effective 'helper' , continues, thanks to my work with international students.

Professional Training experience. My counselling training was rigorous, of a high standard and completed in a training institution with a good reputation. However issues connected with transcultural work were virtually absent from the schedule. But as luck would have it, I did have an introduction to the issues pertinent to transcultural relating and it was something of a 'baptism by fire!' The training group reflected a typical composition of counsellors, with the majority being middle class white women, one white man, one Asian man and one man of mixed race. The two group members who were non-white, were pushed into the role of 'expert' by the majority and indeed by the white tutors, a typical phenomenon commented upon by McKenzie-Mavinga (2009) in her research on Black Issues in Therapeutic Training. In this role of 'expert', the black and Asian students, then had do deal with an explosive reaction from many white group members. The vocal majority felt challenged and attacked for their defence and complicity in a privileged history that historically perpetuated oppression and still colludes with its destructive legacy.

At that time I did not have the insight and awareness to recognise the dynamics responsible for creating and consolidating discrimination within the group, but can see them much more clearly, when viewed retrospectively. The Asian man played a historic role in the group, by bringing the subject of race and discrimination very powerfully into the foreground amidst great consternation and bitter confrontation from the majority of group members. This experience opened my eyes to the rest of the world, as seen and experienced from others' perspectives, namely those from a Black and Asian cultural background. The provincial roots and insularity of my early background had been shaken up so intensely, that my cultural worldview would never be the same. When confronted in this way, I too felt the strength of my own prejudices borne out of my white colonial past and certainly not diluted by being a member of the dominant settler Protestant community of Northern Ireland. I experienced the historic guilt and the reactionary defensiveness in much the same way as the others. Yet I recognised the necessity of learning ways to understand and overcome this legacy, so that I would be able to relate constructively with clients of colour in the future.

Out of the 'baptism by fire', which almost tore the group apart, came a kind of epiphany that has informed my search and re-search for a better understanding, to engage meaningfully across cultures as a counsellor and as a person. To make those exchanges constructive, respectful, and in the right context, therapeutic, has been a commitment forged out of those intense revelations, at that time. I was determined to avoid that all-to-common criticism of the profession, not entirely undeserved, 'that the majority of the profession's membership of white, middle class females are in the main, equipped only to help clients like themselves'. Wishing to break out of those self-imposed, self-limiting restrictions, I wanted to embrace the full spectrum of human diversity, to learn and grow in wisdom through my relationships with clients and friends, whatever their background. This powerful awareness has continued informally for me in my choice of literature, the books I read to gain knowledge and insight, journeys I've embarked on to other countries and my conversations across cultures, when the opportunities present. This forms the bedrock of my personal and professional investment in my research focus – *the help-seeking behaviours and coping patterns of International students from Non-European backgrounds* – and gave me a firm footing for the challenges that lay ahead.

Introduction

> *Whatever you can do, or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it. Begin it now.*
>
> Goethe

Humans can hardly avoid stress, problems and unpleasant situations. The way we deal with these situations is shaped by many factors, ranging from one's life experiences, attachment history, family structure, one's socialisation or conditioning to the influence of role models and cultural heritage, to mention but a few. In a considerable part of my work as a counsellor, I have been privileged to witness and share the search for a meaningful resolution of students' difficult life events. Often, I have been struck by individuals' repertoires of coping resources when confronted with challenges and their varying attitudes, apprehensions and reservations about seeking help. Coping repertoires can be extensive or limited, they may be effective or sabotaging, and they may undergo changes during therapy. Having counselled a number of international students of

non-European backgrounds, throughout my professional career, I became interested in the possibility of culturally influenced coping patterns and help seeking behaviours. This group of students' infrequent and limited use of counselling services, often following a crisis, raised questions suggesting a possible link.

Professional practice in context. I continue to be keenly aware that western psychology, in which of course my person-centred humanistic training is embedded, is eurocentric, individualistic and on its own, woefully inadequate to assist me in working with a diverse client group. This reality is by no means a unique experience, confined to my institution or training establishment. Indeed most of my co-researcher colleagues remarked, when I conducted the research interviews with them for the PEP (Practice Evaluation Project), "we never discuss race or cultural issues at meetings". The intention behind this doctoral study is to bring this out in the open, to provoke critical reflection on the provision of appropriate support from university counselling services for non-western international students in Higher Education, at local level, national level and international level.

Rationale for the Introductory Pilot Study (PEP). At my former university, there was a low uptake of counselling services by international students of non-European backgrounds, yet if anything, medical services would seem to be over-used. Both services resided in the same physical space, as part of an integrated multi-disciplinary team. Although some students of different cultural backgrounds used the service, it was usually only when referred by a nurse or academic tutor. In order to understand the complexity of what the international student needed from a university counselling service, I decided to start my research by examining the experiences and perceptions of two nurses and two counsellors, my colleagues in Student Support. That was the subject of my PEP and my first piece of research.

In the course of conducting the PEP, I discovered I had to examine my own cultural stereotype that clients from different cultural backgrounds somatise their symptoms of stress. So do many European students but I hadn't considered that unusual! Furthermore, I was particularly struck by the number, who develops mental health problems during the course of study, and only become known to student support in circumstances of crisis or breakdown.

The intention was that the findings and implications of that small study would pave the way for the main research, whose focus is the perspectives of the

international students themselves. The findings of the PEP helped to construct the interview questions on which the main research is based (see Appendix A).

Outline of the Thesis.   The preface outlines my personal motivation for this research. This includes the professional context in which it is situated and the relevance of early cross-cultural experiences in counselling training, with its lamentable cultural training deficits. These continue to impact my sense of social responsibility and cultural worldview. The *Introduction* sets the scene for the doctoral study by giving an account of the preliminary research and its relationship to the main research, conducted with staff participants (two nurses and two counsellors) in a university.

Chapters two to four.   In Chapter two, the *Literature Review*, examines the literature surrounding the proposed research topic, including areas of specific and relevant interest such as spirituality and writing, as coping strategies. It takes account of the vast array of quantitative studies, conducted mainly in America on international students contributing to cross-cultural studies. The chapter also draws attention to the modest body of UK qualitative research, in an attempt to anticipate and position the research planned for this project.

Chapter three discusses the *Methodology* used and the reasons for this choice. The chapter seeks to explain the use, appropriateness and value of phenomenology for the study and considers other methodologies that were possible contenders but were later rejected.

Chapter four describes the many processes, stages and sequences of *Data Collection and Analysis*. It makes explicit the infrastructure that was required to bring the project into being, to keep it going and ultimately to deliver its outcomes and products.

Chapters five to nine.   The following five chapters are based on the analysis of super-ordinate themes, that emerged from the interviews with eighteen student participants from twelve non-European countries, on three university sites. Throughout, the students' voices are given ample coverage to facilitate the rich vivid narratives that are essential to portray a phenomenological approach.

Impact of Transition explores students' experiences of what it's like to arrive in a new country and culture, in many cases with minimum psychological preparation or support. It examines the students' concepts of Culture shock, which arise from a literal and personal interpretation.

Both *Living with Challenge: Coping* and *Living with Challenge: Seeking Help*, give an in-depth perspective from individual students' experiences of how they manage to cope with the on-going challenges presented to them, what personal resources they call upon, at what point they seek help, from whom and why.

Shifting Identities examines the effect of personal development and disclosure, occurrences precipitated by the new circumstances. It highlights the consequences for evolving and expanding a sense of self, often within conflicted loyalties that are integral to identity.

Enhancing Cultural Engagement addresses ways in which cross-cultural communication and sensitivity can be improved upon, within educational settings. Examples of good practice are included, when highlighted by students and found to be beneficial. Students' reflections on possible interventions that could create a more culturally aware and supportive environment are noted with interest. Invariably, these speak of change-making, which can benefit the entire student 'body' by giving serious and respectful consideration to its plural, diverse membership.

Chapter ten to the Conclusion. Chapter ten is a *Discussion* of the major concerns and ideas raised by emergent themes within the analysis. The chapter begins by highlighting the importance of ethics for the welfare of student participants and the overall integrity of the study. It goes on to address key points for critical reflection such as the traditional application of individualistic eurocentric style approaches for students who are from collectivist societies, who have very different perspectives on the 'self' and personal choice.

Chapter eleven offers a *Conclusion*, but not in the sense of confirmed knowledge of certain findings. Rather it is a reflection of the doctoral journey and the significant events that have defined it. This includes a critical evaluation of the achievements; an understanding of the pitfalls that threatened to sabotage but were ultimately overcome; the limitations that had to be worked with in the real world; the sacrifices made and the lessons learnt. The result is intended to be a balanced estimation of the value of my research, its contribution to raising the profile of cultural awareness and enhancing cultural engagement in educational settings, for staff and students, alike.

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

My research will explore the subjective perspectives held by international students on help-seeking and coping. This includes at one end of the spectrum, attitudes to professional help of counselling and medical services through to self-directed and informal help of family, friends, religion, reading and use of writing and any other coping methods as shared by the students.

My literature review will address several different areas. Firstly, an overview of research on counselling international students. The majority of this is based on American studies, but includes some UK studies too. Secondly, transcultural therapeutic engagement including theoretical positions and various models that have been developed to enhance that process. Thirdly, an examination of health and mental health issues across cultures, when the help-seeking fails to deliver the desired outcome and/or existing coping mechanisms do not work. Fourthly,

help-seeking behaviour and coping styles used by various people of different cultures and backgrounds both inside and outside University settings. And finally, a more expansive look at one coping style: the use of writing in various forms including expressive writing.

2.2 Research on Counselling non-European Students

There is extensive and diverse literature available on multi-cultural counselling, a small part of which addresses counselling international students in a university setting. The majority of these studies are quantitative in nature and North American based. There is a remarkable paucity of research on counselling international students that is qualitative in nature and within that category there are even fewer studies that are UK based. This lack of qualitative research on counselling international students conducted from a UK perspective indicates a gap in counselling research on help seeking and coping styles for international students which my work will address from a student perspective.

2.2.1 Quantitative Studies

Most research on multi-cultural counselling including the research on international students derives from large quantitative surveys carried out in America over the last 3 decades and has been conducted within disciplines of education, psychology and sociology. This work is often hypotheses and theory driven with the theories being centred on established or emerging models of multi-cultural counselling. A review of this work was carried out by Ponterotto, Costa, & Werner-Lin (2002) comprising 114 studies published between 1995 and 2000 in six key refereed journals in North America:

Journal of Counselling Psychology; Journal of Counselling and Development; The Counselling Psychologist; Journal of College Student Development; Journal of Multi-cultural Counselling and development; Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority psychology.

This reveals that seven areas dominated cross-cultural research: acculturation, stress and coping, attitudes towards diverse populations and towards coun-

selling, racial/ethnic identity development, multi-cultural competence and training, vocational and academic issues and quantitative instrument development.

Work that followed the behavioural-quantitative approach has resulted in a wealth of information, which has made a contribution in providing frameworks for much needed contextual understanding. For instance, Hanassab (1991) conducted a survey on young Iranian women who had emigrated to America, in order to gather information that would be useful for counsellors working with Iranian immigrant women. It followed the idea that cross-cultural counselling is enhanced by a counsellor's understanding of the world views and philosophies of their clients. Many studies like this with different client groups, different emphasis on different variables etc. provided the material that inspired and underpinned cross-cultural frameworks which were intended to educate and inform. By definition, behavioural-quantitative research sets the focus mainly on observable behaviour. Transition, adjustment, stress and coping, attitudes towards diverse populations and towards counselling are viewed through this lens. However, the constructs involved such as ethnic identity, acculturation, or racism are complex and multi-dimensional. It is questionable if and to what degree they are indeed amenable to a behavioural-quantitative approach (Ponterotto et al., 2002).

According to Ponterotto & Casas (1991) the behavioural-quantitative approach typically relies strongly on large student samples that are neither representative nor random, and it is often characterised by a lack of theoretical/conceptual framework to guide them These criticisms were endorsed more recently by researchers from various disciplines who came to the same conclusions (Prieto, McNeill, Walls, & Gómez, 2001). Furthermore, the behavioural-quantitative approach follows primarily a research perspective that does not seem well-suited to address the subjective component of students' perception of their situation in general and help-seeking and coping in particular. By virtue of its very existence the behavioural-quantitative approach continues to dominate and determine theoretical discourse and clinical practice, despite the majority of it being considered inadequate (Lago, 2006).

Example of a cross-cultural framework

As quantitative research and the work it inspired is such a vast and sprawling area, it is hard to do it justice. For the sake of illustration, I will consider one framework from the quantitative research tradition in some detail. Devised by J. Casas & Vasquez (1989) for understanding and supporting the cross-cultural counselling process and subsequently supported by Watts (1992) this counselling framework was developed further by J. M. Casas, Vasquez, & Ruiz de Esparza (2002). It proposes a continuum made up of firstly selected counsellor variables, e.g., personal, socio-cultural and professional factors inherent to the counsellor that will affect the counselling; secondly selected client variables, e.g., personal socio-cultural and life experiences that the counsellor must understand accurately and address appropriately. The final part addresses interactions between client and counsellor variables. These include the client's expectations, attitudes to counselling and preferred approaches together with the counsellor's level of sensitivity, understanding and respect for the client's culture. These are offered as predictors of the level of successful therapeutic engagement. In understanding the interface between these three different dynamics, there is the potential to detect early risk of mental health issues for clients but also the opportunity to witness and support their resilience and coping ability.

In my opinion, the framework for understanding the cross-cultural counselling process proposed by J. M. Casas et al. (2002) has some useful attributes. An emphasis on this knowledge within research is a step towards more effective research that can validly inform practice. However, as an example of the behavioural-quantitative approach it shares many of its characteristics: the behavioural-quantitative approach is often reductive in that it reduces complex concepts to some simplistic elements such that they can be technically addressed via a questionnaire; it is typically researcher-led in that the researcher and not the students examined set the agenda for the topics to be addressed. Finally, the behavioural-quantitative approach often does not live up to its own standards (e.g., in terms of the representativeness of the samples studied).

Issues particular to International Students

Distinctive issues faced by international students are well documented. For example researchers offer various classifications. Leong (1984) divides the issues

into three types: personal adjustment problems affecting all students, issues affecting most sojourners and those affecting international students. A study by A. F. Furnham & Bochner (1982) on culture shock offers four problem areas: issues confronting anyone living in a foreign country, difficulties affecting all late adolescents and young adults, academic stresses and the role that international students face in being ambassadors for their countries. The observation that international students face additional stresses to local students but that not all their difficulties can be attributed to their international status (A. F. Furnham & Bochner, 1982) is particularly apt. However, I would add that it is likely that all issues are exacerbated, given the fact that physical location, proximity of help or lack of it have an immediacy that can permeate all aspects of experience.

Culture Shock

One of the major areas of research concerning international students is that of adjustment and cross-cultural adaptation. Many models have been developed to describe this phenomenon. The most prominent one is the Culture-Shock Model. It is theory-led, suggesting that sojourners progress through a variety of different stages towards adjustment. The anthropologist Kalervo Oberg introduced the notion of *Culture Shock* as comprising four different stages: honeymoon, crisis, recovery and adjustment. Later this was revised and the U-shaped curve of adjustment was the result. This was characterised by three stages: initial elation and optimism, followed by frustration and depression, followed by an upswing towards confidence and satisfaction (A. F. Furnham & Bochner, 1982). The model was revised further thanks to an alternative re-formulation of the hypothesis to include return to the country of origin where there is a reverse culture shock or a re-acculturation process in the same U-shape. The entire process then forms a combined W-shape curve (A. F. Furnham & Bochner, 1982).

The second model has an emphasis on the individual acquiring the socio-cultural skills necessary to participate in the new country. This implies that the individual has to learn the characteristics of the new country in order to manage their transition rather than implying that their problems are indicative of some kind of pathology. This development shows a healthy progress in the devising of a more ethnocentric emphasis.

Limitations of the Culture Shock Model

It would be limiting only to view 'culture shock' in the way it was first conceived. The model of Oberg (1954) does not take account of the external realities of oppression, racism, discrimination as may be experienced by some international students, especially those from non-European backgrounds who are the focus of this research. Moreover, the initial culture shock model does not consider the possibility that the environment needs to change as it may be contributing to the problem. Sue & Sue (2012) remark on the fact that counselling interventions tend to focus on the individual and how the individual should take the initiative to change without regard for the environment. Unwittingly colluding in such unhealthy dynamics can result in oppressing the client and 'blaming the victim'. At worst, culture shock can cause breakdown and long term illness (Lago, 2006). Despite its limitations 'culture shock' still remains a very a useful category that has the potential to describe and examine the experience of international students studied in this thesis. Its usefulness depends on an understanding of demands and pressures placed upon those who suffer this process.

2.2.2   Transcultural and Multicultural Counselling Research

Overview and Context. What is transcultural counselling and is the term interchangeable with cross-cultural? Eleftheriadou (1994) makes a distinction by emphasising that 'trans' denotes an active, reciprocal process that requires the counsellor to work across, through and beyond cultural differences. She contrasts it with the word 'cross' and 'inter' saying that those words imply that counsellors are using their own reference system to understand clients' experiences rather than going beyond their own world view. Transcultural counselling takes into account that both parties may hold different world views or life philosophies and that the counsellor should try to meet the client more than half way.

Despite a century of research on migration and its consequences, the development of cultural awareness in the help-professions is fairly recent. The Civil Rights movement in the United States significantly contributed to this emer-

gence and probably explains, in part the much greater proliferation of cross-cultural research that has come from North America.

Relationship to Various Counselling approaches. There are different frameworks within which transcultural therapeutic work has been placed, both from a theoretical and practice perspective. Examples are existentialist phenomenological, integrative, idiographic and narrative therapy. Biever, Bobele, & North (2002) suggest that post-modern therapies such as those based on social-constructionism, are useful in intercultural work. Social constructionism maintains that what we know as reality is constructed through our interactions with others (Gergen, 1985). Silva (1993) suggests that the principles and practices of Buddhism can be introduced into the therapy highlighting references in Buddhism literature that define concepts recognisable to westerners as cognitive-behavioural, for example graded exposure, stimulus control, and distraction. However, there are no studies yet to show the efficacy of these approaches. But despite this absence, it is now well recognised that there are inherent problems with many western techniques of psychotherapy when applied to clients from a different cultural background (d'Ardenne & Mahtani, 1999). The complacency that good techniques work regardless of the person or the problem is no longer a prevalent view.

Creative Approaches to Therapy. Mckenzie-Mavinga (2003) has written on the incorporation of other forms of helping and healing in the transcultural process that have involved writing, dance and story-telling which would traditionally be used as forms of relaxation and transformation within African and Asian societies. Mckenzie-Mavinga's research explored the link of social history and the therapeutic process in research on black issues. Her study led her to examine how recovery can occur outside therapy when there is a shared experience of identity. She is referring to black womens' writing groups where themes relating to identity, slavery, colonisation and migration surfaced.

Evolving Therapies. In short, traditional therapy had to change to become relevant to people other than its 'heartlands' of white, mainstream, usually middle-class clientele. It seems like that the ground had been prepared slowly over time (the vast quantitative work briefly reviewed earlier) and now the fruits are beginning to appear in the last decade for UK. More research programmes such as practitioner doctorates, the inception of the BACP research conference and its international peer-reviewed *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*

Journal (started in 2001) has generated some very interesting papers on the subject. There has also been the introduction of important handbooks such as Colin Lago's *Race, Culture and Counselling* (1996, 2004) Stephen Palmer's *Multi-cultural counselling – A reader* (2002) and Zack Eleftheriadou's (1994) *Transcultural Counselling.* Recent texts that have proved invaluable have included Colin Lago's *Handbook of Transcultural Counselling and Psychotherapy* (2011); Patricia d'Ardenne's *Counselling in Transcultural Settings* (2013); Isha Mckenzie-Mavinga's *Black issues in the Therapeutic Process* (2009) and Judy Ryde's *Being White* (2009).

2.2.3 Physical and Mental Health

There is a legacy to be overcome from the early research in multi-cultural psychotherapy and psychiatry which negatively stereotyped and pathologised people from different cultures and backgrounds, especially black people. In understanding mental illness, it is necessary to examine the salient normative beliefs, attitudes and values of a given culture which guide behaviours at a social, personal and cultural level (Laungani, 2008).

Somatisation – A Controversial Issue. There has been some research on how psychological distress may be differently perceived or expressed by Asian groups but it would seem the results are inconclusive and often contradictory. Earlier studies which suggested that Asians demonstrated a higher number of somatic complaints compared to non-Asians (Sue & Sue, 1977) have been negated by later work in Manchester that revealed no significant difference (Bhatt, Tomenson, & Benjamin, 1989). Researchers have also observed that international students express their stress physically rather than psychologically and are therefore more likely to seek medical rather than psychological help (Alexander, Klein, Workneh, & Millar, 1976). Leong (1984) reports how international students suffer more health problems than local students suggesting that this may be because they are expressing their adjustment difficulties in somatic terms and may be doing this to avoid losing face, re-iterating an explanation offered much earlier in studies by (L. Ward, 1967) in his 'foreign student syndrome'. By contrast, Allen & Cole (1987) failed to find that international students are more prone than native-born students to use medical centres. They propose an alternative explanation that Western physicians tend to label the normal behaviours of members of non-western cultures as pathological, a view also supported by

Leong & Chou (1996). A further caveat is offered by A. Furnham, Bochner, et al. (1986), who warn that unless corrective statistical methods are applied, an above-average utilisation rate for a group can result from frequent use of medical services by a small subgroup of its members. In sum, the nature and degree of somatisation amongst international students remains a controversial issue. The exploration of this issue requires consideration of factors such as repeat users, the diagnostic basis of the medical practitioners, and the possible somatisation of psychological issues.

What has been revealed indirectly by the contradictory outcomes of studies is the often inherent cultural stereotype and the failure to understand that Asian languages are allusive and indirect (Kohen, 2000). Anyone who is working therapeutically across cultures needs to consider different idioms of distress (Tribe, 1999). In some studies, patients differed in how they attribute these symptoms (Kirmayer & Groleau, 2001). Some offered metaphysical causes, such as loss of the soul, spirit possession, sorcery and angering a deity (Koss-Chioino, 1995).

In some cultures, mental illness is often attributed to a shameful cause such as being unfair in social dealings, failure to respect nature, misdeeds in past lives, past family transgressions, immoral excesses or personal weaknesses (Gong-Guy, Cravens, & Patterson, 1991; S. Lee, 2001). There are interesting implications for medical services and counselling to consider, in that symptom attributional style has been found to affect the recognition rate of certain disorders. For those that have somatic symptoms related to depression, they are less likely to have their depression recognised and treated by clinicians (Kirmayer & Groleau, 2001). Many mental health practitioners may fail to identify symptoms correctly due to the predominance and exclusivity of Western concepts in medicine.

Under-utilisation of counselling services. There is widespread agreement that international students from non-western backgrounds underutilise traditional counselling services (Martinez, Huang, Johnson, & Edwards, 1989; Brinson & Kottler, 1995; Yorgason, Linville, & Zitzman, 2008; Masuda, Anderson, & Edmonds, 2012). The studies suggest that these students prefer help from people they know and tend to enter helping relationships in a much more informal way. They conclude that many of these students avoid help-seeking until a crisis occurs or when their own attempts have failed – which again infers an extreme state of affairs. This finding is consistent with my own practice and experience, and I can endorse many of the statements and sentiments shared by these

authors. Most often, it is only in circumstances of crisis that international students become known to our services. Developing a therapeutic alliance under such conditions is fraught with difficulties. The intervention requires greater skill and creativity to engage the student and a high level of cultural sensitivity, perhaps not shared by all practitioners. The latter can be a consequence of lack of awareness both at a personal and systemic level, relating to inadequate training and low priority given to these students and issues, surrounding cross-cultural working.

Cross-cultural Communication and Training of Counsellors. The majority of counsellors receive minimal training with regard to cross-cultural counselling (Qureshi, Collazos, Ramos, & Casas, 2008). Specifically commenting on the Latino population in the US, J. M. Casas et al. (2002) make the point that many counsellors fail to appreciate the role of culture in psychological development and functioning. They focus solely on their client's presenting problems and fail to evaluate those problems within appropriate sociocultural and ecological contexts. On the subject of cross-cultural communication, the anthropologist Edward T. Hall (1976) provided insight. He characterised the US as a 'low-context culture', which means that most communication is conveyed through words and the role of context is subsidiary. It is likely that American and probably British counsellors conduct the majority of communication in this way. According to Hall, for example, China and Japan are 'high-context cultures', which means that non-verbal communication commands much greater importance. The potential for miscommunication, misunderstandings, not to mention offence is inevitable. These communication subtleties may help to add complexion and context, alongside other factors discussed, to explain the phenomenon of 'one-off attendance' of sessions and high drop-out rate for the few international students of non-European background who come to traditional counselling. This is a phenomenon in my own counselling service, and I'm sure is recognisable to every university counselling service.

2.2.4   Coping Patterns amongst International Students

Stress and coping has attracted research in many fields as diverse as psychology, psychotherapy, medicine and cultural anthropology. Consequently, this has generated a considerable volume of literature. One definition of coping is that it is the "constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage spe-

cific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

In this section, the focus is mainly on stress and coping as seen from a counselling perspective with an emphasis on the theme of this research, i.e., help-seeking and coping among international students. To give some structure and direction, I have addressed key themes under section headings.

Work on Stressors. Several researchers have identified common stressors for international students. Oropeza, Fitzgibbon, & Barón (1991) describe five main stressors that they believe are responsible for precipitating mental health crisis among international students:

- culture shock usually manifesting through depression and anxiety,

- changes in economic status creating feelings of loss, grief and resentment,

- concerns about academic performance, which can heighten anxiety or provoke withdrawal and depression,

- isolation alienation and discrimination,

- family related pressures which include differential rates of acculturation amongst family members.

Other studies have included additional stressors such as language barriers, financial difficulties, and interpersonal problems with American students as well as international students (Pedersen, 1991; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992; Mori, 2000).

Help-seeking Attitudes

Help-seeking is an important aspect of coping and has a stress-buffering effect on the reaction to problems (Schonert-Reichl & Muller, 1996). Ideally, students should be able to avail of both informal and professional help to assist their adjustment. A qualitative study on 15 undergraduates in a Turkish university addresses the help-seeking attitudes and barriers to help-seeking for Turkish students in their own university. The findings revealed the students preferred informal sources of help in dealing with problems and generally did not seek psychological help. Perceiving their problems as manageable and having an

unwillingness to disclose their personal lives to others were amongst the barriers. Significantly, they were only willing to seek help from a professional, if the problem seemed extreme (Koydemir, Erel, Yumurtacı, & Şahin, 2010). Such findings help to shed light on the under-utilisation of counselling services.

There is a growing body of research on the subject which has revealed information such as a differentiation between attitudes of male and female persons towards help-seeking. Generally, females have more positive attitudes than males (Addis & Mahalik, 2003); those with low incomes and education levels have often negative attitudes (Leaf, Bruce, Tischler, & Holzer, 1987). For those of non-western background, there are additional cultural variables such as individualism vs. collectivism (C. J. Yeh & Inose, 2003a) and a perceived stigma (Shea & Yeh, 2008) which present a barrier to the utilisation of psychological help.

Coping with Racism. Various types of coping which pertain to racism and discrimination were identified by Utsey, Ponterotto, Reynolds, & Cancelli (2000) in their study of 213 African American college students. They found that African American women in particular preferred 'avoidance coping' as opposed to 'problem-solving coping' or 'seeking social support coping' when they experienced racism at an individual level. The researchers found that for the entire sample, the use of 'avoidance coping' was associated with lower levels of self-esteem and life satisfaction. In another study on the impact of racism on African American students, 'racial socialisation' and not self-esteem was found to attenuate the impact of perceived racism on mental health and wellbeing (Fischer & Shaw, 1999). The authors define racial socialisation as "the process of communicating behaviours and messages to children for the purpose of enhancing their sense of racial/ethnic identity, partially in preparation for racially hostile encounters". Whilst the advice of good parenting to support a child's growing racial identity and hopefully prompting greater resilience in later life is sound, there is a less helpful individualist perspective in evidence here. This risks putting most of the responsibility for combating society's prejudice and oppression on to the individuals, who are already battling with these issues in their everyday lives. There seems to be insufficient acknowledgment or awareness that racism and its effects are endemic throughout society and that it is incumbent on organisations, researchers, counsellors and educators to address this structurally, to cultivate and create a humane work or study environment.

Work inspired by the Culture Shock Approach.   Much work has been done on acculturation stress. Acculturation has been defined as the behavioural and psychological changes in an individual that occur as a result of contact between people belonging to different cultural groups (Berry, 1997). Berry devised four modes of classification: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation. This has gained much recognition as an indicator and predictor of mental health status. Integration is the identification and involvement of the immigrant with both cultures and would imply the least amount of acculturation stress. Assimilation is where the immigrant solely identifies and blends with the new culture. Separation is where a person is solely involved with the culture of origin. Marginalisation is the lack of involvement with either culture leading to the rejection of both. Assimilation, separation and marginalisation are increasingly associated with poorer mental health outcomes (S. Atri, Sharma, Sarkar, Garg, & Suri, 2007).

English Language.   English language is thought to be one of the most challenging concerns for international students (Mori, 2000). It was found to be one of the significant predictors of acculturation stress in a study by C. J. Yeh & Inose (2003b). Naturally a lack of skill and fluency will impede an international student's academic performance which will directly and indirectly affect their adjustment. Many students who study abroad have achieved highly in their own country, so this is a particularly distressing experience with implications for their self-esteem (Pedersen, 1991). Lack of confidence in English communication skills will hinder the student not just academically but in their social interaction generally.

It is apparent that alternative ways and openings must be developed to reach international students from non-European backgrounds. It is astounding that there are so few examples of this. In spite of the much greater proliferation of American research, even in America there are very few examples of applied research that has been developed to assist non-western international students with this major adjustment. There are many training programmes providing techniques to help students prepare for study abroad (Ptak, Cooper, & Brislin, 1995), but few recent programmes providing a framework for helping international students during their cultural adaptation (Law and Guo, 2008). An exception to this is the cultural awareness training manual and accompanying DVD produced by Alison Barty with Colin Lago entitled *Bridging our Worlds*, UKCISA (2007).

Work on coping and stress relief intervention. Motivated by the afore-mentioned gap of provision, Law & Guo (2010) devised an orientation course over one semester for 53 first year Chinese international students at an American University. They evaluated its impact on the students' ways of coping with stress, anger and psychological well-being. The findings revealed the course had a positive impact and contributed to better functioning, more appropriate ways of coping with stress and anger, thus improving psychological well-being for this group. This is very encouraging work in terms of suggesting creative methods of outreach and education that have the effect of reducing these students' help-seeking thresholds, whilst being able to offer them contact that poses no threat to their cultural identities. Such contact can offer a pre-therapy orientation, which is probably essential for access and trust-building, given the fact that many of these students will not be familiar with the traditional approaches offered in the majority of universities. Such contact also has the advantage of enabling counsellors to screen individuals who may be in need of urgent support. One major limitation of the above study, despite its positive benefits, is the fact that it was researcher and theory-led. The individual sessions of the course followed an adjustment cycle on the basis of Chickering's student development theory (Chickering & Reisser, 1993) and Rhinesmith's cultural adjustment cycle (Rhinesmith, 1985). The applied or practical component of my work will have the distinction of being student-led due to my choice of methodological approach.

Stress-Relief gained from Religious Coping. It is likely that for many students, religion will have some place in their cultural identity. A recent quantitative study examined the effect of religion/spirituality as a stress-coping mechanism for international students at a University in New Zealand (Chai, 2009). A sample of 515 domestic students and 151 international students completed questionnaires. When the data was analysed by ethnicity, Asian students were significantly more religious/spiritual than European students. The results confirmed that religion/spirituality functioned as a coping mechanism (Chai, 2009). Despite the positive correlation which is not uncommon for empirical studies of this kind, the literature portrays an ambiguous picture. Religion may moderate the effects of stress for some groups and not for others (Park, Cohen, & Herb, 1990). To represent the evidence that religion can be both positive and negative, a distinction of 'positive and negative coping' has been identified (Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998). As an effective coping strategy, religion can

moderate the effect of stress by giving comfort and meaning. However, it can also have the opposite effect when there is punitive re-framing, religious stigma and blame. In some cases it can even have a seriously detrimental effect on mental health. I think this is an important area to be aware of in cross-cultural work and particularly with international students, as many come from countries where religion observance is an important expression of everyday life and culture.

2.2.5 The Role of Writing as one Form of Coping

There is a growing body of literature on therapeutic writing which has been described as forming a continuum between the polarities of a humanities paradigm and a scientific paradigm (Wright, 2002). Researchers and practitioners from a humanities background concern themselves with the creativity, imagination and mystery of the phenomenon, whilst those who follow the scientific paradigm in disciplines such as psychology, sociology and medicine seek to master the phenomenon by measuring, explaining, and predicting the results of randomised controlled trials (Wright, 2002). Both approaches are needed to develop the research base and professional practice of writing therapy (Mazza, 1999). In any case, there seems to be widespread agreement about the efficacy of therapeutic writing as a way of reducing stress and improving physical and mental health (J. M. Smyth & Pennebaker, 2008). The findings are based on three decades of evidence-based research. The human experience extends back into ancient history or as Gillie Bolton memorably puts it ''since Apollo was the god of both, poetry and medicine have gone hand in hand" (Bolton, 1999). Surprisingly, there is uncertainty and puzzlement about exactly why expressive writing is effective in bringing about such striking physical health and behaviour changes (Esterling, L'Abate, Murray, & Pennebaker, 1999). There is speculation that it is related to that still mysterious connection between stress and disease. Suppression of difficult experiences involves stress, and prolonged stress can lead to poor health and illness. Writing gives the writer a sense of control. To write about a stressful memory or event means breaking it down into small pieces, which has the effect of making it seem more manageable. It may also have the effect of freeing up resources previously used for suppression and inhibition

Independent literature in social and clinical psychology offer the explanation that several self-processes such as self-affirmation, cognitive processing and dis-

covery of meaning may buffer stress, improve health and adjustment (Bower, Kemeny, Taylor, & Fahey, 1998, 2003; Creswell et al., 2005)

Limitations and Caveats. Whilst there is definitely convincing evidence to suggest that writing represents a direct line from feeling and thinking to healing (Lowe, 2004), there are also limiting factors of the research to consider. Most studies have used fairly standardised writing tasks developed by Pennebaker and other researchers with college students and healthy volunteers. There are notable exceptions, which I will refer to later. Not all studies were randomised control studies although the main ones were (Lowe, 2004). Very little is known about the amount of writing therapy that is required for an effective intervention or the type and frequency of the writing or particular outcomes. The links between writing and improved health and well-being are well demonstrated, but the causal relationships between them are less well understood.

There are also indications to suggest that expressive writing is not always appropriate or beneficial for everyone. If the person's stress or trauma is pre-verbal, other expressive therapies would be preferable; if writing was associated with strong negative feelings, e.g., English classes at school, it is unlikely that this medium would help; it would also not be suitable for disturbed or psychotic clients. There can be a short-time increase of negative mood and psychological pain resulting from writing about stressful or traumatic events which may not be tolerable for some unsupported writers, especially online writers (Esterling et al., 1999).

Forms of therapeutic writing. The most popular forms of therapeutic writing include journaling, expressive emotional disclosure writing, creative writing done in groups or alone, memoir writing, bibliotherapy /poetry therapy and online writing in discussions or courses.

The Pennebaker Paradigm. The written emotional disclosure paradigm was developed in 1986 by Pennebaker and Beall. Pennebaker first conducted studies on healthy college students. They were assigned randomly either to an experimental group where they were asked to write about the most stressful, traumatic events of their lives for 20 minutes over 4 consecutive days or to a control group where they were asked to write about trivial, non-emotional events under the same conditions. In this and subsequent studies, the findings confirmed physical and emotional health benefits for expressive writing (Pennebaker, 1997; Esterling et al., 1999; Lepore & Smyth, 2002; Epstein, Sloan, & Marx, 2005).

Groups who have benefited from Expressive writing.   Expressive writing has been found to be beneficial when people are not using first language in face-to-face therapy. Writing facilitates them to use their first language or a mixture of first and host (Lago, 2004).

It has also been deemed appropriate for those who, for cultural or other reasons, are silenced by shame and feel unable to speak (Bass & Davis, 2008; Bolton, 1999; Etherington, 2000) The writing task seems to be valuable for various aspects of life across cultures, languages, education and socio-economic status (J. Smyth & Helm, 2003). For this reason, it would be an appropriate medium to explore in working cross-culturally with international students to help them reduce stress.

Use of Writing with International Students.   Nandagopal (2008) has examined the use of emotional expressive writing as an intervention to reduce stress among Indian international students. This is the first time this has been used with international students, and to my knowledge is the only example that exists. Nandagopal (2008) used the Pennebaker paradigm with a group of thirty international Masters students of Indian nationality studying in various universities in the UK. For most of these students, English was not their first language. The study was conducted over 2 months in the summer prior to the students submitting final projects and dissertations, a normally stressful period. Those participants who were assigned to the experimental group were asked to write continuously about stressful university experiences for 20 minutes on three consecutive days. The findings indicate that expressive writing can significantly reduce perceived stress associated with impending stressful events.

Limitations of the study. The study of Nandagopal (2008) was a small sample size for a quantitative study. It relied on self-report measures for health and wellbeing outcomes. Benefits associated with writing can be under-represented or missed when self-reports are used (J. M. Smyth, 1998). Conditions of isolation for the most effective writing (Pennebaker & Seagal, 1999) may not necessarily have been present, as participants were asked to carry out the instructions in a place where they were least likely to be disturbed.

Implications for my work. It is exciting to discover that there is current research with a strong practice component in my area of interest. Even more compelling is that it has much in common with the applied focus of my second research question, that aims to enhance university counselling services by developing

new alternative ways of supporting international students from non-western backgrounds. The findings of Nandagopal (2008) strengthen my motivation for incorporating some form of expressive writing either as a stand-alone form of helping or as an adjunct or prelude to traditional counselling in universities.

2.3   Conclusion

Which lessons can be learned from the previous research relevant to my research questions? The behavioural-quantitative research is distinctly different from the qualitative phenomenological approach that I will be adopting to bring forth the authentic voice of the students, through a rich description of their perceptions and experiences. That process and outcome is intended to answer the first research question. Ultimately, the recommendations that will be fashioned from my work will be student-led with the objective of then answering my second research question.

Methodology

Our journey requires us to be touched and shaken by what we find on the way and to not be afraid to discover our own limitations ... uncertainties, and doubts. It is only with such an attitude of openness and wonder that we can encounter the impenetrable everyday mysteries of our world.

Van Deurzen-Smith (1997)

3.1 Introduction

The research addressed in this study is dedicated to a subjective perspective. Following a subjective approach, this work attempts to reveal thoughts, feelings, attitudes and perceptions of people studied, as seen from their perspective. By implication, a number of methodologies, e.g., a strict behavioural approach, are

ruled out for this type of investigation. Doing justice to the subjective nature of the research question, means considering, choosing and applying an appropriate research method. The subject of discussion in this chapter is, which research method is most appropriate to explore the phenomena in question. To honour the integrity of a thesis, which has in its title "a phenomenological study", meant going beyond explaining and justifying my choice of methodology. As part of my research journey, I felt it was imperative to demonstrate my understanding of the concepts, to document the internal debates raised, the puzzlement and frustration it evoked, together with the gradual unveiling of knowledge in that quest for understanding.

3.2   Perspectives of Phenomenology

My first encounter with phenomenology was as a theology student in connection with interpretation of biblical texts. I remember the concepts to be obscure and baffling, yet the names of philosophers like Heidegger, Schleiermacher and Gadamer, three of the most important hermeneutic theorists, had made an impression. My foreknowledge, although not exactly inspiring, contained the memory that their ideas were noble, laudable and had made significant contributions to the theological discourse. I decided I should therefore take this opportunity, as afforded in Paul Barber's "Research Challenges", in my first year at Metanoia, to gain greater insight, with a view to exploring the possibilities offered for research in psychotherapy and practice. I chose a group exercise and presentation on phenomenology electing to explore Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, as my contribution. At that time, my motivation initially led me to a firmer academic understanding of the theories represented, and a growing awareness of phenomenology's situatedness on a continuum between science and the humanities. In my first piece of research for the PEP (practice evaluation project), I explored the phenomena of help-seeking behaviours and coping patterns of non-European international students, from a staff perspective, thus paving the way for the main study. The PEP drew on ideas from Husserl who is often accorded the title of founding father of transcendental phenomenology. This is the first phase of phenomenology, which strives to reduce our understanding of experience back to its core essential structures. In other words, it aims to transcend the personal and contextual. Husserl is famously associated with the phrase "going back to the things themselves", the thing

being the content of consciousness which is often taken for granted in everyday life and not attended to. The founding principle of phenomenological enquiry is that experience should be examined in the way that it occurs and in its own terms (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009).

As interviews were to be the main source of data, I needed to acquire good instruments of learning to make the most of the face-to face encounters with the participants, trying to get "experience near" (Eatough, 2012) in a context where the participants are making sense of their own experience. Then through the iterative consideration of their experience in the textual analysis to follow, the processes would be repeated. Making sense of them, making sense of themselves, a process often referred to as the "double hermeneutic" was a challenge, especially as the aim is to conduct such an inquiry with minimal intrusion from my pre-conceptions as a researcher. Being descriptive, empathic, critical and interrogative was the way to build the hermeneutic layers in my analysis. The appropriateness and attractiveness of the phenomenological approach lies in its intention to "generate descriptive knowledge of everyday experience" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003). This knowledge was gained through dialogic engagement with the participants and the interview texts (Gadamer, 2004).

Phenomenology offers a unique language to come to terms with subjectivity so therefore is particularly well suited to address the research questions, as help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies are subjective phenomena. Descriptive phenomenology attempts to describe rather than explain the "life-world" of participants, independent of the researcher's pre-conceptions. It offers the concept of 'bracketing-off' or observing the 'epoche' (Greek meaning to abstain or get rid of), a Husserlian term to describe the researcher becoming aware of preconceptions, prejudices, and assumptions, in order that the phenomena under research can be freshly and naively considered. Husserl termed these "eidetic reductions", each one giving the researcher a different lens or prism to evaluate the phenomena in hand. The sequence of reductions is aimed at leading the researcher away from their own subjective distractions and back towards the essence of the experience of the phenomena. However, putting aside one's subjectivity does not mean being objective. It means that the previous understandings are temporarily put out of action, reducing the field, which commands the researcher's attention.

The reductive process is anything but reductive in the usual sense of the word, more a case of expanded and enhanced attention, following the "bracketing-off" of one's pre-conceptions. The process has parallels with the therapy world. As a counsellor, it equates with offering unconditional positive regard to the client's subjectivity, rather than aiming to be objective. This is a useful concept in that it offers a framework for dealing with bias that is helpful to both the researcher and reader. Being a university counsellor with seventeen years of experience at the time of this study, meant I had a close involvement with the subject on a professional level, compounded with personal identification issues on exclusion as discussed in an earlier section. Ownership and open declaration of such bias is encouraged by the "bracketing-off" mechanism. When the pre-suppositions are revealed, there is a counterbalancing effect that serves to increase transparency for the reader, who can make an informed decision as to reliability of the analysis. The researcher is also afforded a means to consider the foreknowledge, if indeed they are incorporating a hermeneutical stance, as I later did. Fore-understanding provides a useful concept especially with reference to the hermeneutic circle and with a view to enabling a reflexive approach. Addressing the fore-knowledge is not a way of obliterating the past but rather of heightening the present (Georgi, 1975).

The deepening awareness is achieved through interpreting and revising the implicit pre-understandings and moving, sometimes through resistance, towards evolving current understandings. Making sense of what is said and written involves a close interpretive engagement on the part of the listener and reader in a dialogical relationship of the part and the whole. This can operate at many different levels. For example one interview as one part of the whole sample, one single extract as part of a whole interview, one episode in a person's life out of their whole life, one interviewee as one entity in a group of eighteen, one site/place where interviews took place out of three different sites. The iterative and reciprocal process of questions and answers serves to thicken the descriptions of experience and thereby come closer to its essence. Delving deeper into the particular takes us closer to the universal and therefore touches on what it is to be human at it's most essential (Warnock, 1987).

Phenomenology provides a method of inquiry and a method of analysis. Furthermore, the hermeneutic phenomenology, which is also employed in this study, takes account of the idea that despite the "bracketing-off" mechanism, researchers' interpretations and context are intertwined with the research findings.

Hermeneutic phenomenologists argue that any description of lived experience by participants has to be seen in the context of that person's life situation and projects (Finlay, 2011). Finlay goes on to say that interpretation is further implicated as researchers empathise and make sense of data by drawing on their own understandings, which arise out of their life experiences (ibid). In the activity of sense making, it is possible to hold a variety of conceptions, which are compared, contrasted and modified. The important thing is to be aware of one's own bias, so that the text can present itself in all its otherness and thus assert its own truth against one's own fore-meaning (Gadamer, 2004). To put it more simply and succinctly, as researchers we are engaging in a dialogue between what we bring to the text and what the text brings to us (Smith et al., 2009).

For the reasons mentioned, I came to understand why hermeneutic phenomenology is one of the vital components of IPA, which provides a method for carrying out research. IPA is my chosen method for analysis and will be discussed in a later section. The philosophies, although very important for their underpinning were conceived of by theorists who were chiefly interested in conceptual thought. (Smith et al., 2009). The purpose of using these ideas to examine the response to experience, in others, came much later with the arrival of IPA, whose early origins were in Health psychology in the 1990's. This offered the bridge between philosophical theory and its use and application to inform practice and research.

3.2.1 Heuristic Inquiry

As a branch of phenomenology, heurism concerns itself with the subjective experience, which has been characterised by six phases: initial engagement followed by immersion into the topic, incubation, illumination, explication and culmination of the research in a creative synthesis of essences and meaning. The root meaning of heuristic comes from the Greek verb *heuriskein* meaning to discover or to find. It refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experience. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process and while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences growing self-awareness and self-knowledge (Moustakas, 1990).

I'm particularly drawn to heurism as the underpinning to my research journey. It embraces the concept of myself, as subject and object, the researcher

and the researched, by offering the opportunity to create a coherent narrative through the power of writing. To ensure that the heuristic element stays integral to the endeavour, I have kept a journal. Being able to record thoughts, feelings, images, memories and experiences to reflect on them later, has provided a valuable record of the whole doctoral journey. It's even helped to capture the 'fugitive data' (Bager-Charleson, 2014), those incidental and virtually discounted moments of observation, all of which helps to shape the narrative. It is an opportunity for me to share in the lived experience of my co-researchers, by examining my journey as a student of Metanoia, travelling physically and metaphorically between the different locations of N.Ireland, Dublin, Metanoia, London and Hyderabad, India. There is the chance to place my own experience as a foreigner abroad, alongside the experiences of those I'm researching. These evolving dynamic narratives, pertaining to the participants and myself, are continuously changing because of new experiences, and, by their very nature, are tantalising and elusive. The stories are particularly suitable to convey how people experience their position in relation to culture, whether on the margins, in the centre or becoming part of a new culture (Etherington, 2004). The process translates well to the context of international students who are traversing and straddling more than one culture at one time. Heurism promises to be a useful instrument in unveiling hidden truths that have the power to resonate at different levels, with different audiences.

3.2.2   Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

> *Without phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret. Without hermeneutics, the phenomenon would not be seen.*
>
> (Smith, Flowers, Larkin, 2009)

There are three intellectual movements from which Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis or IPA as it's commonly known, is derived. They are Phenomenology, Hermeneutics and Idiography. Phenomenology and Hermeneutics, as discussed at length in the previous section are methodologies concerned with people's perceptions of reality, rather than trying to capture reality itself. Idiography, the third major influence, is interested in 'the particular', how the part relates to the whole and vice versa. This sense of the particular brings the attention to detail, resulting in a greater depth of analysis. This in turn en-

sures thoroughness, by means of a systematic approach. The open orientation of IPA aims to explore the meanings that participants assign to their experiences. The participants are the experts with regard to their own experiences and the method of IPA allows them to tell their own stories, in their own words and in detail (Eatough, 2012).

Although IPA is often associated with small samples (four to ten participants) and I am dealing with a large sample of eighteen participants, I felt this was the appropriate method of analysis as my sample is made up of three groups on three different sites, consisting between four and ten participants. The analysis works on different levels, from examining the individual case, then moving to an examination across the group looking for similarities and differences, emerging into clustered themes. The themes were then grouped into super-ordinate themes to produce an account of "patterns of meaning of a shared experience" (Smith et al., 2009). In order to stay faithful to the approach, I aimed to parse the account both for shared themes and for distinctive voices and variations on those themes (ibid). I used the raw data of participants' voices to illustrate the particular phenomena under discussion, to enliven the narrative whilst providing authenticity.

The two strands of hermeneutics and phenomenology came together in the work of Heidegger, Husserl's most infamous student, who moved away from the transcendental element of phenomenology and towards a hermeneutic emphasis. Others carried this forward like Gadamer (1960's to 1990's) who emphasised the existential aspects of phenomenology. Gadamer (2004) concerned with historical and literary texts, highlighted the importance of history and tradition on the interpretative process. He and Heidegger brought new ideas of how to conceive of fore-understanding and how to link these to the new phenomena to 'thicken' description. IPA owes much to the formulations for psychological research that were developed from these underpinnings. Ricour, a French phenomenologist (1970's) distinguished between two broad interpretative positions, that of hermeneutics of empathy and that of hermeneutics of suspicion. The former is very much aligned with the position of offering empathy in psychotherapy and counselling where the focus is about trying to see the world from the client's perspective. The later is more aligned with a critical stance, often associated with a psychoanalytic approach, where a theoretical perception adds another hermeneutic layer. IPA went for the central ground (Smith, 2004; Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006), which combines the hermeneutics of empathy

with the hermeneutics of questioning. As mentioned, the first seeks to give the insider view, representing as closely as possible the participant's perspective. The second gives the outsider view as in the researcher's interpretation, standing alongside, looking from different angles, asking questions and giving critique. The use of IPA makes the research experience a joint endeavour between participant and researcher where both are engaged in an activity of uncovering meanings, which may lead to the co-creation of new knowledge. The analysis relies on the process of people making sense of their world and their experiences, firstly for the participant and secondly for the researcher, a concept already referred to as "the double hermeneutic". The idiographic part is fore-grounded by the analysis maintaining focus on the distinctive voices, whilst also attempting to balance this against an account of what is shared (i.e., commonalities across a group of participants). I found this iterative process also known as the hermeneutic circle, discussed in an earlier section, to be present at all stages of the research, indeed probably characterising the whole research journey. It's presence has kept me mindful that all interpretations must be grounded in the meeting of researcher and text (Smith et al., 2009). It has also kept me honest, as in being open to new unanticipated understandings that are participant-led. The strength of IPA is to go beyond description and develop understandings from a sustained interpretational engagement (Eatough, 2010).

The beauty of IPA is that it does not aim to privilege one phenomenology over another phenomenology, whether it's the descriptive, the hermeneutic or the idiographic. It draws from the core aspects of each to bring about a collective working approach that benefits from the complementary nature of its fundamental components. In this way, IPA as a qualitative psychological method, facilitates the complexity of phenomena being revealed to the participant and researcher. This makes it well equipped to handle the type of analysis needed to deal with the major life events of participants. In my study these consisted of experiences of culture shock when moving to a different country and culture for study, experiences of challenge, coping and crisis when separated from the usual help-giving sources. The implications for "identity shifts" along the way represented newly emergent unanticipated issues, which gained a high profile within the analysis. These issues inevitably evoke multi-dimensioned aspects of a response to that experience, primarily in the participant and secondly in the researcher, at all stages of the research. For example, having multiple responses to the experiences described, was a feature of the interview encounter. Then

during the analysis, when immersing myself in the material to find patterns of meaning and connection, I was to re-visit and rediscover those original responses but from a different place and time on the research trajectory. I started to recognise that I was owning and contributing to an evolving specific knowledge, that of the help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies of International students from non-European backgrounds. In the first instance, this was happening by virtue of meeting such vibrant individuals from a variety of backgrounds who were willing to engage with me for the purposes of research. Much later, my knowledge was evolving differently through working with the data in a sustained engagement, deep into the night to make meaning out of the rich material I was fortunate to have gathered from a particular time and context in the lives of eighteen people, in Northern Ireland, Dublin and India. All these experiences were changing me too; I was not a constant but also a changing dynamic part of the whole.

The experiential experts, the participants, with their distinct, compelling and persuasive voices represent a collective repository of wisdom on the phenomena under study. It's my responsibility and privilege to ensure that the participants' voices are able to resonate with the reader, through a coherent narrative. I aim to ensure that the narrative is congruent with its phenomenological core; it is convincing; it answers the research questions and has something to add to the existing body of knowledge that can help to improve policy and practice. In a later section in Data collection and Analysis, I will explain and describe the practical steps I took, to follow an IPA approach.

3.3   Other Methodologies Considered

Within the broad literature of research methods addressing subjective sense-making, a necessary and defining consideration where my research was concerned, there were two other methodologies evaluated.They were Narrative Inquiry and Grounded Theory.

3.3.1   Narrative Inquiry

In the early stages of my research journey, narrative inquiry was a serious methodological contender. I had attended a professional knowledge seminar on

'Narrative Biography' at Metanoia, led by Jane Speedy (Speedy, 2005a,b). I became fascinated with the range and flexibility offered by the narrative tradition with its emphasis on "specific" stories to express generalities and exceptional experience (Polkinghorne, 1988; Riessman, 1993; Coles, 2014).

In many ways, there are parallels with phenomenology, as narrative inquiry also focuses on developing description and interpretations of phenomena, from the perspective of the participants. The iterative and dynamic process of interaction between researcher, participant and the data that informs decisions, actions and interpretations (Etherington, 2004) is also integral to this methodology. Like phenomenology, it shares an implied need for reflexivity at the heart of its application.

However, I became aware that narrative inquiry appears to be more suited for research phenomena that have a clear temporal dimension that can be arranged on a time axis. For example, biography, autobiography, letters, interviews, photos, professional development are ideal phenomena. Narrative inquiry is concerned with capturing the emotion of the moment, like the descriptive aspect of phenomenology. It also pays attention to the latent meaning of the storyteller, so naturally this has echoes of the hermeneutic style of interpretation. What marks it out as less appropriate for my purposes are that notions of "memory and time" are central tenets of the methodology. My eighteen interviews with participants were separate incidents involving eighteen participants. If my eighteen interviews were constituted from a smaller sample and repeated over the duration of the research, then I may have appropriately used the methodology of narrative inquiry. It also seems to focuses more on the personal rather than the social context, which may have been limiting for my purposes. Phenomenology by contrast, emphasises the life world of the participants, which was an attractive aspect.

3.3.2   Grounded Theory

Grounded theory involves the construction of a theory, through the analysis of the data. It is often described as an inductive or 'bottom-up' approach, whereby the emphasis is on distilling knowledge in more abstract concepts, from the data found in interviews. In other words, the research is directed towards fitting the data into an existing theoretical framework and then retro-

spectively formulating new hypotheses. The emergent theory or hypotheses is necessarily grounded in the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I acknowledge the importance of grounded theory for qualitative research. The ground-breaking work surrounding the conception of grounded theory in the 1960's opened up a way to legitimise qualitative research so that it could be taken seriously as an alternative to quantitative research. Despite my appreciation of the origins and method, there are some vital components not offered. Sense-making as evidenced in the interview process seems to play a less important role. This would surely reduce the range and dynamism of the multi-layered responses, enabled and validated by a phenomenological inquiry. Grounded theory is also not a descriptive method, which ruled it out for my purposes. Gathering data that was as close as possible to the participants' perception of experience was one of my research goals. This could not have been fulfilled by using Grounded Theory, as my methodology.

3.4   Conclusion

To live means to live with other people (Halling, 2008). In everyday life, each of us is something of a phenomenologist, in so far as we genuinely listen to the stories that people tell us and in so far as we pay attention and reflect on our own perceptions (ibid). Van Manen (1997) talks of poets and painters as the born phenomenologists who understand their task of sharing insight by means of word and image. I don't know whether I'm a born phenomenologist but I'm sure I'm an everyday phenomenologist in my commitment to unfolding this research. I've embraced the principles of phenomenology, some of which came naturally and already informed my interaction with other people, with clients and with research. The more complex concepts demanded steady and steely commitment to fathom the depths. I feel the effort is rewarded in terms of grounding the research and thereby adding to its value and quality. Phenomenology is a particular way of thinking about and carrying out research at every stage of the research process. It is both scientific and poetic and it demands imagination and creativity (Eatough, 2012).

Data Collection and Analysis

The interviewer is a traveller on a journey to a distant country that leads to a tale to be told on returning home. (She) wanders along with the local inhabitants, asks questions that lead the subjects to tell their own stories of their lived world, and converse with them in the original Latin meaning of conversation as "wandering together with"

(Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009).

4.1 Introduction

The serenity of the image of the interviewer/traveller wandering wherever the spirit takes, conversing with the locals about their life stories is seductive and compelling. As I literally travelled to other places, most notably India, in the

name of research, the comparison holds some meaningful actuality as well as symbolism. The romanticised overtones of the image are not completely divorced from reality. There were elements of languor and contemplation in the process of data collection and analysis that encouraged meaningful discussion, and suspended reality, as if nothing else in the world mattered. My experiences in India embodied some of this vibe and will therefore be given special mention in the recruitment section. However the carefree image belies the rigour, dedication and industry involved in the systematic processing of the many stages of analysis to produce findings, that can do justice to the research. In this chapter my quest is to show the multiple facets and experiences of this endeavour: from the deeply satisfying, pleasurable moments of insight that can elevate one's everyday experience, to the hard grind of moving the research forward, step by step, to an end goal that was endlessly disappearing yet reappearing (mercifully) into my mind's eye . . . as I kept trudging on.

4.2   Ethical Considerations

For ethical reasons, I decided that my participants should not be current clients of counselling services. At my own university, there were a couple of interviewees whom I'd seen for a one-off study related issue but not for on-going therapeutic counselling. The rationale was to safeguard against possible dilemmas this could pose for the student, potentially putting them in a vulnerable situation. For example, if a student withdrew from the research study, they may find it difficult to access university counselling, in the future. Or perhaps a student client may feel obliged to take part in a research study, which could have implications for his/her therapy. For these reasons, I recruited participants independently.

As with my counselling clients, I observed the BACP guidelines for Ethical Conduct. Participants were given an information sheet in advance, telling them the purpose of the study, explaining and assuring them of confidentiality and their right to withdraw at any time, right up to the point of analysis. When they had given agreement, they were asked to complete a *consent form* (see Appendix A). At the beginning of the interview, the consent form was discussed again and any questions or concerns about the research re-visited and clarified further

In the event of a participant becoming upset by any of the issues raised in the interview, they were given the opportunity of a de-brief session afterwards or support through referral to their university support services, if necessary.

4.2.1 Research Design

As outlined in the methodological section, my research design for my 'large' project was set in three locations: University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, National College of Ireland, Dublin and University of Hyderabad, India. In each location I conducted an investigation into the help-seeking behaviours and coping patterns of International students of non-European backgrounds using phenomenological semi-structured interviews. The aim was to have a rich sample group, comprising international students who had made very different choices to study. Having three sites increased the diversity of the sample. For example, the students at Ulster were predominantly Indian and Chinese; at the National College of Ireland, they were exclusively African. At the University of Hyderabad, perhaps due to geographical proximity, there was a greater variety of non-European students, including many from Arab countries.

4.2.2 The Sample

My sample comprised eighteen international students from non-European backgrounds. Six students were from the University of Ulster, Northern Ireland, where I worked as a counsellor for almost eighteen years until recently, four from a university in the Republic of Ireland, National College of Ireland in Dublin and eight were from the University of Hyderabad in India. There were an equal number of male and female participants. They were from diverse study backgrounds including Business, Computer Science, Physics, Technology, Biomedical Science, Nutrition, Comparative Literature and Philosophy of Art. They ranged from undergraduate to PhD level, spanning a considerable age range from early twenties to mid thirties, some single, some married with young families who moved to support the family member studying, and one married woman living apart from her husband for the duration of study. They came from twelve different countries and three different continents: Yemen, Saudi Arabia, India, Bangladesh, China, Iran, Iraq, Palestine, Guyana in South America, Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya.

4.2.3   IPA Analysis

The following is a summary of the steps of analysis. In the sections that follow each of them will be described in more detail.

- Recruiting the Interviewees

- Designing the semi-structured interviews

- Conducting the interviews

- Transcriptions

- Identification of emergent themes

- Generation of clusters from related emergent themes

- Creation of superordinate themes from clusters

4.2.4   Recruitment of Interviewees, in Ulster, Dublin and India

The decision to recruit interviewees from the three different sites came about opportunistically. My partner had a contract of work to teach in India at the University of Hyderabad for the summer and my plan was to join him for a few weeks. I was also struggling to find the number of interviewees for the large sample group, I'd agreed in my Learning Agreement. I was excited at the prospect of travelling to India on holiday and immersing myself in a whole new cultural experience, which would in fact be my first visit to Asia. I thought this will richly inform my understanding of what it is like to travel and live abroad, albeit from the protected place of white privilege. There would be no imme-diate pressure of having to achieve a good study outcome or face the kinds of challenges I surmised are commonplace for the students. However as a foreigner abroad, a researcher and a doctoral student, I expected some comparable expe-riences, which could inform and sensitise my understanding for the research I'd undertaken. I followed my commitment to the phenomenological approach by "varying the imaginative frame", in order to see the world from another place. Thanks to a throwaway remark from a colleague, the nature of my sojourn in India was to expand my horizons multi-dimensionally. My colleague, one of the

nurses who had been an interviewee for my PEP, an active supporter of my study and a willing collaborator in recruiting potential interviewees, suggested: "Why don't you combine your trip with your research and find some students to interview?" It seemed so obvious and yet it hadn't occurred to me. My time in India became a working holiday, dedicated to finding suitable students willing to engage with my study and me. Surprisingly, it was easier for me to recruit students in India than it was at my own University! It was the most interesting holiday imaginable for all the adventures that I embarked upon, in the name of research!

The disorientation of what its like to come from somewhere else when the common references with one's own cultural group have vanished, was an experience I came to understand at first hand. The familiar people and places that soothe, buffer and contain the everyday anxieties of existence had disappeared. Their absence created a vulnerability that heightens experience, making one open and naive, sometimes fearful and often excited. On reflection, those very conditions facilitated and supported my phenomenological approach. Whilst the strangeness and newness afforded wonderful opportunities, I was mindful that the robustness and resilience of the newcomer plays an important part in the uptake of such opportunities. Who/what is there to absorb the impact when things go wrong, become overwhelming or the individual is simply not able to engage with the new environment? I was fortunate to be able to make the most of these opportunities as my visit was time-limited, well structured and I had good support. However, many people travelling to another country and culture, including some of my participants, may not have been so lucky.

Still, I was acutely aware of my vulnerability as a foreigner, even in a country, which to all intents and purposes, is English-speaking. There were no communication problems apart from accents! The common use of English was an advantage for negotiating the bureaucracy. It enabled me to obtain permission through the correct channels, in order to gain access and ultimately secure meetings with the students themselves. The main contact for official permission was with an Indian professor whose job designation was head of *Study in India Programme (SIP)* at the University of Hyderabad, India.

The head of the *Study in India Programme (SIP)* declared an interest in my work, which was a very positive outcome of the meeting. She gave permission to interview international students and introduced me to the Programme Co-

ordinator and the Vice President of the Student Union. This made him an an "elite interviewee" (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). This proved to be one of the most valuable and fortuitous meetings, within the whole research project in India. A thoroughly likeable and charismatic person, Sami from Yemen had finished his PhD, had some free time and seemed to be on friendly terms with just about every international student residing on the campus. In the manner of welcoming guests, he went out of his way to assist me in finding willing participants for my research. I had prepared an interview schedule of questions, a consent form and a short explanation of the nature and objectives of the research. Sami circulated these to the students whom he thought would make 'good interviewees'. This judgement was based on a number of considerations including the students' fluency in English, their country of origin (as I was aiming to have a variety) and a balance of genders. Sami's extensive friendship networks, powers of persuasion and advocacy had a crucial part to play in the successful recruitment.

Another site was the National College of Ireland in Dublin where my partner was a lecturer at that time. Amongst his students he had a small number of International students whom he supervised. As it happened, these students were all from African countries and became the only African interviewees of my research. We arranged that I make contact with them, explaining the nature of the study and if they were interested in participating, I could arrange individual interviews at a later date. After meeting the students informally, all of them agreed to take part in the research. As a group they also took part in a writing workshop, which I conducted about a month later. This was audio-recorded and the written material voluntarily submitted which may provide material for a future publication. I also used the transcribed material of the group discussion in my final analysis chapter, entitled "Enhancing Cultural Engagement". The rationale for departing from the individual interview design is explained in the chapter. The group discussion of all the interviewees on the Dublin site represented an opportunity to observe cultural engagement in action.

Finding students at my own University proved harder than I imagined as the wider networks, like induction talks and conversations with the International office were not delivering. In fact, not a single interview came from my efforts to liaise with other Departments such as the International Office, or circulating information after my induction talks to International students, at the invitation of the academic departments. Academic staff paid lip service at these events,

but in reality nothing concrete in the way of interviews materialised. I had to resort to my immediate contacts within my department of Student Support – nurses and counsellors, to request introductions to their student clients and patients. A colleague in the library services who regularly gave library seminars to International students was another valuable source. Once the introductions were made, emails were then exchanged giving information about the study, explaining consent and confidentiality, and then invitations for interviews were set up. Many of the students I met personally, followed through their commitment. However, it was a slow process to find people who would actually commit to an appointment for interview and even when they did, there was a degree of effort involved in arranging the appointments to suit both them and me. I was fitting these interviews into my diary, alongside client appointments.

Unfortunately this was a study carried out in hostile conditions and without the support of my then head of service. In a time of austerity for the services, doctoral research was regarded as a superfluous, unaffordable luxury that I should do in my spare time. I was told there was no precedent for supporting research, in terms of time or resources and that I didn't require it to do my current job as 'counsellor'. As far as line management and organisational support were concerned, I was on my own. Fortunately I had great collegial support from immediate colleagues, trusted allies in some departments, like education and library services and wonderful personal support from my partner and friends.

4.2.5   Construction of the Interview Schedule

On each site, I conducted semi-structured phenomenological interviews, approximately 45-60 minutes in length. The questions providing structure were informed by the PEP findings, broadly confining themselves to the subject of help-seeking behaviours and coping patterns of international students from non-European backgrounds. The PEP was a pilot study, carried out at the beginning of the doctorate, which focused on the perceptions and experiences of two nurses and two counsellors in my department of Student Support, regarding their work with international students from Non- European backgrounds. Much speculation was generated from the PEP about comparisons with students' home countries and cultures, which was thought to influence the help-seeking behaviour and coping attitudes, especially those who rarely consulted counselling

services. Those students were perceived to be the most likely to suffer emotional breakdown and to be referred in crisis.

The findings of that study helped to shape the questions for the semi-structured interviews for the main research to follow. The interview schedule is shown in Appendix B.

4.2.6   Conducting the Interviews

The experience of conducting the interviews varied greatly between the three sites. In India they were carried out over two days in a very intense and concentrated time period. I've chosen to highlight these experiences in the following piece because they were the most intense, exciting and were my first research interviews.

The structural process, in terms of setting up the meetings, providing information about the study, obtaining consent, adopting an open facilitative style to engage participants and debriefing at the end with the offer of support if needed, was fairly consistent across all sites. However I'm sure practice helped me to refine my techniques as I went along, making my later interviews a more polished affair. There was a natural reliance on my counselling skills to create a rapport, by attentive listening, keeping the questions open-ended with occasional prompts, offering empathy and warmth and inviting interviewees to expand on certain topics that would help to address the research question through later analysis. The distinctive difference with counselling was that I did not carry any responsibility to "be helpful" in a therapeutic role or to offer knowledge or solutions to certain difficult issues. In many ways this was liberating and allowed me to more fully engage with the participants' lifeworld. My counsellor training nevertheless was in the background, alerting me to any probable signs of students' distress or discomfort, which could be addressed through counselling support, away from the interview. As it happened, two students out of eighteen later received counselling, as a result of my ethical considerations for their well-being.

On the Indian site, over two days I interviewed ten students, giving each of them an appointment slot at intervals throughout the day. There was a similarity to having a full appointment diary of counselling clients on consecutive days. Some interviewees were late, but every single student attended their appointment,

which would be unusual in the comparative example of university counselling appointments. Other favourable conditions that contributed to this recruitment success included the fact that it was summer time, there were no lectures and most regular students had gone home. Out of boredom many international students were looking for a diversion. They were campus based, on a campus of 2000 acres, which was also a wildlife and elephant sanctuary. It was mainly accessed by a small campus bus or by motorbikes and mopeds, which many students owned. Cars on campus were virtually non-existent. The insularity and vastness of the natural space created a sense of remoteness and detachment from the main city busyness, which had advantages and disadvantages for student life. Some students I met informally beforehand; others I met for the first time when they arrived at interview. Those students, whom I hadn't met prior to the interview, had agreed to participate on the recommendation of their friends. I was aware there was a novel factor to me being a white European woman, interested to have personal meetings with individuals about their everyday lives, in the name of research. They were curious and intrigued which made them, from a phenomenological point of view, ideal participants to share their life world. I was also curious and intrigued, enabling me to throw myself into the unknown, therefore embracing the inductive principles of the phenomenological approach. In hindsight I was "bracketing off" my own pre-suppositions, coming round the hermeneutic circle to enter the participants' "lifeworld"', by making it the centre of my attention. This allowed me to depart from the schedule, in moments when participants brought unexpected content to the interviews, that offered rich, new perspectives, e.g. disclosures regarding sexual orientation. Smith et al. (2009) describes this as giving the "experiential experts", i.e., the participants, enough leeway to take the interview to "the thing itself".

The Indian interviews took place in a nice air-conditioned room, which I'd been allocated, lasting approximately an hour; they were audiotaped with the students' permission, with the exception of one female interviewee from Iraq who refused to be taped.

One other interview could not be used due to the participant speaking so softly that his voice was barely audible over the noise of the air-conditioning. Despite this, those meetings had a contribution to make to the research in terms of my growing understanding and awareness of the everyday concerns affecting individuals and the occasional unplanned, uncontrollable sets-backs that go with the territory.

4.2.7   Transcription of Interviews

With the exceptions noted, interviews were audio-recorded with students' permission and transcribed verbatim. This was a highly onerous task to bring to completion and one that I had totally misjudged in terms of time and resources. I repeatedly asked myself why I had agreed to conduct twenty interviews in my 'learning agreement' and now felt duty-bound to keep that promise!

The sheer number of interviews plus the fact that most students spoke with accents that were difficult to decipher on tape, perhaps conveys some sense of the enormity and stress of the task. I quickly realised I could not do it all myself, so had to find a professional service. The service employed was of a high standard, but even they could not deliver a full text, due to the reasons mentioned. This meant further hours of listening to the audiotapes, over and over again, to fill in those missing sections that had defeated the professionals. I was driven on by the knowledge that I had understood the communication in the actual interviews, so must be able to find those nuggets of idiosyncratic expression that gave the narratives their authentic character and meaning. This was an immersive and iterative process, often characterised as the 'double hermeneutic' where the researcher is actively trying to make sense of the participants, making sense of their experiences. Frustrating yet rewarding, it helped set the groundwork for the next stage. I became so familiar with the students' voices and stories, I felt I really did inhabit their 'lifeworlds' for the many months that it took to complete this challenge and later in the analysis that emerged from it. For the following steps of the analysis, I used the software tool NVivo 9, to assist the process, as I was working with a large dataset.

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1. Initial noting
2. Developing emergent themes
3. Generating clusters for related themes
4. Identifying of superordinates on the basis of the clusters

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I wish to make the evidentiary base of the process transparent for the reader, so will illustrate the steps with accompanying tables, keeping textual explanation to a minimum.

4.2.8 Computer Software to assist Analysis

The role of NVivo 9 was purely instrumental as it was used to provide assistance applying the research method chosen, i.e., interpretative phenomenological analysis. NVivo uses concepts of 'parent and child nodes'. This was a useful tool for identifying emergent themes and sub themes, whilst going through each interview, collecting text snippets that supported various emerging themes. Being able to amass a great amount of material under these different headings, using coding, brought some level of structure and containment to what otherwise would have been an overwhelming and chaotic task. The system showed the frequency of each theme, not always important but very useful in terms of seeing constellations of emergent themes that relate to one another. For example, feelings of discrimination, exploitation, limited job opportunities, immigration and racism could be linked together under 'feeling of injustice'.

Other examples correspond to the idea of the magnet metaphor (Smith et al., 2009) where some text snippets stood out, as they were richer and more illuminating. They portrayed the theme better; therefore enabled certain themes to emerge more quickly and with greater dominance, for example statements about culture shock. Other less vivid statements were able to fall in behind, to support. Thus the patterns of convergences and divergence started to appear.

This was an iterative process involving reading and re-reading. Despite the assistance of software, it was time-consuming, laborious and painstaking. The software was not a substitute for thought, but a strong aid for thought. Computers don't analyse data; people do (Weitzman & Miles, 1995). There were no short cuts, so the drudgery of the coding task had to be endured!

4.3 Theme Development

At the beginning of the theme development are *multiple readings and making impressionist notes*, as observations occurred. These could be *linguistic* – focusing on participants' choice of words, pauses, repetitions, use of metaphor; *descriptive* – taking at face value the important elements that make up the participants' experience or *conceptual* – noticing higher abstract ways of defining the participants' understanding of their experience, which usually involves

personal reflection. This meant drawing on my professional knowledge and experience. Smith et al. (2009) describes this as a Gadamerian dialogue between the researcher's pre-understandings and newly emergent understandings of the participants' 'lifeworlds' and represents the interpretative strand of IPA. Table 11.1 gives example of this process.

Making notes alongside the transcript meant departing from the transcript itself. It involves stepping back and allowing space for patterns of commonality and divergence to emerge. This was enabled by the coding process. of gathering key phrases and text snippets that described a particular phenomenon, for example coping by being strong, coping by faith and spirituality, coping by personal resources. Inevitably this involves breaking up the transcripts into parts, thus facilitating a change of focus. And so I engaged deeply with the hermeneutic process: considering how the 'part' relates to the 'whole' transcript, noticing the connections with 'parts' of other transcripts, wondering how they relate to each other, and deciding whether the connection constitutes a theme. The character of a 'theme' according to (Smith et al., 2009) is that it speaks to t he psychological essence of the piece, contains enough detail to be grounded, and enough abstraction to be conceptual. This aspiration carries the hallmark of IPA, demonstrating the fluidity and flexibility of its elemental strands. In this way, I found the focus beginning to shift to the relationship between the higher abstract levels. The resulting change of emphasis helped to prepare a basis for identifying the larger organising principles of 'superordinates' that could accurately and appropriately 'house' all the other themes contained within.

4.3.1   Seeking relationships and clustering themes

The following steps continued the process of moving from the particular, as in the words of the individual participants to the shared experiences within the sample, whilst at the same time moving between the levels of description to levels of interpretation, in a continual flow of the hermeneutic circle.

Tables 11.2 – 11.3 show examples of text snippets from interview transcripts, which have been coded according to what seemed like an emerging theme. This was performed on every line of text for every interview. For illustration purposes, I have chosen 5 examples to show the progression from identifying emergent themes and sub themes to gathering them together into clusters. At this stage

of analysis, the emergent themes with or without sub themes were isolated units of meaning. However, many of the themes clearly shared commonalities. The objective of this step was to address these commonalities and make them visible by organising them into clusters. Later, there was the challenge to find an over-arching concept that seemed to define the experiences at a more abstract level. Smith et al. (2009) describes this as putting "like with like and finding a name for the cluster". For example, I decided family, friends and cultural community belong together within the concept of *Living with Challenge – Seeking Help* as it involved a social component, distinct from *Living with Challenge – Coping*, which defined self-motivated coping strategies such as *Coping by being Strong* or *Coping by Personal Resources.*

4.3.2   Identifying Superordinates on the Basis of Clusters

The analytic processes described so far set the scene for the creation of super-ordinate themes, the over-arching aggregate category to describe the cluster of emergent themes that led to 5 superordinates: *Impact of Transition, Living with Challenge – Coping; Living with Challenge – Seeking Help; Shifting Identities and Enhancing Cultural Engagement.* Table 11.4 presents the overall set of themes (emergent sub themes, emergent themes, superordinates).

There are some methodological aspects of the theme development process worth highlighting. A few of the emergent themes, e.g., process of integration, were repeated in more than one superordinate. Their complexity ensured that they did not exclusively reside within set parameters but could be seen from different perspectives. For example, 'process of integration' can be seen from the view-point of *Impact of Transition*, describing 'culture shock'; it can also be seen as 'self-development' within a *Shifting Identity*. Emergent themes could therefore be overlapping and were not disjunct.

Many sub themes were subsumed into emergent themes and some, because of their low occurrence, later became redundant. The final reduction of the emergent themes judged to be sufficiently related, are therefore presented with the corresponding superordinates or organising domains, shown alongside.

4.4 Validity

To address the overall validity of the study, I aimed to work within Yardley's (2008) framework, which provides general guidelines for assessing the quality of psychological research. It comprises four broad principles:

- Sensitivity to Context,

- Commitment and Rigour,

- Transparency and Coherence,

- Impact and Importance.

4.4.1 Sensitivity to Context

IPA as a research method fitted well with my research focus: bringing forth the "voices" of my participants through close engagement with the text. I continued this through the analysis, ever mindful of the process of the 'double hermeneutic', making sense of the participants making sense of their own experience. The decision to include a wide variety of verbatim extracts in my write-up was a deliberate attempt to allow the participants to speak in their own voice, thus allowing the reader to check my interpretations. In line with IPA, my interpretations have been offered as possible readings and more general claims have been offered cautiously.

Knowing that the interpretations can only be as good as the data generated from the interviews, I was careful to conduct the interviews with as much sensitivity and care towards the participants, as possible, applying the BACP ethical guidelines of conduct, in consideration of their well-being. I briefly experimented with employing a 'neutral' interviewer. However, I quickly realised that the interviews produced were more of a 'question and answer' experience and thus not able to deliver a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973), necessary for good quality analysis. My counselling skills of empathy, warmth and focused attention were integral for helping my participants to open up, to tell their stories with passion and intimacy, and ultimately provide the rich material that my analysis relied upon.

My awareness of the existing literature has been substantive in relating to the wide-ranging nature of the research topic as evidenced in my *Literature Review*. Following my analysis, my findings dictated that I include dialogue with a great range of 'new' literature not included in the *Literature Review*. According to Smith et al. (2009) this is very common for studies that are findings-led, which was my endeavour.

4.4.2   Commitment and Rigour

There are overlaps between this and the fore-going principle. Rigour normally means thoroughness and disciplined attention. This can refer to the care and respect shown to participants and their material; it can also mean the carefulness of the sample selection, so that it is appropriate for addressing the research question. The commitment and time spent in travelling between countries and continents to find a fairly homogenous sample but including diversity and variety, I think answers this point. Again the painstaking efforts of acquiring accurate verbatim transcripts, followed by the equally painstaking process of analysis through the many stages to arrive at findings, hopefully is evident within the write-up. Emergent themes, their patterns of convergence and divergence, their relationship to each other at a higher more abstract level of interpretation, hopefully demonstrates my immersion in the subject and my growing knowledge as I progressed further into the journey. Finding the balance between, showing something important about the individual participant and showing the importance of shared experience at a more abstract level, were the moving points on the hermeneutic circle, which characterised the process throughout.

4.4.3   Transparency and Coherence

I used tables to assist in showing the various steps of analysis between participants' voices, transcripts, initial note-taking, emergent themes, clustering of themes, creation of superordinates or overarching domains, findings, and implications for practice. Where possible, I illustrated graphically findings that had a descriptive nature with the potential to contribute to enhanced cultural engagement and increasing cultural competence. For example, the *Hierarchy of Helping* (Figure 10.2) and *Resilience and Situational Factors* affecting Coping

(Figure 10.1). Throughout, I also tried to stay faithful to the phenomenological and hermeneutic sensibilities, by appropriately returning to the research focus, 'the thing itself', i.e., the help-seeking and coping patterns of International students of non-European backgrounds. Emphasising the connectedness between the superordinates not only emphasised the logicality of the sequence but also acted as testimony to the unfolding story of participants' lived experience.

Other ways of conveying transparency and coherence involved writing up the stages of recruitment, construction of the interview schedule, discussion of how the interviews were conducted, in their respective contexts.

4.4.4 Impact and Importance

This principle is founded on trustworthiness and is concerned with, whether or not, the research has something interesting and useful to say. Naturally the reader has to judge this independently, regardless of the researcher's assertions.

One of the yardsticks to measure this occurred naturally within the study. At a late stage in the process, I conducted a writing workshop with one group of interviewees on one site. The second half of the workshop involved a discussion, which was audio-taped (with participants' permission), later transcribed and incorporated in the analysis. In this group conversation, unprompted and spontaneously, participants' followed topics of interest, which corresponded exactly with four out of five of the superordinate themes. The fifth superordinate, which was *Cultural Engagement*, they were actually embodying, without consciously acknowledging it. I took this as an endorsement of the study's efficacy.

The responses I've had from 'my products' have been positive, encouraging and rewarding. The feedback would suggest that my work is important and has impacted a range of audiences, from students to counselling professionals and student support staff across educational sectors of Higher and Further Education. This will be elaborated upon in a subsequent chapter entitled 'Products'. The products have included workshops of cultural training over three years within my own university; a feature I wrote for the University Staff magazine based on the development of this training; a writing workshop in another university; a conference paper delivered at the University of Cork in June 2015 to the CSSI (Confederation of Student Services in Ireland) and an article published in the September 2015 issue of *University and College Counselling* journal.

4.5   Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to expose and reveal the 'infrastructure' that necessarily had to be created to bring this research project into existence. That's notwithstanding the vast array of skills, knowledge, collaboration and perseverance – my own combining with that of my participants and my supporters (friends and colleagues) to keep the wheels turning, to produce co-created new knowledge that is compelling and persuasive. The adherence to the research methods of IPA provided the supporting infrastructure, thus creating the functional space for the rest to follow. The findings are not truth claims, nor do they purport to be representative of all students fitting the description of 'International Students of non-European backgrounds'. The aims of IPA lie elsewhere. The strength of the study is in the 'experience near' (Eatough, 2012), faithful rendition of individuals' subjective realities and the power of their voices to connect and resonate with those who might think they understand ... to understand better, more fully and with much greater human awareness.

This sits within an agenda of how to newly define the transcultural discourse, (perhaps even ensuring that there is such a discourse), in universities and colleges to enhance cultural engagement. I believe the efforts involved are worth it, in terms of impacting on a variety of audiences, some of them hard-to-reach, for example, heads of services and senior managers, who exercise power in decisions, that can inform the organisational ethos. The change-making potential of my research for professional practice, training and institutional policy will be discussed in a subsequent chapter on 'Products' and in the final discussion.

Impact of Transition

I think by now a culture shock comes with any movement you make from any familiar thing.

Selma, Uganda

5.1 Introduction

The impact of transition is a unique experience for every student. After leaving their home country, the life of international students is affected by transition in a myriad of different ways. Naturally change in location is the visible transition. The less visible changes are multi-layered, manifesting in changes to one's perceptions, feelings, attitudes, evaluations of one's own culture and other cultures, developmental changes in terms of age and maturity, acquisition of knowledge and life experience. There are elements of this that individuals have in common

such as the experience of culture shock on arrival followed by the process of integration when the shock has dissipated. For any kind of coping, transition provides the context. In the interviews conducted the multifaceted theme of the *impact of transition* surfaced repeatedly, indicating its key importance to international students and therefore elevating it to the status of a 'superordinate theme'. This means it exists as an organising concept for many emergent themes in the context of this analysis. The following chapter lists and analyses the impact of transition among international students, seeking to explore and find a balance between the idiographic and the nomothetic. In other words, the analysis will give prominence to the authentic individual voices, whilst at the same time uncovering patterns of connection for more general aspects shared within the sample group. Variations on the themes carry significant quantitative weight in that they are mentioned often in the interviews. Participants went to some lengths to describe the emotions involved, often giving very vivid and moving accounts. For some, despite the difficulties, they acknowledged varying degrees of acceptance from their hosts. One person even found a sense of belonging in the new place. Unexpected consequences for some individuals were the opportunities for self-development outside their academic expectations. Others crucially experienced a feeling of injustice, outlining experiences of discrimination, racism, and exploitation. Other related emergent themes interwoven throughout included health concerns, emotional stress, study difficulties, communication problems and financial worries. In the manner of phenomenological enquiry, I will seek to present an 'experience near' rendition and thus a 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) of the participants' accounts by using extracts from the raw data.

5.2   Transition or Culture Shock?

Before embarking on this study, my pre-awareness suggested that the very dramatic part of the transition was the initial stage, often referred to as 'culture shock'. This was a personalised interpretation, predating my search of the literature, which revealed the error of my understanding. The term 'culture shock', as it is used in the literature denotes a complete transitional process, over many stages and sometimes many years, from arrival to a place of comfort and integration. The students' initial reflections showed they also took a literal interpretation of the term, which nevertheless provided a valid entry into

their experiences. In the interest of clarity and for the benefit of the reader I am therefore drawing a distinction between how participants perceived the term 'culture shock' and the way in which the term is conceptualised in the literature. This is the context within which many students almost objected to the term, choosing to downplay the perceived drama inherent in the phrase and to focus more extensively on the challenges that come later, which I have referred to as process of integration.

we did face difference, but I wouldn't call it a shock as such. It's just a different way of looking at things. It wasn't a shock I would say but we had significantly very much differences in the way people live and practice their religion. (Amit, India)

Amit was studying at Ulster and I had seen him on one occasion a few months earlier for a single session of counselling. He was also on a scholarship from the University of Ulster, which probably helped reinforce good feelings about the place engendering a sense of loyalty to the institution. I may have been included in this by virtue of my job designation of university counsellor.

He was to endorse this position by supplying more information about the welcome he received on arrival, which clearly was influential in creating good bonds of attachment.

I mean what I see from my perspective is that things like practicing my religion here wasn't a problem for me. The supervisors here were quite understanding and accommodating when I said on a certain day, I'll have to go for my prayers. I definitely have respect for the people here. They recognise every person has a belief and he has the right to practice it. (Amit, India)

On the issue of perception of culture shock, Alma from Saudi Arabia re-iterated a similar sentiment.

We have different culture from here in Ulster. But no I doesn't see any culture shock. When I come here to university, I'm surprised because there is all the people, they know about my religion, my culture, they know about my scarf, why I should cover my hair. There is like prayer room to make me pray, really sur-

prised about that. They knew in advance what was required to deal and show respect. (Alma, Saudi Arabia)

It would seem that the welcome and understanding of the student's cultural background mitigated that shock to the extent that they felt the word 'shock' was inappropriate and not an accurate description of their experience.

Different mitigating factors operate for other students in reducing the level of cultural shock on arrival. Kavinda had a diverse educational career that had involved her studying in the Middle East and later in USA. Her exposure to new experiences developed her maturity and no doubt increased her coping repertoire.

When I went to the States was when I got a culture shock, so I knew I was never going to get that much of a culture shock here but I did get a shock, in a good way. (Kavinda, India)

She tells a story of how she was helped by a security guard on the second day when she was trying to find her way around the campus.

He was like "Oh, are you lost?" and I was like "Yeah, I want to go to the International office". Basically he took me there and waited with me. This is the best experience I've ever had, I don't feel like I'm in a different place. (Kavinda, India)

Not only was Kavinda responding to the welcome, which enabled her to connect to the new place, she was also remembering and comparing her experiences in the States, which were quite negative. She felt she was ignored when she would ask for directions. She describes "fending for herself, until I got to know how things worked. Nobody would help you". Her previous negative experiences were preparing her for a similar reaction. Steeled by this preparation, the warmth of the welcome exceeded all expectation causing her to elevate the experience above the ordinary.

I am aware of the N.Irish reputation for hospitality so recognised it instantly. I was also aware that the act described could equally be seen as infantilising the student, almost taking them by the hand, like one might do with a lost child. But it was the word "lost" that resonated with Kavinda as it would seem at that point she did indeed feel like a lost child, in spite of all her declared worldliness. So the action of the security guard was entirely congruent with her need.

Like Amit, Alma, and Kavinda, Tarif from Bangladesh also took issue with the phrase "Culture Shock".

I will say culture shock or anything like that, it's a bit too strong a word. It's a bit different to the life I've lived but it wasn't a challenge. (Tarif, Bangladesh)

However Tarif wasn't pretending to be unaffected by the changes he was observing like the drinking for example. He says, "Back in my country drinking is prohibited in public. I'm coming to terms with the fact that drinking is quite normal here in Ireland". Like many other students he compares the habits and behaviours of people in the new situation to what he is used to back home. This becomes a pre-amble to an exploration of the openings afforded by a more liberal, individualistic society, which he is embracing.

Back in my country, I mean, even at the age of 22 or 23, you're more depending on your parents. They will have a say in whatever decisions you make. Its not that you have your 100% full authority. Back there I won't be able to work in a restaurant; it would be demeaning my position. (Tarif, Bangladesh)

Working in a restaurant is a menial job that Tarif is proud to have the opportunity to do as a student. He talks of his discomfort about parents providing everything. He is proud of his first earnings, which he calls "pocket-money" for luxuries. As everything is so expensive in Ireland, he is creating space for himself to grow into adulthood where he can take more independent decisions. Later he revealed that the prohibitive aspects of his own culture affect him in ways far beyond independence to work as a student or to drink alcohol. It inhibits him exploring and expressing a key part of his identity, his sexuality. In

Bangladesh, homosexuality is illegal and risks punishment and imprisonment. Following the research interview, Tarif was offered a counselling appointment to further explore these issues. He accepted this support. He gave good feedback of the experience, which he found extremely helpful. As someone who knew nothing about counselling prior to the research, it is unlikely that he would have used the service without this stepping-stone.

Of the international students studying in India, the responses regarding culture shock were also varied and differently nuanced. My assumption was that many, for example those from neighbouring Arab States such as Yemen and Iraq, also the students from Iran and Palestine would experience less impact as they were culturally closer to the their host country. Although there was acknowledgement that "it is the atmosphere of the Orient in general" and that they had some idea of Indian life and culture before they arrived, I was surprised at the extent to which they concentrated on the differences, often negatively. The exception was one student from Guyana in South America whose experience stood out as different.

It would seem no special effort was made on the part of the University of Hyderabad to address their different needs.

The situation is I'm far from my country. As a foreigner I have my own problems. And they are dealing with me as if I'm an Indian student. (Khalid, Yemen)

The lack of understanding seemed to encourage negative comparisons with the students' own country and culture. However, such comparisons are an inevitable part of second and third stages within culture shock models and will be addressed later in the discussion.

I think we are not completely different from India especially where I come from. British brought Indians to my country for a long time so there is a kind of understanding (Omar, Yemen)

Implicitly held within the comparisons were references to certain prejudices between cultures such as Arabic and Indian, which were being re-inforced. The students chose quite vivid even shocking examples to illustrate their point. I wondered if consciously or unconsciously they were hoping for endorsement from me. It would certainly be plausible for them to assume that an outsider Westerner like myself must also have witnessed similar unpleasant shocks on arrival in India. I was mindful of my own process of Impact and Culture Shock whilst in India. I did not wish my experiences to get tangled up with my interviewees' experiences lest it may distort my judgement or indeed influence the course of the interview. And yet there were points of common ground that were impossible to deny. I found myself sometimes acknowledging those points of agreement in spite of myself. In retrospect, to do anything else I believe would have interfered with my genuineness in the interview space.

Hanif contrasts the behaviour of the Indian students with Palestinian students remarking on how submissive the Indian students are in the presence of authority. At first Hanif didn't realise his Indian lecturers were speaking English because of the accent.

I thought I am from other place, that I don't belong to this place because I couldn't follow. But after some times I recognise that there are some Indian students, mostly they don't ask if they don't understand. They feel shy. And I was shocked because of this. The way (Indian) students deal with themselves, a lot of respect they give. Palestinians will have this respect but not like this. (Hanif, Palestine)

It seemed as if the intention behind the negative comparisons was to convey a sense of superiority infused with national pride.

The issue of cleanliness and noise in India were conditions of living that participants struggled with during transition. One student spoke of going to the shops and discovering a rat eating from the foodstuff. He also spoke of a dog eating its food in the same canteen where the students eat. His reaction of revulsion was to project a negative stereotype on all Indians.

They don't care about cleaning. In their culture it is ... I don't want to insult them and say "dirty" but it seems to be dirty really. This is quite different from our countries and our culture. (Jamal, Iraq)

Yasmin from Iran makes comments in a similar vein regarding negative comparison with her own country.

India has so much noise. We don't have such high noise like this in our cities. It's too much dirty compared to my country in the streets. The holy animals is kind of weird. There are too many dogs. My country is not like that. (Yasmin, Iran)

Yasmin says she has had to adjust but that the noises are still bothering her, especially when she is studying and on nights before exams.

5.3   Process of Integration

The experience of settling and integrating into the new culture is as personal and individual it would seem, as the participants themselves. There are however many notable factors that help to determine that experience: the age at which the student arrives in the new country; previous experiences of foreign travel and/or study abroad; whether they were accompanied by family; whether they were fortunate enough to find their own cultural group resident within university or in the nearby community and whether there were any formal or informal attempts from the host university to understand their needs and to support their integration. The randomness of a successful integration as reported by the students was particularly striking. It would seem there is only a sliver of luck between the circumstances that created an overall positive experience for some and less so for others.

Isla from Nigeria attributed her fairly positive integration into an Irish University to the fact that there was a group of Nigerians already there, although she didn't know them prior to her arrival. She also attributes her strong reliance on this group to the fact that she was only 17 years old, yet at the same time there is a remembered ambivalence about the benefits versus the constraints.

This was 10 years ago. Isla is one of the longest staying students in Ireland as she extended her part time studies to PhD level whilst combining them with a part-time professional job.

I'll say it was OK because of them (Nigerians). They kind of helped me through it because they were already here. (Isla, Nigeria)

Four years down the line, when the guys left, I didn't have my shield anymore. Although I was working part-time, I didn't really integrate that much with the Irish. (Isla, Nigeria)

Isla goes on to elaborate these difficulties by talking about the attitudes of the Irish to drinking alcohol, which she found alienating. She felt under tremendous pressure to behave like the Irish in order to gain acceptance.

Follow the crowd what everyone is doing makes it easier. And it gets to a point actually when you are doing what everyone is doing, you start feeling comfortable in yourself, it becomes part of you. I think it depends what age you are at that point. (Isla, Nigeria)

It is evident that for some students there is substantial self-expectation to make themselves acceptable to the new cultural group and probably less expectation on local students or even services that they should meet their needs halfway.

Another student Elim from Kenya studying in Ireland also expressed similar sentiments about needing to conform. He didn't have any problem with the English language and rated his communication skills highly yet the challenge of fitting in was a persistent rumination in the course of the interview, surely a reflection of its importance for everyday living.

So what I needed to do was try as much as possible to assimilate myself into the system so that I can get going. Because you really have to understand how they (the Irish) do it because people in different cultures are doing things differently. I just have to get along and know exactly what the meanings are. I have to bring

myself into this society. (Elim, Kenya)

Isla from Nigeria uses similar language when she talks of needing "two years to adapt" and "five years to transform". She speaks of "watching and learning" how to approach people and the refuge of "the weather" as a conversation opener. She uses the metaphor of being a child "growing up again and trying to figure out how to do things in another place". She describes the process of being introduced to the local Irish group using an interesting choice of metaphor.

You haven't a clue what they're gonna expect of you. I suppose it's hard to find that person who's going to understand you first of all in a group and to make a connection with that one person in the group. Then that person sort of introduces you to the wolf pack, so it's kind of a gentle process. If I don't find someone I can relate to within the group, I'll just generally keep to myself. (Isla, Nigeria)

The wolf pack is something of a chilling image and must convey an atmosphere of the terror felt by an outsider like Isla. Yet strangely she describes the introduction as a gentle process, which may represent some of the conflicted feelings evoked by the memory. There was clearly relief and possibly gratitude about finding a kindly insider "wolf" who was willing to take her in.

At a philosophical and intellectual level, Khalid welcomes the freedom of experience made available to him through a multiplicity of cultures.

I came from one country, one religion which is Arabic and there is only one culture there. But when I came here, I saw that there are many cultures. I came to know the meaning of multi-culturalism. (Khalid, Yemen)

Khalid was living with his family outside the campus. Despite his intellectual enthusiasm about ideas of integration, unfortunately his personal everyday experience did not match. He lived rather reclusively, only going from his house to the University because of language problems. English was only spoken inside the campus. For example he said he found it difficult to go for market shopping

as the traders only spoke Telugu or Hindi.

It's difficult for me to go outside and mix with people because I can't understand them and they can't understand me. (Khalid, Yemen)

To overcome this feeling of alienation, Omar, another student from Yemen sought out the local Yemeni community.

When I feel I am bored I can go and eat the Yemeni food and talk to the old people who can still speak the Arabic. It is a small community who has come from Yemen before more than two centuries. You feel you are at home. I call them a mini-Yemen in Hyderabad. (Omar, Yemen)

The various rich and diverse narratives give a sense of the uniqueness of the personal yet at the same time conveys a feeling of the struggle, the frustration, the resourcefulness and perseverance shared by the students in this brave decision to study abroad. I was struck by how few students actually referred to the contribution made by their universities in helping to buffer the impact of the transition. However two students, unprompted by a direct question on the subject, volunteered this information. One was Lin, a female Chinese student, the youngest and the only undergraduate of the group who was studying at University of Ulster. The other one was a female student from Guyana, South America who was studying at University of Hyderabad, India.

Like many Chinese students, Lin struggled with the English language, which set her apart from not only other English-speaking students but also other international students. She had very good support from her Chinese peers who formed quite an extensive co-national group. She mentions how important the pre-sessional English language course had been for her transition into education at Ulster. The University provides this in the summer before term starts.

That course the university gave us, that free course make us quickly stay in there, living here, studying here. They gave us some help like Doctor help and lots of things we learnt from that course. We make lots of friends from China

in that course . (Lin, China)

She emphasised the fact that this course was free several times. Clearly this was meaningful for her, probably beyond the financial value, in a context where her family were paying extremely high fees for her education. She seemed to interpret this fact as a caring gesture from the institution (rather than thinking it had already been factored into the cost). Whether naivety or dogged optimism guided her perception, this gesture of a free course and its attendant opportunities, seemed to increase her sense of attachment to the place, thus enabling an easier transition.

Maya from Guyana was equally praising of the efforts made by her department at the University of Hyderabad. Her extremely positive experience was not shared by the other non-European international students, who often referred to the preferential treatment they believed the American and European students received. Although Maya was from South America, her mannerisms, accent and style of relating could easily be construed as North American. My musings led me to consider that perhaps her uniquely different experience from the other Non-European students could be explained by an unconsciously incorrect attribution of her place of origin. Issues of racism, discrimination, and injustice figure throughout the interviews on all sites but are not experienced by all students. I will address this subject later in the chapter. The content will also be re-visited in a subsequent chapter on shifting identities.

Maya studied in the Department of Communications at Hyderabad, which by Maya's account definitely lived up to its name. This department offered a facility, which didn't seem to be known to other students studying in other departments. It offered a mentoring service consisting of senior students who were assigned up to 3 or 4 junior students. As each cohort of students moved up the years, the mantle of responsibility was passed on. Maya had enjoyed the support of the seniors in her first year and was proud to tell me she was now a senior herself and was actively carrying out her mentoring responsibilities.

Throughout university we have a mentor here. When you come as a junior you will be assigned a mentor. This we consider as psychological support. I'm a

senior member now. When I was a junior, I knew we could sit with certain seniors and have a chat with them if we were having problems. One thing I found in this country is that I always have someone to talk to. Lecturers are like parents. (Maya, Guyana)

Given the increasing teaching demands on lecturers, I was sceptical about her portrayal of a near continuous drop-in facility with lecturers or even senior students. However the spirit of students helping other students resonated strongly with me, as there are many evidence-based studies of successful peer mentoring. My own knowledge of this entails a more formal recruitment process attracting students usually on vocational courses like social work or psychology who are keen to enhance their work experience. Maya's experience of mentoring was within a different set-up. It relied on an expectation embedded within the education itself, that the care of fellow students within one department is everyone's concern. An extension of family and community within the academic setting is indeed a worthy aspiration and an interesting proposition to explore.

5.4   Feeling of Injustice

Almost by definition, studying abroad involves some sort of adjustment to a new culture. But the challenges of international students do not stop here. Often international students find themselves in situations that are not only different when compared to their culture of origin but can be threatening to their sense of justice and even in extremes cases their sense of self.

  A feeling of injustice featured in six out of eighteen interviews with an even representation across all the sites. These included issues connected to discrimination, exploitation, immigration, limited job opportunities and racism. Interwoven through these themes are stories in which health and financial worries figure strongly.

Sameer, an Indian student studying at an Irish university, expressed very strong feelings regarding the marketing and methods of recruitment of international students by college "consultants". He felt the emphasis was very much money-oriented and not about the welfare of the student. He had plenty of anecdotal evidence to draw on to suggest that many students are given misleading infor-

mation. At best he claimed the students have vital information withheld from them, essential for making informed decisions. At worst he claimed the students are lured under false promises by unscrupulous "consultants" on commission, whose chief aim is to increase business for the colleges. Sameer's context of reference was his own college, which is one of many private universities, not in receipt of state funding, so entirely dependent on student generated income.

Many students have been misled by the consultants who promise you'll get a work permit and you're going to work 30 hours. (The students) take loans from the bank thinking that ok I can complete my education and then I can get a great job and can pay back the money to the bank. But on coming here, you find that in reality there are no jobs at all. This kind of thing should be stopped. (Sameer, India)

Sameer himself had been spared the fate of making an uniformed decision by virtue of the fact that his brother had travelled to Ireland for study nine months ahead of him. This had offered Sameer some protection and guidance where the pitfalls were concerned.

False information or omission of important information are serious allegations which students are entitled to make, especially when the consequences can so seriously impact on their own lives and that of their families. The reality of becoming aware of the full extent of one's choices, more limited than imagined, can be devastating.

Another student, Elim from Kenya studying at the same Irish university on a masters course, Elim reports related hardships. Elim had been working in a part-time professional job combining it with studies until recently. Being employed was integral to his study arrangement as his income was funding his education. He told me

Right now I'm not working, I don't have a job, that's why I'm in crisis (Elim, Kenya)

He explained that the college had come up with a proposal whereby he would finish and take his exams which were pending but that he would not see or

receive the result until he had paid his debts in full.

It's like owing a mortgage. Ok, you have that house but it don't really belong to you until the day you pay the last cent. Then we give you the keys and ownership certificate to say that's your house. It's kind of something like that. (Elim, Kenya)

Elim's well-chosen metaphor conveys something of the frustration and indeed absurdity of the situation, were it not so personally deleterious to him. When we met, he was under enormous pressure. If he could not find another job to complete his payments, he might have to return to his country without a qualification. As Ireland was descending into a steep recession, the chances of this seemed quite bleak and the Celtic Tiger Boom years, a distant memory. Elim's attempt at humour to temper the despair was quoting the semi-sympathetic jibe he'd become used to hearing "Oh Man, you came at the wrong time!".

Both Elim and Sameer felt let down by the college, who in their opinion, made no effort to signpost them to the right agencies for the possibilities of jobs, research grants or sponsorships. Sameer is aware of some international students who have received grants from organisations, but in no case he knew of, was this a result of helpful networking through the college.

Commentary on the high fees paid by International students and the substantial differential with home fees was not confined to those studying in Ulster and Ireland. In both continents equal numbers of students commented on the differential as potentially exploitative, struggling to find any other plausible explanation. Omar from Yemen studying in India says

The tuition fees are high and regarding the education they don't provide different materials or teachers. I sit with my Indian friend with the same text and the same professor. There is no difference. But he is paying less and I am paying more. I don't know if you can call it some kind of discrimination or not but that is the situation. (Omar, Yemen)

The distinctions made between home students and international students are not the only ones to induce feelings of resentment and discrimination. Most of the non-European students expressed their grievances at being treated differently to the international students from Europe and America. This was a complaint confined to the Indian site and was not expressed by anyone studying in Ulster or Ireland.

A student from Iraq gives his experiences and explanations for the different treatment he receives.

They have a custom. I don't like to say it's their religion but in Hindu culture they caste the people for all levels in a hierarchy. They allotted the ground floor for students who came from under-developed countries. The ACs don't work on the ground floor. At the same time there are Europeans and Americans on other floors; the AC is working and everything is OK. This is because I come from Iraq. I pay the same money as those from Europe and the United States, the same money I pay, but I don't get the same services. (Jamal, Iraq)

Later in the interview the student concedes it might not be so personal as to pertain to his Iraqi origin but rather to the terrible disorganisation that exists. Each attempt to sort out the problem results in the problem being passed on, as each section denies having responsibility. Nevertheless he is convinced there is a racial underpinning to the importance and priority given to some students over other students.

Of the students who spoke of oppression and discrimination, some located the source of this within the general society choosing to see it as embedded in religion and/or emanating from racist notions about inferiority of peoples from developing countries. Some saw those prejudices embodied in the practices and operations of the University, regardless of whether they were being consciously applied or not. Other students specifically located their feelings of exploitation within the university setting in terms of unhelpful practices of recruitment for example, which left them exposed, anxious and financially vulnerable. Another attitude displayed in regards to feelings of injustice was to firmly locate the source of the oppression outside the university setting. This occurred for the remaining two students, of those who reported feelings of injustice. Both

were studying at Ulster on a scholarship from the University. They experienced racism in the local community. They chose to see this behaviour as exceptional and associated mainly with uneducated people who had never been to University and were acting out of ignorance.

I had a kind of negative experience but it was not from the University environment. It was the place where we were living. Myself, my wife and kids, used to get taunted and ridiculed because we were a bit different. Late in the night they would knock the doors and run away after ringing the bell. I would say it was on racist and on religious grounds. But I know teenagers are like that everywhere, it's not just this country. (Amit, India).

Kavinda reports similar experiences, giving a similar rationalisation.

I wouldn't call it racist. Certain people would pass remarks. It was locals. But because I've been to other places, I could judge it was ignorance basically. But it would disturb me because it was directed at me personally, in the sense to my religion and nationality. (Kavinda, India)

Both Amit and Kavinda seem to downplay the effects of these negative experiences in an effort to preserve the dominance of their substantially good feelings about their transitions and most importantly their good feelings about their sponsor, the University of Ulster. The perceived good life within the safety of its boundaries is worth protecting. It is convenient to locate the negativity outside in the 'hearts and minds' of uneducated teenagers. Such rationalisation usually enables better coping through reduction and containment of the problem, at least in the short term. Maintaining a strong positivity even if it may risk denial of reality seems preferable to the alternative.

I wondered if there could be concerted effort, not necessarily conscious on the part of the students to present the best of Northern Ireland back to one of its natives, i.e. myself. Could this be the case or was my unease indicating a resistance to the very positive portrayal of a place about which I had so many ambivalences? Perhaps I was forgetting that N. Ireland has moved on and is a

much more open society for visitors of different ethnic backgrounds than I was able to acknowledge. Tarif from Bangladesh made an unexpected and surprising comment when he said

It's nice when you are walking down the street, specially if you are of a different colour, if someone looks back at you, smiles and will say hi or hello. It helps. It helped me during my initial days. Like I felt a bit more ease. (Tarif, Bangladesh)

He told me he had been warned there could be racism but he hadn't as yet experienced it. He expressed so much enthusiasm about the helpfulness of Northern Irish people in a manner that characterised his fresh naivety. I sincerely hoped for his sake that he would not have reason to change his mind.

5.5   Conclusion

All students go through a phase of transition when they begin to study. The change of culture plays a pivotal role which in the literature is traditionally discussed under the heading of 'culture shock' (Oberg, 1960; Barty, 2011). The term is often a convenient label, which in itself does not reveal much about an individual experience unless the individual gives it meaning, through narrative discourse. For some of the participants this concept was instrumental in helping them to organise and articulate their experiences. For others it failed to resonate. Even for those who didn't embrace the concept of culture shock, it had the effect of enabling them to shape their own meanings from it. In this sense, 'culture shock' worked as a narrative prompt for all participants.

Seen from an ideographic point of view, each student gave a unique account of personal experiences encompassing a large spectrum of emotions, hopes and attitudes. From a nomothetic perspective, individual experiences often shared common elements, which in the context of this study are represented as emergent themes. The emergent themes discussed in this chapter grow out of the common experience of a transition. Here, they have been discussed under sections carrying the same name heading, for example, experience of culture shock, process of integration, and feelings of injustice. Sub-themes such as adaptation, dis-

crimination, exploitation, immigration, limited job opportunities, racism, have been subsumed. I have also taken the liberty of choosing for discussion the emergent themes, which I feel give most illumination to the overall research question.

Living with Challenge: Coping

We have a lot of capacities with which we can heal our problems whatever it is- physical or psychological. We have that ability. If we use it, we can find an answer to that problem. If you switch that off, you may be in trouble.

<div align="right">Omar, Yemen</div>

6.1   Introduction

Beyond transition and its impact are the circumstances of on-going challenge, which the students have contracted to live with for the duration of their study. This chapter will focus on coping strategies employed by the students for 'living with challenge'. These are usually experienced as self-directed and informal. In a subsequent chapter, the emphasis will be on seeking-help as a response to 'liv-

ing with challenge' which of course for many is inter-connected with self-coping from the outset. For the purpose of clarity, I have separated the emergent themes of coping strategies and help-seeking behaviours. In a nutshell, coping as it is used in this work refers to the individual activities of students when presented with challenges. Help seeking adds a social component in that students' activities prompted by the challenges, involve other persons or institutions. Whilst acknowledging the overlap, I wish to highlight the different aspects associated with each and the link between the two. When self-coping is perceived not to be effective or has failed to bring the desired stress-relief, when there are increasing challenges that start to overwhelm or there has been an occurrence of negative events, it is at this point that individuals often seek additional resources outside their usual responses. For the purpose of this analysis, the students' usual responses referred to as coping strategies, are the subject of this chapter.

For the most part, participants concentrated their accounts of experience on on-going challenges, which comprise the every-day banalities alongside the extraordinary high points and low points of existence. The repeated concern of living with challenge, which continues long after the transitional phase, was one that figured prominently with all students. This elevates its importance to the level of a superordinate theme and an organising concept for the many emergent themes. The emergent themes are 'coping by being strong', 'coping by faith or spirituality' also known as 'religious coping', 'coping by using personal resources', 'coping by focusing on the end goal' and 'coping by using natural medicine'. The diverse narratives demonstrated a variety of resourcefulness, revealing both resilience and vulnerability to many different situational factors, that were to shape experience over months and years of study abroad. The personalities and identities of the participants undoubtedly play a role in the range of coping strategies available to them. I expect these are not always or even usually consciously selected but are integral to a person's belief about themselves and their perceptions about the world they inhabit. The emergent theme of 'not coping', descriptive of a range of scenarios, indicating reduced coping and impaired quality of life will also be examined. Often this phenomenon can directly prefigure the stage of seeking help. However, 'not coping' does not necessarily lead to seeking help and over time the gradual erosion of a person's capacities for self-helping can result in emotional breakdown and crisis. Unfortunately, the option of seeking help becomes accessible for some, only as a consequence of crisis and managed intervention.

6.2   Coping by being Strong

The self-concept of 'being strong' repeatedly occurred in the interviews. It is typically used as a description of what students desired of themselves for the preservation of self-esteem and fulfilment of a necessary aspiration to gain approval at a family and societal level. Imbued in this were certain cultural references, which caused some to reflect that this notion of 'being strong' might be culturally determined. Evidenced in a majority of the interviews, it was however more greatly expanded upon by the male participants.

It's about cultural things and there is a difference. Especially male. The boys have to show themselves as strong as they can. So they just go for it and sometimes they ignore the problem. Some people who are weak from inside, face a small problem and they multiply the problem even, by consulting others. (Omar, Yemen)

Omar was a PhD student from Yemen studying Comparative Literature in Hyderabad. He was the Vice President of the Student Union and had been instrumental in helping to recruit participants for my research. In the interviews, he turned out be be an an 'elite interviewee'. Omar had lived in the USA for a couple of years and his comparative studies were based on American and Arabic texts. He therefore had sensitivity and attunement for issues of cultural difference, based not only on an intellectual appreciation but also from experience of living in a highly developed western country. Like many other students, Omar was wary of involving others when facing difficult situations. It seems that he has been conditioned into believing that males have to be strong on their own and a departure from this belief can risk not just one's masculinity but also one's mental health. He even displays contempt for those who are unable to take a pragmatic approach to problem solving, giving the judgement that "they are weak inside", a state of mind from which he is keen to distance himself. He warns against "submitting heavily to others" as experts. To receive solutions from such people is like "switching off yourself". However he is not opposed to seeking help but opines, "It should be a co-operation, an assistance".

He explains that Yemenis "resist to some extent, their problem but if it becomes overloaded and difficult, it will simply be assessed by the group". Omar appears not to be advocating against outside help but questioning the point at which some people make that decision. If anything, he seems to be advocating for self-autonomy in the first instance, admonishing dependency and keeping faith with the belief that the community will act in the person's best interests ultimately, if the problem is acute.

Another male student Khalid from Yemen also studying in Hyderabad reveals a similar attitude about how 'being strong' is part of early conditioning, with terrible consequences for those that fail to live up to the obligatory male stereotype.

You are not safe to share your emotions and difficulties. Actually, you feel bad to tell others that you're suffering from a problem. From the time I was small, I was brought up 'to be a man'. You have to be strong to carry this responsibility and no one has to know your weaknesses. Otherwise, people will say you are not a man. It's very tough. Many people commit suicide, some become mad. (Khalid, Yemen)

Khalid critiques the entrapment caused by economic and sociological conditions, which prevail for most people in his country, especially those who are uneducated.

People in my country are married at an early age, sometimes 16. They are uneducated so it is very difficult to support families. Some have 6 children. How can you provide them house and food, if you want to continue your education? It means if you succeed, you are really tough. (Khalid, Yemen)

By his own assessment, Khalid has overcome these seeming impossibilities to have a family and education. He attributes his success to having an ambition and refusing to accept 'the life of the ordinary man'. Whilst benefiting from society's acceptance, he is aware this success is tenuous and comes at a price.

If you're successful, then people are happy with you. Otherwise, they will start blaming you. He is not strong. they will say he is not a man. It's a terrible judgement. Its tradition. (Khalid, Yemen)

Hanif from Palestine also speaks of the pressure to appear strong. It is apparent that coping by 'being strong' is as much about creating an impression that is acceptable for others. It is a coping strategy of self-protection and one that Hanif resorts to in social situations. He was a teacher in a secondary school before embarking on a master's course of study in India. He told me that he had suffered the trauma of losing thirteen members of his family and some of his students, in Israeli military attacks.

Most of the peoples they are waiting support from me. When I go to see my student's family, I have to give them support. When I go to see my family, my cousin, my uncle they like to see that you are strong. I have to speak with them, nice words, …yeah he is fighting for his country for our freedom, our development, for a State. So I have to give them courage and ask them to be patient. But believe me, it's not easy. Even I didn't cry since I was 15 years old. (Hanif, Palestine)

I was surprised and moved by the way in which these participants opened up in the course of the interview to share such personal and sensitive life experience. In view of the conditioning influences described and the huge gulf of cultural distance between these students and myself as a western white woman, it was an extraordinary step of trust into the unknown. I was constantly resisting any natural instinct to move into a therapeutic role. My aim was to stay present as the researcher. To offer my humanity as a person, whilst acknowledging the nature of the researcher/participant interaction as markedly different to the therapeutic one. This made these revelations of intimate reflections all the more astonishing to witness.

The concept of 'being strong', was raised in a direct way mostly by the males in the study. However, indirectly many female participants addressed this too, without using these words. They were more likely to describe the embodiment of such sentiment in action, by talking about their personal resources in dealing

with challenge. This was another prevalent emergent theme that resonated with both genders and will be examined later in the chapter.

Isla, a female student from Nigeria studying in Ireland, introduced a generational dimension and an environmental aspect to 'being strong' which she believed was relevant to the varying perceptions and behaviour around living with challenge.

It's probably to do with exposure as well. See our generation is more inclined to be like Europe where you actually consider emotional problems like real illnesses. Whereas the older generation will go "there's nothing wrong with you". You're brought up to be strong and deal with it. (Isla, Nigeria)

Isla went on to elaborate more fully, indicating a certain antipathy to therapy that would seem to support the notion that its an indulgence that westerners are privileged to engage in. Real disasters are not the reality of everyday life, unlike in many developing countries.

Here (in Ireland), everything's working, the roads are good, the transportation is all great, you know you are not going to get malaria, you're not going to have a bad war. Whereas if you go to my country, the important illnesses are malaria, fever. Because they don't have these sorts of serious illnesses here, there has to be another illness that is treated as serious and on the same level. At home (in Nigeria), they wouldn't pay much attention to that. Maybe its because there are more things that are killing people nearly immediately. They would not consider suicide because generally people with that background are worried about survival. (Isla, Nigeria)

Isla's contextualisation of the issue was indeed a challenging one. The concept of 'being strong' meant the physical survival of the strong and the fittest. This represented the very essence of existence, of life itself. It went far beyond societal approval and recognition.

There are divergent views in how students perceive attitudes regarding mental health and suicide in their own country and the effect this may have on their

thinking and ways of coping. Evidenced was agreement that mental health problems do exist in their countries of origin but that the subject is stigmatised and therefore very difficult to discuss. There was also a feeling articulated by a number of students that there is higher incidence of such emotional distress in western developed countries because westerners lack the resourcefulness and toughness to solve their problems. Some felt this was a consequence of individualism and the lack of a strong integrated group life; some felt it was a lack of spiritualisation. Khalid from Yemen makes this point when he says

That's why you have psychologists and psychiatrists and all. We didn't have them in our country. We have other forces. We have a low rate of suicides compared to your country. I think because we have spiritualisation. (Khalid, Yemen)

Clearly the concept of coping by 'being strong' has different meanings for different individuals. For Omar, Hanif and Khalid the importance of strength was rooted in masculinity and social expectation. But these categories are fluid and interconnected with other aspects of their identity. Often, individuals also connected their desired strength with their group life, sometimes with faith and spirituality and in Isla's case with the generational transfer of belief. She had internalised the stoicism of her grandparents that confirmed she was born to be strong and to live. It was a matter of survival.

The concept of 'being strong' appears to be at the crossroads of many other entities of reference, the most prominent of which are self-concept and identity, family and culture of origin. It amalgamates both pride and defiance and in doing so, it provides not so much a particular strategy but self-assurance.

6.3 Coping by Faith or Spirituality

The expression and observance of faith and spirituality is often viewed as a helpful aspect to coping, but not universally as it can also be experienced as unhelpful and even disturbing. Participants were not questioned directly about this aspect of identity, so when it surfaced it was entirely at their introduction.

In all seven cases out of the eighteen interviews, it was framed in positive terms. Five male interviewees and two female interviewees spoke of the importance of faith and the observance of religion, as contributing to their sense of coping and well-being.

Amit, a PhD student from India studying at University of Ulster spoke of his surprise at how accommodating and respectful he found the academic staff, in the department where he was conducting research. As this was such a positive discovery at the arrival stage, I referred to it in an earlier chapter on *Impact of Transition*. Noteworthy is the fact that facilitation of prayer rituals during work time, conveyed a deep level of respect to Amit, clearly enabling him to settle in more easily and feel relaxed. The support within institutional policy to enable one of his coping strategies, communicated a powerful message about care and respect. Amit explained how the presence of faith makes a valuable contribution to his life.

I believe God makes things easy for you but you need to put your own efforts somewhere too. Some of it is family, some of it is faith community, some of it is God's help through prayer and meditation and some of it is here within the service (of student support). (Amit, India)

The inter-connectedness of helping sources, which are all the more effective as a collective input, is a point that Amit makes with great conviction and one that bears testimony to many students' experiences. Alma from Saudi Arabia studying for a master's at the University of Ulster shared a similar sentiment, regarding acknowledgment of her faith. This has also been discussed in chapter *Impact of Transition*. Again, the benefit was keenly felt at the arrival stage because it was such a positive surprise for her to discover there was a prayer room on campus, and that staff and students had a respectful awareness about her headscarf and why she covered her hair. Like Amit, she had immediate access to this particular coping strategy, which connected her to a part of her identity that was clearly integral to her person and well being. Elim, a master's student studying in Ireland expresses what faith means for him

We always say that you pray to God to get the courage to face those challenges that are thrown at you. It is strength because if you don't have that, it can break you. (Elim, Kenya)

Despite financial troubles, which were jeopardising his education at the time of interview, Elim felt fortunate that he could rely on his faith to give him strength.

Faith and religion was a subject that raised strong emotions for those who professed its presence in their lives, especially Hanif. He was at pains to describe how fundamental it was to his philosophy of life, which included his need to show that faith and medicine or science (he was a scientist), were not mutually exclusive. As for Amit, faith was not a passive acquiescence to a higher authority; it involved self-autonomy as well as belief. He applied the same principles of belief to other things, inferring that the power to influence an outcome, resides equally with oneself. At the very least, he seemed to be saying that neither a belief in God nor a belief in a doctor would help, if the person doesn't trust in that relationship.

It's up to what you believe. If you speak to any human being, its not that I don't believe it will help. It's something about belief and I believe God will help me. (Hanif, Palestine)

Hanif's analysis of the role of his faith is interesting, in terms of how he qualifies it. Perhaps he felt he needed to make a convincing case that removed all elements of doubt, yet his insistence on his own capacity for thinking independently, seemed quite secular. Repeatedly, for his own benefit or perhaps mine, he outlined his reconciliation of faith and reason.

Even if you believe in God, this will not help you if you have a problem. As the Prophet Mohammad (Arabic praise to God) tells us, if you have a problem, you have to know which problem you have. If there is a medicine to sort out the problem, you should go to that, even if you don't like it. God created your brain to think. (Hanif, Palestine)

In those narratives where students acknowledged the influence of faith and spirituality, the experience of faith differed in its private and public expression. There was no question however, about the meaningfulness of faith to those students' lives, in terms of influencing their world view, increasing their sense of capability and resilience, both to endure and confront the inevitable challenges of life. The complexities of faith are difficult to define, personal and intimate, yet with hidden depths of ancient and traditional affiliations that give substance to one's group identity and sense of self. Each student attempted to make explicit an understanding of how faith and spirituality permeated their core being. I expect they would not appreciate me framing it as a coping strategy. Respectfully of course I refrained from doing that, whilst at the same time observing the therapeutic benefits for those who perhaps were fortunate enough to draw strength from its source.

6.4   Coping by use of Personal Resources

There were a variety of ways that participants responded to challenging events that involved a practical, pragmatic approach, often applied in a conscious way, with the intent of reducing stress. As a way of referencing these particular coping strategies, I have called them personal resources. Some of these were study based, describing a particular way of managing the workload demands or resolving a difficulty. Those that were geared towards relaxation included reading, writing a diary or a blog, listening to music, watching films, having time for oneself and active pursuits such as cycling, hiking, walking, yoga and playing cricket.

The most common reaction expressed by the majority of participants was that they would try to sort out problems on their own. Only after some time and for some, as a last resort, would they consider involving others. This response was fairly equally distributed between the genders. However, there was a much greater female representation for coping strategies that pro-actively sought to achieve a more relaxed state of mind, away from study. Amit studying in Ulster gives a fairly typical view when he says

When I know I have done everything and still the problem is persisting, then I would seek other people's help. (Amit, India)

Yasmin, a female student from Iran, studying in India and Selma from Uganda studying in Ireland both indicate a high level of internal self-support

I don't like to bother anyone else. I'll try to be alone and recover myself. Its not that I'm saying I can manage all the things in the world but I have been able to manage all the things that I face here. (Yasmin, Iran)

I guess it's that taking responsibility for yourself and saying 'look you can't always expect somebody else to solve your problems. You need to give it a shot yourself'. (Selma, Uganda)

Selma goes on to tell me how she overcame a depressive episode in her early years in Dublin. Like some of the other international students in Dublin, she had arrived in the country initially to start a professional job contract during Ireland's boom. Some years later she embarked on a part-time PhD, which she was combining with her job. She describes a staged approach where she evaluated her abilities critically, moving from a Higher Diploma, to a Masters and then a PhD.

There was that aspect of re-assurance to myself that yeah, if its what you actually want to do, you can do it. (Selma, Uganda)

Selma clearly displayed a remarkable degree of self-possession and an insight into her own process for coping. She is an advocate for self-helping and only seeking outside help, as a last resort. She tells me how she dealt with her depression.

First you're overwhelmed, then it's slowly ok, this I can deal with, and then slowly I find that there are more things I can deal with than I thought. One time I remember shouting in the streets. Umh! Did that help? Maybe. But I still had it...it didn't go away because I shouted in the street. It was a majorly difficult

time. It was a struggle. It was kicking me. (Selma, Uganda)

Selma went on to say this experience, which she called a period of 'slumpiness', continued for quite some time. Then she discovered that by doing things that " took her mind off it", her mood started to improve. As an active, sporty person, she took up cycling and joined a hiking group. With enthusiasm, she told me

Now I'm loving Dublin. I've carved out my place. I'm active, I like cycling. If I want to go for a walk in the city its only a few minutes. If I want to cycle out to the hills, it's not far off. If I want to cycle to the beach, it's round the corner. So that has worked to my advantage. (Selma, Uganda)

Other participants who shared creative ways in which they used their personal resources were female.

Two female students tell me of their ways of coping, using creativity. Alma from Saudi Arabia uses art. She once took an art module, as part of her studies in the past. Although not connected to her present chosen field, she still returns to art as a form of relaxation.

I used to do print materials. I feel happy after I finished my picture. It's for relaxation, I'm not professional. (Alma, Saudi Arabia)

Layla, from India shares that writing is her strategy for coping. This gives her a place for reflection and release.

I have a habit of writing a diary. I sometimes put it in my blogs. I personally feel it is good to write a diary to get rid of stress. Its like I am telling this to someone. I'm just letting my feelings out". (Layla, India).

The range and diversity of personal resources employed for coping with challenge was significant. Interestingly, the female participants seemed especially well motivated for finding solutions. They also seemed to be more in tune with their emotions, more psychologically minded and therefore better equipped to deal ef-

fectively with situations as they arose, even in the more extreme circumstances. The purpose of this study is not to critique differences dictated by gender, as this is the preserve of a quantitative study, dealing with large numbers of participants. However, for the sample group of 18 students, there was a discernible difference in the way that the males and females approached problems. This is not to exclude the fact that there were also similarities, in that all students shared an attitude of seeking resolution of a problem, usually by exhausting their own resources first, before considering the involvement of others.

6.5   Not Coping

Between coping and seeking help, there often exists a period of 'not coping' or an experience of reduced coping with implications for students' study and mental well-being. As acknowledged earlier, coping and seeking help are not necessarily discrete entities. Invariably there exists an overlap or inter-connectedness, which is healthy and indicative of a well-functioning individual. However, it is all too common an experience for some students, that once their usual responses for self-help fail to resolve the problems, there follows a period of 'not coping' or reduced coping that can have severe consequences. The severity of such consequences can range from moderate to chronic anxiety or depression to the development of psychiatric conditions leading to a crisis of emotional breakdown and even suicide, in the most tragic cases.

Of the eighteen students interviewed, eleven students spoke movingly about another student, often someone well known to them and in some cases a good friend, who suffered such an experience. In two cases the story shared, tragically involved a suicide of another international student and in one other case, the story shared referred to a 'missing person', an international student, whom the interviewee presumed was dead. Only one student spoke about her own extreme emotional distress manifesting as a depression, which has been discussed earlier under the section of 'coping using personal resources'. She overcame her depression without actively seeking outside help.

Kavinda, an Indian student studying at Ulster, coincidentally at the time of interview, was gravely concerned about another Indian female student, also studying for a PhD on the same course. Kavinda had never used counselling

herself, but wished to avail of the first part of her interview appointment to seek advice about what she should do. Kavinda may not have approached counselling independently, if she hadn't contracted to attend the research interview. Naturally, my role as a university counsellor had to take precedence over my role as researcher, from an ethical standpoint within the context of my job setting. I had a delicate balancing act to perform, in regards to keeping the confidentiality boundaries. I had been closely involved with several departments, including accommodation, the academic department, security staff, the nurse within Student support and a GP in a local practice. The aim was to manage and contain the troubled student as well as the institutional anxieties this situation provoked. The student had become the focus of anxiety for many staff due to her increasingly bizarre behaviour. There was a concern, not unfounded, that she may be exhibiting early symptoms of a mental health condition. At the same time this student was adamantly refusing help from every source, including counselling and medical assistance. The issue was very problematic at the time, causing intense reverberations in the highest echelons, right the way up to the Vice Chancellor's office. Kavinda was not aware of any of this, but felt compelled to inform me that something needed to be done, as she believed this other student was at risk.

It was poignant that the issue unfolding, regarding the complexities of offering support to an international student who was not coping, had actually taken over the interview itself. Without revealing the hinterland of my professional knowledge of the case, I endeavoured to give Kavinda the best advice possible, about how to manage her own role as a concerned friend and to know the limits of this. This meant giving re-assurance. As she had brought this matter to the attention of the counselling team, she had discharged her personal responsibility and could afford to step back a little and feel less worried.

This is the only time that I've known about someone going through a crisis, the one that we were talking about earlier. So according to that, I think that person has been made aware of the help available and I have raised my concerns.

(Kavinda, India)

Despite the advice, Kavinda was still uneasy and remarked that a more pro-active approach might benefit the student. I could not reveal that we were indeed doing this behind the scenes in order to engage this student, but that unfortunately up to that point, our efforts had been unsuccessful.

I wish it was more of a pro-active approach. If the person's mind-set is not willing to go seek help, I think there should be an emergency procedure that would allow student support to intervene. (Kavinda, India).

The implications of this statement are far-reaching and in many ways the debate it raises, underpins the motivation for my research. There are 'difficult-to-reach' students from all backgrounds and cultures, regardless of whether they are international students. How to interpret the institution's duty of care, in a way that's empathic, respectful and effective should be an on-going discussion for a counselling team and of enough significance to have a public profile at an institutional level. In a later chapter on *Enhancing Cultural Engagement*, these themes will be revisited.

Two students Khalid from Yemen and Layla from India had the tragic experience of losing a friend, also an international student to suicide.

He had some mental problems and it ended in him committing suicide, just one year ago. I knew him personally. He called me and told me the story. He was depressed. (Khalid, Yemen)

One student, Isla from Nigeria, told me of her ordeal of supporting a Nigerian friend studying in Ireland, who had an addiction to prescription drugs.

Whenever there's an emotional breakdown or anything like that, it was always kept within the group of friends. It was more a case of each of us supporting each other, rather than actually trying to get someone who knows about this professionally. (Isla, Nigeria)

Isla and her friends realised that the addiction was "leading (her friend) down the wrong path" and the deterioration in her health was becoming very apparent. She says

We asked the girl to get help, but it had to be nearly a forceful affair. Its very difficult convincing someone to get help. (Isla, Nigeria)

Isla went on to describe a situation where the friends "forced her to see a doctor" and felt that their efforts backfired. In Ireland, health care is privately organised so it is possible to see more than one doctor at a time. According to Isla, her friend was seeing five different doctors at once, all of whom were prescribing strong medication for pain relief. There was the financial impact, in addition to the harm to health.

I don't know if it was pushing her that made her go to five different doctors. Sometimes it might be looked on as if you are trying to criticise that person by telling them to get help. Eventually, everyone kind of left her to decide on her own what was best. (Isla, Nigeria)

Isla represents very well the dilemma faced when trying to deal with a friend who is in denial and refusing all efforts of help. In her story, she evoked all the frustrations and powerlessness of caring for someone who was seemingly beyond reach. Professionals face the same dilemma when presented with clients who, for whatever reasons maintain a distorted picture of reality that bears little resemblance to the evidence on the ground. Unfortunately, when such individuals are most in need, it is often at this point paradoxically they are driving people away. This may manifest in a refusal to contact services or in disengaging with services or in alienating a group of friends. It can lead to a self-imposed exile of even greater isolation with ever increasing risk of harm. The reasons for not coping or coping with extreme difficulty, are multiple and diverse. The manifestations of a troubled existence are revealed and concealed in a myriad of different ways. As uniquely represented as they are, the difficulties probably require an equally unique and personal response. If such a response can understand the person sufficiently, to create conditions of appropriate support,

not just for coping but also for growth and development, it would have fulfilled a worthy aim.

In the narratives offered by the students about their own crisis or that of others, students interrogated the question very differently, based on their own experiences. What stood out as significant was that almost everyone knew at least one person in a similar situation to themselves, who had experienced some kind of emotional breakdown. The levels of personal involvement varied, as did the curiosity and interest about what in fact had precipitated these unfortunate events. Some students seemed quite disengaged from thinking about the causes of the breakdown and more concerned about how to support a friend's recovery. Those students, who had lost a friend or acquaintance to suicide

appeared still to be processing the loss and feeling the grief, at the senseless futility of the act. I referred briefly to events surrounding two students (not interviewees) on both sites, who were currently undergoing an experience of crisis, at the time of interviewing. Although representing different stages of a similar trajectory, their experiences through their immediacy at the time of interviewing, showed their power to impact at an individual level and on the institutional environment. The apparently unsuccessful attempt of helping a friend in crisis, as shared by Isla, is another very common narrative. And its not only an experience from a student's perspective, but unfortunately can be a professional's experience too, which can be deeply disturbing and disappointing.

Mercifully, not all students experience crises, but many do and not everyone can seek help or talk about it. I'm sure that all the interviewees were sincere in the stories they shared about friends. However, I also wondered how much easier it was to access obliquely this difficult subject, by keeping the scrutiny firmly on a friend's distress. Only one student, Selma from Uganda, spoke directly to this question, by opening up about her experience of depression. However, she did not at any point feel she wasn't coping, although the challenge was immense. This is why her story was included in the earlier section of 'coping by personal resources' as opposed to 'not coping'. It would seem that to admit such vulnerability represents something of an antithesis to most international students' self concept of coping. If this is the case, it further illuminates just how difficult it is to take that first step for seeking help.

6.6   Conclusion

The experience of living with challenge, as recounted by the participants is remarkably diverse yet there are significant commonalities in the nature of the coping styles shown. Strikingly obvious is the decision by all those interviewed, to grapple with the issues on their own for a considerable period of time, as a matter of pride, before involving others. This seems to epitomise a profound stoicism, not unique I'm sure to international students and designed to draw on a not insubstantial repertoire of resources for overcoming immediate difficulties. Certain coping strategies seemed to be more greatly evidenced among the male participants, like coping by being strong. As discussed this is probably more of a self-assurance, but when acted upon certainly seemed to strengthen the resolve of participants for coping with challenge. Faith and spirituality as a way of coping, was a resource drawn upon fairly equally by those male and female participants, professing the power and significance of this aspect of identity in their lives. Coping by use of personal resources, which included creative means of distraction and relaxation to aid stress relief, was evidenced most strongly in the narratives of female participants. This does not necessarily mean that the male participants did not resort to such methods. But that they did not choose to speak spontaneously about these aspects of their lives, whilst the females did so, with fairly startling openness. The fact that I was a female researcher may have enabled a greater ease of disclosure for the females or they may have experienced a different, possibly less prohibitive form of conditioning. This in itself is a notable observation about the way different individuals conceptualise the perception and resolution of a stress-related circumstance.

The experience of 'not coping' presented interesting interpretations. In accordance with my pre-awareness about difficulties to personalise or admit weakness or vulnerability, all participants distanced themselves with varying degrees to the notion of 'not coping', choosing instead to discuss the distress and crisis of other students in a similar situation.

One student Selma from Uganda was the exception, in that she chose to share her experience of depression following her arrival in Dublin. Interestingly, she couched this in terms that did not suggest, 'not coping' but rather emphasised the struggle to overcome adversity through perseverance and resilience. There would seem to be an unexpressed anxiety around admitting a failure to cope,

which of course is closely linked to the decision to seek help. Navigating this hurdle in a way that does not tap into archaic, even shamed based feelings about inadequacy would seem to be especially important in the context of making help available, professionally. Cultural sensitivities on the part of the helper would be paramount to ensure a response that is non-maleficent, that in other words does no harm but will also go beyond this minimalistic ambition to achieve a good experience that is life-affirming and empowering for the student.

Living with Challenge: Seeking Help

The discussion itself is a therapy. He will talk only to the closest person, and by talking he will feel relaxed and things will move along again naturally.

Omar, Yemen

7.1   Introduction

Help-seeking reveals a social element to coping. Invariably, for most students, it is inextricably connected with self-coping which is individually motivated and the subject of discussion in the previous chapter. Seeking help becomes a more predominant activity when self-coping is not working or is failing to bring the

desired relief or resolution. The challenges may have increased and are starting to overwhelm. There may be an unanticipated succession of negative events or new life experience, prompting the individual to seek additional resources outside their normal patterns of behaviour. Seeking help usually enhances self-coping, especially when those familiar coping strategies are under strain, maybe are no longer effective or possibly may even be exacerbating an already delicate situation.

Sometimes certain coping strategies can turn out to be a short-term solution; for example denial or avoidance of responsibilities, minimising of uncomfortable realities or worse, actively destructive coping that may involve addictions, leading to self-harm. Even positive coping styles as discussed in the previous chapter such as 'coping by being strong', 'coping by use of personal resources', 'coping by faith and spirituality' can be tested to their limits and found wanting, in the midst of new, unfamiliar, and perhaps extreme challenge. This is not to undermine or devalue any of these resources but to acknowledge they work best when integrated with other kinds of helping, located outside the individual, in the form of other persons or institutions and usually involving social exchange. The inter-connectedness of coping and help-seeking is the basis for healthy, well-adjusted living with challenge. However for the purpose of this analysis, I have drawn distinctions between the two, in order to present the phenomena as clearly as possible. In this chapter the emphasis is on seeking help for 'Living with Challenge'. The aim is to understand how the usually individually motivated 'coping' discussed earlier and the behaviour of 'seeking help' discussed in this chapter are experienced by international students from non-European countries and how the respective phenomena relate to each other.

The predominance of living with challenge by employing other responses ensures that 'Living with Challenge' remains the superordinate theme, but in this part of the study it is the organising concept for emergent themes that define help-seeking. These include 'family', 'friends', 'neighbours', 'faith/cultural community', 'medical services, inside and outside university', 'university support from academic staff', 'counselling services, student mentors', and 'employment support from work managers and work colleagues'. These sources of help represent both positive and negative experiences of seeking help for the participants interviewed. The negative experiences usually related to dissatisfaction with services including a lack of services and/or a lack of effective help arising out

of misunderstandings. A later chapter on *Enhanced Cultural Engagement* will pick up these themes again with the intention of constructively processing the learning and direction contained in the criticisms, so that these 'voices of truth' can speak to power, through the medium of research.

As evidenced in the previous chapter, an emergent theme of 'not seeking help' is again present and just as integral to understanding, as it's related affirmative of 'seeking help'. Not all students seek help, which can lead to isolation and increased vulnerability to crisis, an inevitable consequence of reduced coping. This is an especially crucial and often hidden area that can reveal important information, and if correctly mediated, could change the way in which future services are delivered. Part of the same discussion involves addressing themes of 'perceived barriers to counselling', 'distrust', 'lack of knowledge' and 'resistance', all of which figured strongly in the narratives thus gaining profile as emergent themes.

It is not possible to address in depth and detail all of the emergent themes mentioned. As before, I will choose those, which most strongly demonstrate the experience of seeking help for most of the participants, paying careful attention not only to the dominant stories, but the exceptions too. Their contrast and variety illustrate, by juxtaposition, the richness and diversity of the context from which they are drawn. Inherent in the process is the privilege bestowed on the researcher to act as messenger, conduit and midwife in the creation of new knowledge for new audiences, be they authority figures in Universities, heads of services, or government policy makers. This aspect alluding to implications for counselling services will be developed more fully in a subsequent chapter entitled *Enhancing Cultural Engagement*.

7.2   Seeking Help from Family

Without exception, all interviewees spoke about seeking help from family. For most, it figured predominantly as the first port of call revealing varying levels of dependency according to the age, relationship and maturity of the students concerned. Parents represented the key family members for the majority whilst for those students who were married, the key family member was their spouse.

Khalid from Yemen, whose family had moved to India with him, acknowledges the importance of this support.

I talk to my wife everyday. She is my best friend. (Khalid, Yemen)

Kavinda, a married student from India studying at Ulster, expresses similar sentiments. Her husband remained living and working in India, whilst she studied in N.Ireland.

My support system was my husband, back home, because I tell him everything. (Kavinda, India)

In disclosing an experience of racial abuse when she had first arrived in N.Ireland, Kavinda was acknowledging the important role her husband played. She didn't know many people in the first six months, so her telephone calls with him represented a lifeline of support at a very difficult juncture.

Brothers, sisters and cousins were often mentioned too, especially when they had similar experiences of living and studying abroad. In fact where this was the case, there was greater reliance on these relationships for support. Both parties could assume a level of shared lived experience, thus dispensing with the need for preliminary explanations. Selma from Uganda refers to this support

My cousin at the moment is in Sweden, which is handy because you talk to him and he understands the dilemma of having moved away. We both walked that long road, not knowing where it takes you, but you walk it anyway. (Selma, Uganda)

These relationships offered more equality as did the support of a married partner, removing the anxiety for some about "burdening parents" with their everyday woes, subjecting them to even more worry and sense of helplessness. Those students who had travelled the greater distance, both geographically and culturally to Ulster and Dublin seemed more conscious of needing to spare their

parents of any anxiety about their daughter or son's well-being. Inevitably the
need to protect family can compound even further the students stress levels,
thus reducing one significant channel of support. Selma from Uganda describes
this dilemma

*I try to protect them because I know they worry about me being away. I think
me calling them when I am down, how does that help? I mean my mum just
gets more worried.* (Selma, Uganda)

Financial support from parents was often mentioned with some degree of guilt
and anxiety. This was a prompt for a number of students to seek part-time work
so that they had money for luxuries and a sense of independence. Tarif from
Bangladesh expresses his gratitude and discomfort about support from parents.

*The financial part was well taken care of by my parents, so that helped me in
coping. I could pay them back whenever I wanted to. It wasn't like they were
charging me or they had the hammer on my head. But I felt pressure ... just
that they were paying for everything.* (Tarif, Bangladesh)

Four out of the eighteen students arrived at their place of study, accompanied
by their families who had chosen to re-locate with them for the period of study.
All of them were male, and three out of the four were married. For three, they
came with their wives and children and for a fourth, his parents and brother
travelled and settled with him in the new place. Two other students already had
a brother, resident in the place of study for one or two years. These experiences
were fairly consistent across the three sites, at Ulster, Dublin and Hyderabad.

*Initially, I thought having a family here while I do my PhD would be a very dif-
ficult thing to manage but actually, it turned out to be the opposite. Whenever
I was going under stress, my wife and of course my kids were together with me
so I could share my feelings and experiences.* (Amit, India)

Although Amit had expressed misgivings on the basis of cost about bringing
his family to N.Ireland, he actually later recommended this and seemed even

surprised that the benefits outweighed the practicalities. Another student Elim
enjoyed the support of his family who travelled to Dublin from Kenya. However
due to financial constraints, they were unable to remain for the duration. The
unexpected separation at a later date came as quite a blow.

*I was staying here with my family but things were very tough and they had to
leave. So they left me here alone. I didn't have a house to stay because we used
to live as a family. When they left, I had to look for alternative accommodation.*
(Elim, Kenya)

The financial implications of study abroad are borne often by the whole family,
if the student is not receiving a scholarship. Only three students were receiving
scholarships, which included a minimum maintenance allowance and this was
at the University of Ulster. The need for financial help from family recurred
frequently with all its attendant emotional issues. Khalid from Yemen distin-
guishes the types and complexities of seeking help when he says

*I can call my father to give me some money. But someone to understand your
psychology, your social situation ... Someone can give you money but how to
understand your emotional needs is very difficult.* (Khalid, Yemen)

Another student Yasmin from Iran commented that it was easier to hide the
stress from family when living away from home but that meant greater periods
of isolation and vulnerability.

*If I live in my family, definitely they will catch me. They will see my behaviour,
they will see that I'm not eating, not joining them. But here because I'm living
alone mainly in my room, nobody will understand that.* (Yasmin, Iran)

She goes on to explain which problems she can ask for help with, how family
can actually help and how she wishes they could help more.

For smaller problems, like stress in my exams, I usually call my mom. Talking to her, she is so calm and relaxed, she gives me advice like "Be patient, do your prayer". When I'm getting pain, I feel I need my mom to be there. I need her especially to cook something for me. (Yasmin, Iran)

For different students, the concept of family has various meanings including parents, spouse, siblings and cousins. For many, family represents the first source of support. But at the same time many students qualified this by saying it depended on the nature of the problem, what they discussed, and in how much detail. Where there was common experience of an education abroad, the quality of the support seemed to be valued more highly in terms of its helpfulness. The single students were younger, less mature and not surprisingly more reliant on a parent, usually a mother in times of distress or sickness. Yasmin's longing for her mother's home cooking to make her feel better, is touchingly resonant. However most were painfully aware of the limitations of family support because of separation by location, by educational history and different understanding about the challenges of living in another culture. They were trying to straddle the differences between themselves and their families, differences arising out of their new life experiences abroad. Inevitably, these changes were creating distance in relationships with some parents, implying something of a role reversal where the student starts to censor the information, to minimise parents' potential anxiety. The developmental process of separation from parents, to establish oneself in early adulthood, underpins some of these processes. This inevitably helps to shape an emerging identity. The theme of a shifting identity, consequent on the challenges of new life experience, will be the subject of a future chapter.

7.3   Seeking Help from Friends

All participants spoke about seeking help from friends. If there was a hierarchy of sources of help most often called upon, friends and family exist at the top. Interestingly, some students said categorically they would confide first in friends before family, and others said family would come first. None said they would seek medical or professional counselling as a first response. It was apparent that the social side of help-seeking is multi-dimensional. Sometimes it is prac-

tical help that is sought from a parent, for example when the issue is financial, and the emotional support can come from friends; sometimes it is study support which may come from a family member, perhaps an older sibling, a friend, or an academic staff member; sometimes the emotional support can even come from an academic staff member, if friends and family are not available or not able to relate to the issue. For most students, their help-seeking was confined to family and friends although they did share experiences of seeking help from other sources, with varying degrees of success and satisfaction. This will be discussed later, under the afore-mentioned emergent themes of professional counselling services within university, medical services (inside and outside university), academic staff, student mentors, faith and cultural community.

If it is some personal issue, which I cannot tell my parents, I go to my friends. (Layla, India)

First, I would go to my friends. I would always go to my best friend first and talk to her. Then my sister. My parents would be my last go because they get all tensed. I try not to bother them. (Nadima, India)

For different students, 'friends' had different definitions. It could mean 'friends back home' whom they would phone or friends from their country who were now also studying abroad; it could mean friends they had networked before their arrival, resident in the local faith/cultural community; sometimes it meant friends whom they had made in the host country who came from a similar background; sometimes this included local students. The latter was less common, but not exceptional.

Amit from India and Alma from Saudi Arabia are students who networked in advance of their arrival in N. Ireland.

Before coming here, I was in touch with one of my friends who was doing his studies here. When I got an offer to do my research (at Ulster) I contacted him and he advised me how to do things here. He connected me to those people who are already living here. (Amit, India)

Amit describes the help as a mixture of practical assistance, emotional support and advice at a later date, when he and his family had to move house due to racial attacks from local teenagers.

In the initial days they kind of took care of us and very much supported us with settling in, groceries, going around, practical things, which we needed. They were the ones who advised me later, you need to change the place (of living) and it really worked out good for us, though not financially. (Amit, India)

Alma also describes receiving a mixture of practical and emotional support from 'friends' from a small Saudi Arabian community, which she linked into, prior to coming to the University of Ulster.

The first thing is I visit my friends. They are living in Belfast, from my country and they are close to me, so I always go there. They always support me. They give me piece of advice and they are older than me. Yeah we are like a family or small community. (Alma, Saudi Arabia)

Both these students appeared to have settled well and despite problems they encountered, which have been discussed elsewhere, received a positive level of support from 'friends' from their local faith and cultural community. Remarkably both were also able to consider Irish students or neighbours amongst their friends. Only three other students in the study referred to the local people/students as 'friends'.

Alma refers to the students from Donegal, a neighbouring county, but in the Republic of Ireland, as also having problems living away from home. She feels this has helped her to bond with them.

I have Irish friends to improve my English. They are my classmates in University. We are always sending messages by Facebook, we can meet each other, go to cinema. They always ask me if you have any problem, if you need help with your assignment, in your studies, you can come anytime to our home. They are from Donegal, so their families is not close to here. We have same problem.

(Alma, Saudi Arabia)

Amit refers to his Irish neighbours as 'friends'. This is within a specific context when he and his family were suffering racial abuse from teenagers who persisted in knocking their door, ringing their bell late at night, then running away.

We had very good neighbours, like friends and we used to discuss these issues with them. They said, it's not the problem with you; we are also getting this treatment from these youngsters. They were saying the best thing is just ignore them, don't reply and just keep calm. (Amit, India)

Amit and his family did move house later, but he appreciated the advice and support even when it wasn't effective. The spirit in which the support was given was what mattered and the impression of neighbours as 'friends' remained.

Two other students relied heavily on their cultural group, Isla from Nigeria and Lin from China. However, unlike Amit and Alma, they did not network these 'friends', prior to coming to University. They met up with their cultural group when they arrived. Through her studies, Lin met eleven other Chinese students who shared her accommodation and Isla met other Nigerians through her employment. Isla initially came to Dublin for professional work and later combined this with PhD studies.

I met them here, but they were all from Nigeria. So they kind of helped me through it because they were already here (Isla, Nigeria),

See, because we got eleven people there, so we were living and studying together and we have strong support from each other. Communication with local people, that's quite different from what we learn from book. It's a big shock for us. (Lin, China)

Those students who had 'friends' from their own country or cultural group, whether they knew them prior to coming to University, had networked them

in advance of arriving in the host country, or had randomly and fortuitously fallen in with such a group, seemed to benefit hugely from this support. Where this circumstance was absent, the struggle to settle and integrate was evidently much more of a challenge. This is notable in Selma from Uganda's story. She did not have such a group to link into. This would seem to have contributed to her depression, which she spoke about so candidly and has been discussed in another section. Like Isla, she had travelled to Dublin for professional employment, later combining this with PhD studies.

I moved in on my own, so it was pretty much me living alone, going to work and then back home. Yeah, you have colleagues but you barely have friends. So I think I spent most of my time, calling friends who are away. (Selma, Uganda)

When Selma's depression was lifting, she recalls going cycling with an Irish friend.

You know, going cycling with a friend who says nothing, but just goes cycling with me, that made substantial differences at that time. (Selma, Uganda)

One student Kavinda from India, studying at Ulster seemed to stand out as exceptional, in terms of her stance regarding friends from her own country or cultural group. She relied on her husband and her family but shared that she did not have friends in India or from her own cultural group that she felt she could trust. She had lived in America before coming to N.Ireland. It was only when she travelled outside her country that she started to feel at ease and started to make friends, with whom she could share at a deeper level. She is insightful in her analysis, attributing this to her own developing maturity and confidence.

I don't know if it's a cultural thing or not, but I don't think I would be comfortable talking to anyone from my own country. Probably it was my immaturity at that stage, but I would think, "How are they judging me?" But here and in the States, when I started making friends, I could be myself. (Kavinda, India)

Kavinda's experience contrasts starkly with the other students' accounts of experience and perception of support within their cultural group. The attendant issues surrounding identity and new opportunities afforded by a new culture for self-growth will be addressed more fully in a subsequent chapter.

The idea of 'friendship' as a sacred gift to be celebrated occurs a number of times in the different narratives. Hanif from Palestine, studying in India, prizes friendship now, as much as his fellow Indian students do. He explains the difference, in his perception, with his own country's norms.

In our country, we believe in relatives more than friendship. Here in India, they believe in friendship. In India, friendship is wonderful and I really like it. (Hanif, Palestine)

Khalid from Yemen, also studying in India extolls the virtues of friendship.

I believe that friends are bigger than anything else in the world. You can live without much, if you have two or three friends who are honest and sincere. (Khalid, Yemen).

Omar from Yemen, studying in India emphasises the importance of friends as integral for living, a cornerstone of Yemeni culture as he sees it. However he makes the point very well that there are different levels of friendship for helping, but in any case, each has a valued role.

Amongst Yemenis, I think no one has no friend. I don't think any Yemenis students in Hyderabad can live alone, out of the group, because one way and another our life is part of others ... (Omar, Yemen)

Seeking help from friends is a diverse and multi-layered activity, vital for coping with challenge and living well. For some there is a very strong cultural sense of the appropriateness and value of enjoying this resource and it comes naturally and spontaneously. Yet there is an innate sense for many, about the level of

trust to engage in, for the help to be beneficial. It can be pre-meditated as shown by the efforts of some students to make links with their cultural group before arriving. The nature of the help needed can be considered objectively and dispassionately, as in who is the best person to offer advice about housing issues and dealing with prejudice or it can be the result of historical good help that can be relied upon from a best friend, now perhaps in another country. The exceptions also carry the caveat that one should be aware of assuming that international students will be able to locate and feel supported by their own cultural group. When this does occur, the dynamic can be greatly enhancing of a person's well-being and sense of self in the new place. However, it is also possible that the student may not want to connect with their own cultural group, as in Kavinda's case or that there isn't a cultural group to connect with, as in Selma's case. New perspectives then arise out of unfamiliar circumstances, calling for a different style of coping that may involve seeking help.

7.4   Seeking Help from University Counselling Services

As with medical services, counselling would not be the first port of call for those experiencing distress. In fact, even for the most open-minded students of the group, it would be a consideration, only after friends, family, medical services and academic staff were unable to help substantially and/or had positively recommended counselling services. Having permission or recommendation from other trusted sources was highly significant in terms of forming an opinion about whether counselling services were worth consulting. This has huge implications for the integration and embeddedness of counselling services within the University setting, not to mention the importance of good supportive relations with other possible internal referring agents.

From the sample group of eighteen students, only three students had any experience of counselling services. These three students were at University of Ulster and had seen myself for a one-session study related matter; two had been referred by the campus nurse and a third referred by an academic member of staff. Perhaps of some significance, is that two further interviewees at Ulster, with no prior knowledge of counselling, sought counselling appointments, post

interview. Although the concept of professional helping was known throughout the group on all sites, the understanding, perception and pre-knowledge differed substantially. Despite not having used counselling services, the remaining fifteen students expressed a range of opinions, both positive and negative, regarding such services. Some were open to the idea of talking to an independent professional, despite limited knowledge; many were suspicious and ambivalent, yet able to enter into a'thought experiment' of what they would expect in such a circumstance; some openly discussed stigma and the need to be selective about the nature of the issue discussed, especially if it were 'cultural'.

Amit from India was one of the students who had attended a one-off counselling session, prior to the interview. He explained the personal process he went through

I was given a leaflet saying there is student support, but somehow I didn't register it. Maybe it was lack of knowledge. It doesn't mean student support don't support, but I was just thinking that getting the support from the community was a lot better . . . (Amit, India)

Amit went on to describe his hesitancy about contacting someone whom he regarded as 'official'.

Despite his reservations, he confided that in his last year of PhD studies, his difficulties increased and he started to experience a high level of anxiety approaching his viva. He says he could have come earlier but it was only at this point he considered "a second opinion or extra help".

I was fortunate that the nurse referred me to you and I still remember that time when we had a half hour chat here. If you really talk to people, even though they might not have some ready-made solution for you in that moment, but you get the feeling that someone understands you and your situation. A word of encouragement is more than enough. It revitalises you and you get your energy back. That was about a month back and since then things have really gone good for

me. (Amit, India)

Having the endorsement of another valued opinion was also instrumental for Lin, a Chinese student studying at Ulster. In her case, the recommendation came from her Course Director.

I didn't really know about counselling, so I called Jay (older PhD Chinese student who teaches P/T and acts as a mentor). He told me it's for any concerns you have, you can tell them what's happening to you. (Lin, China)

The fact that the Course Director and the senior Chinese student gave her a positive impression was sufficient to inspire trust in the counselling service, about which she knew virtually nothing. She said "its strange for us, we don't have knowledge for that service, to know what it is and what help they can give us". Lin went on to explain the sequence of decision-making.

If I got problems, first I would sort out by myself, then other classmates. If its serious I tell my Course Director and she told me about the counselling service, so I came here. If I can't sort out by myself, the course director can't sort it out for me, then nobody can help solve those things. Only because she recommended, so if not, I would not go in there. (Lin, China)

Lin volunteers that her reticence is not only related to unfamiliarity or lack of knowledge. Her reservations suggest a concern about being stigmatised by other Chinese students.

I think because we don't have this in China. We just contact the teachers, course directors. So if we have a little problem, our people will think that it is a serious problem, if I say I'm going to counselling. (Lin, China)

Despite not having consulted counselling services directly, the fifteen other students are articulate, imaginative and forthcoming about their concept of professional helping, whether or not they would consider this source of help and

if so, in which circumstances. The personal narratives are characterised with feelings of distrust, lack of knowledge, sometimes-inaccurate knowledge, resistance, rebellion and even contempt in some examples. However interviewees also displayed a willingness and curiosity to engage with the unknown and to take a risk in the interviews. This meant contemplating possible scenarios that may involve revising some of their pre-judgements. I was particularly struck by the number of times participants contradicted themselves in the course of the interview, seemingly to move from a position of reluctance or non-consideration of counselling services to a more open-minded stance with certain conditions. Although I was interviewing as a researcher, I was also using my counselling skills to assist the conversational flow of the interview. This may have enabled greater disclosure and a more relaxed contemplative attitude where it is possible to think more flexibly and less rigidly. Contradictions are also part of thought process, when one is suitably engaged in the effort to understand and make sense out of the confusion and complexity of a new awareness. In many ways, the interview presented an opportunity for emerging new awareness, inviting students to examine their pre-existing awareness of counselling services, and expanding on this by considering new knowledge and insight gained in the course of the interview.

Selma from Uganda declared her position on counselling services quite emphatically.

I would consider it the very last help I would do, if I had no other alternative. If something heavily traumatic happened to me, which it hasn't and I hope it doesn't happen, but that would really be a last resort (Selma, Uganda)

Selma's spells out her resistance in quite vivid terms.

What are they really going to tell me apart from what is in a textbook? Especially someone who doesn't know me. I believe it gets artificial, its just me sitting down in a chair, in some office and then talking, yeah so what. There is more to me than 30 minutes of someone listening to me...so much more than can be compressed into that time (Selma, Uganda).

Selma then began to grapple with the idea of 'being a client' during the interview. It was as if she had decided to follow the idea in a kind of thought experiment. Initially she thought it demeaning, as if she would be "just another story". But finding the courage to follow her thoughts aloud, she produced some remarkable insights.

They (counsellors) will give advice based on the experiences of the many people they've seen handling issues. What they learn from others, they can bring to you because they have that richness of material, which I don't have. I'm just introvertly looking at myself, but there is more out there. (Selma, Uganda).

Selma's openness in the interview allowed a fascinating glimpse into her pre-awareness and what may present as barriers to accessing counselling. Whilst each person's story is unique, there were echoes in other interviewees' descriptions to suggest that the resistance and ambivalence felt, was not particular to Selma alone. Isla from Nigeria, also studying in Dublin shares a similar sentiment that the presenting issue would need to be extreme, before considering counselling. Her reference point is what would occur back home.

When you hear of people going to a counsellor or psychologist at home (in Nigeria), you can obviously see that they have lost it. It's when it can be seen (Isla, Nigeria).

Like Selma, she enters into a kind of internal dialogue with herself and me as witness. She vacillates between different positions: what is a common response from a place of heritage, to what might be her response now, living in Dublin. The process of this I will examine in greater depth in a subsequent chapter, entitled *Shifting Identities*.

Isla settles on a considered view that appropriateness of counselling rather depends on the problem. This is a departure from the extreme presenting issue that would be required for such a decision in Nigeria. However she voices different reservations. She strongly questions whether a counsellor would have the

necessary cultural awareness and sensitivity to be helpful on cultural issues.

I'd be very wary that the person talking to you can fully understand the background. If it's a problem related to home . . ., it could be something a counsellor has read in a book. I know they're not meant to be judgemental but sometimes I feel that the counsellor cannot fully relate to my background, except what I have said or what has been written in a book or the internet, especially if its culturally related (Isla, Nigeria).

Isla brings substance to her doubts and apprehensions by giving the example of arranged marriages and inter-generational misunderstandings with parents.

You hear sometimes about parents who want to marry off their daughter to who-ever . . . The girl probably would not want to say this to the counsellor because they feel the counsellor is going to go "that's ludicrous, nobody does that any-more". You're kind of worried that that kind of judgement will come up (Isla, Nigeria).

Isla speaks back to her own internal musings in the interview, almost by way of re-assurance that counsellors would be more professional than to show such ignorance and disregard. But still she decides it would be risky to open up on such personal matters.

(The counsellors) probably wouldn't say those things because that's not the way its meant to be. But I still would be worried. There's just a bit of a gap there. But at the same time, we can't get the counsellor to go and sit in your family to try to get the full picture. (Isla, Nigeria).

Isla's other example where she fears counselling may not be helpful is in the relationship between parents and children, from a different background.

In our background, the way we treat parents is different to the way parents are treated here (in Ireland). I probably wouldn't seek counselling for that. I feel I

know how my parents work; I feel the counsellor is not going to relate to how it works at home. I'd rather resolve that myself than going to a counsellor. If its not related to home, I would seek a counsellor no problem. Again, its still going back to the cultural perspective, when it goes down to that, then I probably wouldn't (Isla, Nigeria)

Isla rather implies that a less serious issue would be acceptable to entrust to a counsellor, now that she feels stronger and more mature in her own authority after five years of living in Dublin. Paradoxically, being less needy can enable people to take more measured risks as they may feel they have more residual strength to survive a rejection or disappointment. Isla thinks her maturity has made her more open for seeking help.

In the past, I probably wouldn't have (sought help), maybe because of where I came from. I would just deal with it myself and try to make a decision somehow. Also I would have thought, I'm not going to go to this person who's going to tell me what my parents have already told me'. But now probably I would ask for help. (Isla, Nigeria)

The developmental underpinning that characterises the transition of adolescence to young adulthood is in evidence and shaping her expanding identity. She is not alone in referencing her cultural background initially, by saying how her parents and grandparents would conceive of a situation. Then from this starting point', she is able to weave in and out of her thought processes, figuring out where to position her own views. This verbalised stream of consciousness was fascinating to observe as the researcher. Partly I felt myself occupying different roles from the self-conscious voyeur to the privileged practitioner/researcher to the trusted friend who had been invited inside her mind to share some secrets. As already mentioned, the subject of shifting identities' will be given further elaboration in a subsequent chapter.

The idea of counselling being something of a mystery was a recurrent theme. For those studying in Ulster and Ireland, there was a perception that it's a service more suited to the local students because they are familiar with it and know what to expect. Those, who were studying abroad for the first time, most

keenly felt this 'outsider mentality'. For those studying in India, although there was an outsourced service accessible by telephone, there was a feeling that such help was remote, disconnected or just not available. Omar from Yemen gave his experience of trying to obtain help for a friend, about whom he was concerned.

I have seen a notice. There is a person who has given their number for psychological assistance. I tried calling that number to connect him to my friend, but no answer. They don't come to tell us there is this facility, where it is and who it is. (Omar, Yemen)

Khalid from Yemen articulates a common experience within the sample group that helps to illuminate students' low expectation and use of professional help.

Coming from my country, I was not aware of these things. There was very little support. I didn't have this idea that I could be supported. I came with only one purpose in mind, to study. When you grow up without these things, unless you are introduced to them, you'll feel that they are extra, not part and parcel of your academic work. (Khalid, Yemen)

Tarif from Bangladesh studying at Ulster presents a similar starting point, but is able to move beyond this, no doubt helped by the reality of the setting of student support, where the interview took place.

Student support or student counselling is not very common back in my country. I may hesitate to come and share because I don't know whom I'm approaching. I don't know how much I could trust that person. (Tarif, Bangladesh)

Like Selma and Isla, he fluctuates between different views in an attempt to make sense of the new knowledge afforded by the interview experience. He apparently contradicts himself by initially offering that he could only imagine using counselling for "something that's not very personal" to later deciding that hypothetically the issue could be "something which (he) may not be able to talk to parents about".

Tarif shared a viewpoint with a number of other interviewees that it would be preferable to speak to someone who didn't know his personal history.

Probably not knowing anything about that person helps. Like it gives you a more unbiased solution to the problem. (Tarif, Bangladesh)

As it happens, Tarif took the opportunity within the interview to discuss one of the most personal issues of all, his sexual orientation. In his own country, homosexuality is prohibited and discovery carries a prison sentence. In accordance with ethical procedure, Tarif was offered counselling appointments post interview, which he attended. It is unlikely he would have used this resource, had the contact in the interview not taken place.

Yasmin from Iran, studying in India also expresses her preference for an independent person, with no prior attachment, when seeking help outside of family and friends. In fact, without having any experience of counselling, she unwittingly gave a description of what she imagined counselling was and how she felt it could benefit her. I think many practitioners would recognise the aims of counselling contained in her statement.

I've heard a lot of advice, do this, do that. Don't go there. Don't' come here. So I need someone to share my feelings with and who listens to me and gives me some space to relax (Yasmin, Iran).

There were just as many students who presented a diametrically opposite view, that personal history was essential for sharing one's vulnerability.

Nadima from India represents such a view. She shared with me that she had experienced harassment from an ex-boyfriend.

The psychologists we would be consulting are like total strangers for me. I can't go and pour out all my problems in front of them and tell them that I'm being

harassed by someone. Especially when it is going on. (Nadima, India)

Hanif from Palestine offers a pragmatic view on seeking professional help.

He re-iterates the commonly held belief that counselling would only be for extreme circumstances.

There was one critical period in my life, I asked my wife to marry. Actually in our tradition, we are not allowed to speak with a girl before marriage. So it was a one-side love for two years and when I decided to marry her, there was some other guy who came and asked her to marry first. That was the most horrible time in my life. (Hanif, Palestine)

Even students who seemed fairly determined in their stance that counselling was not something they would easily consider, if at all, were surprisingly and paradoxically open about discussing their private lives with myself as a researcher, knowing that I was also a counsellor. This suspension of disbelief, the bracketing of known information, I found very intriguing. Their stories stayed with me long after the interviews were over. The richness and intensity of the sharing continues to astonish me, especially as many of the internal and external barriers to such open inter-active robust conversations, appeared so prohibitive.

There was a general consensus amongst all the students, both the minority who had used counselling services and the majority who had not used the services, that this particular form of help was only for extreme situations. Extreme' in their perception did not always mean 'at risk', it could equally mean when their studies were affected by anxiety or depression or they had financial worries that were distracting them from study. As with most students in general, any issue that was having a detrimental effect on achievements was regarded as high priority. However, almost without exception, counselling services were not considered with the weight of immediate usefulness as many other sources of help, like family, friends, academic staff or medical services. The point at which counselling services assumed a high level of relevance and usefulness, was when referrals or recommendations were made by the other more familiar and better understood sources of support, usually internal to the university, for example a nurse or

course director. The unexpected discovery in this part of the enquiry was the students' willingness to engage with a "not well understood phenomenon", i.e. counselling services, despite lack of knowledge, lack of trust or even scepticism and prejudice. What I had observed and reported as contradictory responses, perhaps on further reflection may be more accurately described as a *developmental process within the interview*. It seems that initially many reactions and responses were of an automatic type that changed into a more curious, hesitant and uncertain, yet more open form of enquiry. Students who were able to step into this place of reflection, often could see the advantages of having a fresh perspective offered by an independent person, yet retained a healthy paranoia about the limitations of counselling. This attribute I fully respected, especially in the context of university services, which have some distance to travel to provide favourable conditions that promote good cultural engagement. A subsequent chapter entitled *Enhancing cultural Engagement* will address this aspect.

7.5 Conclusion

Help-seeking involves a degree of risk-taking. To step outside what is perceived to be 'the norm' at a time, when one's personal resources are already depleted, is scary. Seeking help involves self-exposure but does not necessarily result in getting help as had been evidenced in the students' stories. The resistance exhibited by some students at the thought of accessing psychological help, tended toward the dramatic and the extreme, to the extent that they were convinced the presenting issue must be similarly extreme, to merit such an action. The degree of risk-taking is closely allied to the preservation of safety and self-protection, which would seem to lie at the heart of the sequencing pattern of help-seeking that emerged within the analysis. By sequencing, I mean the hierarchy of persons or agencies that are consulted on the basis of their perceived helpfulness and trustworthiness, at any given time. Family and friends exist at the high end of this spectrum, followed by medical and academic staff as being the next best understood source of help and therefore considered reliable. Faith and cultural figures for some students would figure higher in the spectrum, assuming the status of 'friends'. To continue the analogy, counselling and psychological help as reliable, accessible sources of help, figured much further down the pecking order. These were more likely to be considered as a last resort when all

else had failed, or if they were recommended by a more familiar and respected source of help. For those who had real experiences to base their perceptions on, the placement of counselling/psychological support in that imaginary hierarchy differed hugely. Counselling as an option of help assumed a high status for the students who had used the service, as they all had positive experiences. The possibility for negative experience also exists which would compound the resistance and scepticism observed, entrenching it even further. This gives some idea of the delicacy that is involved in changing opinions and mind-sets in this area of help-giving, in view of the barriers to be overcome. And that's notwithstanding the practical barriers: bureaucracy, potential insensitivity of services and a potential lack of cultural training on the part of student counsellors to meet the needs of students from non-European backgrounds, if they do mange to cross the thresholds of student support Departments.

When a more democratic weighting of the different forms of support starts to take precedence, where each source of help has its place, not in some imaginary hierarchy as the current perceptions suggested, but rather having an equal valid place of inter-connectedness, this will signal progress. A way forward that can take inspiration from enhancing cultural engagement can then begin to open up. There were tangible glimpses of this expressed in the words of a student who had used counselling services. I think it is therefore fitting to offer the final reflection in the student's voice.

The help has to come from different places to work. Some of it is your family, some of it's the cultural and faith community, some of it's your supervisors, some of it is God's help through prayer and meditation and some of it is from here within the student support service. (Amit, India)

Shifting Identities

If you are in isolation, then we continue to go in the same direction. If you have interaction, you will get ideas from other people and we develop.

Khalid, Yemen

8.1   Introduction

Cultural identity involves at its core a sense of attachment or commitment to a cultural group and is thus both a cultural and psychological phenomenon (Berry, 2007). When a person's attachment or commitment is challenged through exposure to new conditions, to new information and when the person is separated by geographical and psychological distance to their cultural group, it is inevitable that he/she will be changed in some way by that experience. This has impli-

cations for one's sense of self especially at a key point in developmental terms, thus helping to fashion an evolving identity. These processes are not always conscious, yet inside the interview space there was ample opportunity to bring into consciousness some of that lived experience. A significant number of students reflected at length on how they felt their study abroad had changed them, not just in terms of knowledge acquisition and employability, but capturing something less tangible and more profound such as greater circumspection, increased awareness and understanding of other cultures through exposure, with inherent opportunities afforded for self- development. Such positivity could easily belie the struggles involved to embrace such change. What it meant to resist being 'swept up' in the new situation when there was a perceived threat to one's cultural identity, was also perpetually in awareness. To hold or even attempt to reconcile these conflicted feelings is no easy challenge. I was privy to witness at close range what I described in the previous chapter as students' apparent self-contradictory thoughts. In their stream of consciousness' I found myself flowing along with them as they weaved in and out of their internal debates, attempting to make meaning out of confusion. Competing forces and sometimes opposing interests, in their many permutations, were evidenced in the students' narratives. There were deliberations on: their individual needs versus the needs of the cultural group; the validity of opinions steeped in heritage, passed down generationally, versus opinions borne out of actual or more recent experience and what it's like to arrive at a balance in the 'new place' that feels distinctly different.

With reference to the methodological framework, the superordinate theme is 'shifting identities', the organising concept for emergent themes that are concerned with self-development and self disclosure which I've chosen to focus on in this chapter. This seems to highlight an essential awareness around changes to one's identity: some subtle and barely perceptible changes through to the more radical shifts, which involve uncovering or revealing a hitherto hidden part of identity. Within these movements, it's also worth noting that many aspects of identity appeared unchanged and stable, for example spiritual identity for those who professed a faith and personality which most perceived as remaining consistent. When shifting occurred, the anchoring effect of those other elements of identity seemed important for coping and facilitating the changes necessary for self-development. Many emergent themes are repeated from other superordinates as their complexity ensures that they do not exclusively reside within

set parameters. With matters concerning identity, there is fluidity that enables cross-coverage and is essential in phenomenological terms to capture perspectives from different vantage points, for example from the viewpoint of 'Living with Challenge' or the viewpoint of a 'Shifting identity'. The emergent themes are therefore disjunct and overlapping. Sometimes the material draws from the same stories but where possible I have varied the examples in order to provide variety and maintain the reader's interest.

There is an evident need to preserve independence and self-pride when living away from home and family. Departing from the cultural norms can be seen as weak, a subject given close examination in a previous chapter on 'Coping' with particular reference to 'coping by being strong'. This could be viewed as part of one's cultural identity, part of one's personality or both: either genetically conceived or brought into existence through nurture, the experience of being raised within a culture with its certain habits and customs or a mixture of the two. Believing oneself to be strong and determined can present a dilemma when students might consider asking for help, but find they are caught up instead with an internal conflict triggering self doubt, (for example, self-questioning about why might they need help if they are supposed to be strong), suspicion and scepticism about helping agencies and their potential to misunderstand, stereotype, or judge. The threat of having aspects of identity disrespected, albeit with well-meaning intentions from helping agencies, as discussed in the previous chapter, was a concern that was voiced repeatedly, as was genuine surprise and appreciation when the opposite held true.

Being able to express such anxieties allowed some of the students to continue to explore their feelings of defensiveness and anger surrounding perceived portrayals of their culture, which they believed were misrepresentative. This also opened up discussions about stereotypes, which the students themselves held and continue to hold about western identities. Some spoke about having these stereotypes challenged and revised, both their own and what they judged to be the stereotypes held by the 'other'. Those who were able to engage these concepts revealed that their expanding insights were a transformative process, invaluable for self-development.

8.2 Self-Development related to Cultural Change

Most students referred to experiences of self-development, additional to educational advancement, during the course of their studies. Some had actively sought out the experience of studying abroad as they harboured expectations about wanting to expand their horizons, to overcome certain fears, to become more self-reliant and to learn about other cultures. In more extreme cases, two male students shared a recognition that they had to move away to be able to explore and express their identity because of their sexual orientation. Even to talk about same gender expression of love and desire was culturally prohibited, in their own country. This will be examined specifically in a later sub-section. Female students tended to be more reflective about what they gained, from a personal perspective, during their sojourn in another country. Male students tended to be analytical and more detached but not oblivious to changes in themselves, brought about by a different environment and behaviours, to which they were not usually accustomed. They were often more interested in societal comparisons, for example eastern and western traditions, frequently expressing a dominant affinity for one but not to the exclusion of the other. Their participation as students in a differently organised society (to the one they were used) implied some level of membership and belonging to the new cultural group as well.

Maya a female student from Guyana was studying in India and very proud of her decision to go abroad for study.

My very first big plane ride was coming here. That was the first time I travelled alone in my life! It was for twenty-four hours. Four international airports with three big bags and a laptop. I did it. If I can handle travelling to here, I can definitely handle staying here! (Maya,Guyana)

She openly spoke about how protective her parents were of herself as an only child and how much she craved the space to develop her independence. She

explains by saying

When I am at home in my country, if I couldn't do something, mom and dad will always be there. If I screw up, they will be there to help me pick up the pieces. Here I have me and it feels good to be independent. I have always wanted to work outside my country for a couple of years to get experience and overcome my fear. (Maya, Guyana)

Similarly, Tarif from Bangladesh shared thoughts about a new found independence, gained by living and studying abroad. He spoke about the practicalities of acquiring life skills that helped him to feel more confident and responsible. Like many students, before he left home, his mother had organised his meals, his laundry and his pocket money. He was proud of having a part-time job that provided his 'luxuries' and enabled him to take care of himself.

I've learned a lot. This experience is not only the degree. The fact that I'm living here- from the morning, I have to plan my day. I also work two days. I don't have to depend on my parents now for pocket money. The confidence is much more in me. (Tarif, Bangladesh)

These issues of self-development characterise a key transition from adolescence into young adulthood and are shared by all students regardless of their cultural background. It's a form of identity management that almost floats under the radar as its familiar and unspectacular, yet for many international students of this research it is the base line, in addition to all the other complexities of identity management that they have to negotiate.

Selma from Uganda studying in Dublin is also very attuned to the opportunities and experiences of personal growth. She is deeply reflective about her own individual process.

You're starting all over again. Everything is new. You are carving out your identity in the new place. Now I'm happy being by myself when I feel like it. If I'd stayed at home, I wouldn't have had the chance because of the cultural bind-

ings that you need to abide with. For example, it's not considered very normal to be on your own (in Uganda). People think are you ok? It's very social and communal. (Selma, Uganda)

Selma has learned to enjoy her own company and solitude, embracing this as part of her self-development. She equates strength with being able to be on her own; she describes a developing sense of individualism, characteristic of the western society she has been living in for the past five years and an experience not known or associated with her life in Uganda. She supplies the minutiae of her thought process to illustrate

I'm more confident. I want to be this way and it may not necessarily make everyone happy. I also have to realise that I can't always have it my way so there is that juggling between taking time for me and sharing it as well. (Selma, Uganda)

The motif of being a child and learning new skills and habits as one grows up in the new place, is one used by other students too. Isla from Nigeria, studying in Dublin prefaces her account of living and studying abroad in much the same way as Selma.

It's like growing up again, trying to figure out how to do things (Isla, Nigeria)

In another chapter, 'Impact of Transition', Isla's struggles to fit in were closely examined including the pressure she felt in the Irish society to go out drinking in order to integrate and to appear very outgoing like everyone else. She reiterates an opinion that the age at which a person travels to the new country is highly significant. As a young seventeen year old, Isla had conformed to the societal pressure as she felt there was no choice and after some time describes the changes in the following way

It gets to a point when you are doing what everyone else is doing, you start feeling comfortable in yourself, going ok, that's not bad and it becomes part of you (Isla, Nigeria)

Despite seemingly going with the flow of what was expected, Isla gave a revealing example of some habits and reactions that are rooted in her heritage. It refers to the tension between formal and informal forms of address.

One thing that struck me a lot. At home, we don't call people by name in general. Here, to my lecturer, I can't go Caroline or Steve, its always Dr or Mr or Mrs Something. So its little things like that will cause me to be wary and not sure how to integrate. there are some topics that are more sensitive than they are here. (Isla, Nigeria)

One of the topics she referred to, which has been discussed in another section, was the attitude towards professional help in Nigeria and how much this still dominates her response after ten years living in Ireland. Yet she was able to concede that her own position on the matter differs to that of her parents. This is her explanation

It's probably to do with exposure. See, our generation is more inclined to be like Europe where people want to give the same status to emotional problems and to consider them as real illnesses. The older generation will go "there's nothing wrong with you. You're brought up to be strong and deal with it. You don't need to talk to anyone. (Isla, Nigeria)

Interestingly, Isla puts a time frame on how long she thinks it takes to become comfortable and familiar with the new culture in the host country. The fact that she is the longest person remaining in her chosen country of study, Ireland, gives her this authority.

I think you need five years to get in line with everything. Its not a 2 or 3 year process, its something that takes time. (Isla, Nigeria)

Another student Kavinda from India, studying at Ulster had spent a number of years in other countries including America. As discussed in a previous section, exceptionally, she felt that distance from her cultural group enabled her self-development. However, like Isla she had also raised the issue of maturity as

playing a key role. She attributed her distrust of her Indian peers and perceived fear of their judgement and lack of confidentiality, as a reflection on her own insecurity as a younger self. In her more mature identity, she interestingly offers a viewpoint that varies significantly from the other interviewees, regarding her relationships with others in her cultural group.

I would have to say I am more comfortable with people or students from India who have been here for quite a while. They have kind of been adapted as well by having new cultural experiences. They don't have the same judgemental mindset to judge me. So I can be more myself with them. (Kavinda, India)

This viewpoint contrasts starkly with views expressed by other participants who in the main, relied greatly on the support of other students from a similar cultural group for their sense of security and selfhood, especially in the early stages of their integration. Amit from India, studying at Ulster expresses a commonly held view

I would say the more similar you are to other people, the better you can integrate with them and communicate.   (Amit, India)

Many students commented on the benefits of exposure to other cultures, but admitted it didn't come easily.

I think its better for me, the mix between different cultures, different religions and different languages. (Alma, Saudi, Arabia)

Although Alma, from Saudi Arabia, studying at Ulster, advocated integration, she also intimated that this was effortful and required perseverance. She explained where study was involved, she struggled to remember her newly acquired knowledge, even though she had understood it in class.

Sometimes I feel shy when asked a question because I didn't have the answer. When I am reading something relevant to my study, I'm always understanding

but after a while, I can't remember. Because you know it's in English and my
mind is Arabic. (Alma, Saudi Arabia)

Through her study, Alma is progressing her development, sometimes slowly and painfully. Her succinctness in describing the current duality of her world is poignant. Her mind she says is 'Arabic' and yet she is in a situation where all transactions of daily life, most crucially study, is conducted in English. The added dimension of difficulty to achieve self-development in these terms is surely immense.

In more abstract terms Khalid from Yemen, studying in India also advocated integration, as helpful for self-development.

If you have interaction, you will get ideas. Arabs also sought inspiration from the
East from Buddhism. If we are alone we tend to continue along the same path.
But if we are with different people and mix with them, we develop. (Khalid,
Yemen)

Khalid often referred to the impact of studying in a multi-cultural society.

I came to understand how people can co-exist in a variety of cultures. I came
from one country, one religion which is Arabic and there is only one culture
there. When I came here (to India), I came to know the meaning of multi-
culturalism. I learned a lot about how people show respect, regardless of faith,
culture, attitude. Liberal thinking is more imaginative. (Khalid, Yemen)

Characteristically philosophical, sometimes Khalid interjected with some personal details to illustrate his point.

I used to be always in a rush when speaking. I learnt how to be patient, how
to show respect and wait for the other to speak. It makes you revise your own
culture, your own customs and beliefs. I had some Indian stereotypes. We
know about each other through the stereotypes. Getting beyond those perceptions

makes it real. (Khalid, Yemen)

8.3   Reaction to and Reflection on Stereotypes

The subject of stereotypes came up on several occasions with different students. Sometimes this was in a context of grievance regarding the misrepresentative and damaging stereotypes that they believed Americans and Europeans held about them. On further enquiry, some openly revealed the stereotypes they held about Americans, also which they described as damaging, often unrepresentative and not helpful for developing understanding between the cultures. Students who had travelled and lived in Europe and America, and who were psychologically open for adventure and experience made these assertions. Two had a specialist interest as they were studying comparative literature in American and Arabic texts. Their reasoning and understanding is probably much more sophisticated for this. Omar from Yemen expresses his ambivalence about the aspects that are good in his own Yemeni culture and the aspects of American culture, which he disparages. Later he gives a different rendition weighing the positive aspects of his experience with individual Americans and some of his misgivings about the cultural aspects that suppress expression of identity in Yemen.

I have studied a little about American culture. Whether I can claim its American or not, I don't know. But our (Yemeni) group life is greater than their group life. They live, kind of individually. Their decisions are made by their own instincts. They have been taught in different conditions to live the dream'. They call it the American Dream' and you have to be the American hero, by yourself. You have to achieve a lot of things. They don't expect any guidelines from their parents. (Omar, Yemen)

On the big questions of marriage, education and jobs, Omar goes on to describe how decisions are collectively made in Yemen, a polar opposite reality to the American system.

If you go for love marriage by your own self, your parents will not come to help you because they will say, "This is your choice. We were old enough to guide you but you didn't listen". There are actually very few people who face this problem, as arranged marriage is very common in my country. Decisions about getting a job are also made by parents, by friends and by the government. Even the government has to have a form to get a recommendation from the parents and the sheikh ,the person who is the leader of the village. Sometimes I feel it is not good and sometimes I feel it is good. It's difficult to be objective. (Omar, Yemen)

Having experiences in both cultures, Omar's ambivalence was palpable. Frequently he was at pains to give as accurate an account as possible about his cultural background. He told me he was sometimes upset by the stereotypes, which he learned that western people held about Arabs. Out of a fierce sense of loyalty he wished to correct what he felt was a failure of perception.

Being close friends and working on cross-cultural studies, you sometimes get information about what people think of Arabs. They think they are very backward people, that they are very conservative, that they don't talk to women, that they don't drink...and they avoid them. This is completely different according to my experience. (Omar, Yemen)

To give some symmetry to the reportage, Omar reveals the stereotypes he has been conditioned into receiving and which he does his part to counter.

In my country, the same stereotyping is there and about sixty per cent of it is wrong. I have been told Americans are proud, they don't care about others, they are selfish, they are stupid, they use women like toys, they have no values. I have been there (in America) and met people. They have their own culture and their own values. Most of them are helpful. I was surprised when I met people who have guided me. So what we need to do is to meet people and talk to them to understand them. And one day we will bridge that gap. (Omar, Yemen)

Omar had a wonderful sense of optimism, fairness and inspirational qualities which made it easy to understand why he was the Vice President of the Student

Union. In this capacity he brought his humanity to others in a natural leadership style, befitting his charismatic personality. He was constantly bridging gaps in everyday encounters with others, including myself. The very fact that I was able to recruit interesting interviewees for my research in Hyderabad was in no small measure down to his instrumental role.

8.4   Giving Voice to Unspeakable Truths

During the course of the interviews, there were two male students who disclosed their sexual orientation, probably for the first time to an independent person. One was a Bangladeshi student at the University of Ulster and the other a Yemeni student at the University of Hyderabad. This was a highly significant event for both, as their secrecy and concealment of this aspect of their identity was necessary for self-protection in their own country. Discovery of homosexuality in either country was dangerous to the extent that it could result in imprisonment and even death.

The disclosure was prompted by one of the interview questions, which asked if there were any personal issues that would make the interviewee delay in seeking help and if so was there anything they would wish to share. Before answering, Tarif from Bangladesh, studying at Ulster, asked some carefully constructed questions himself about confidentiality and what this meant in terms of information shared in the interview. He was reassured sufficiently. I answered him in the same way I would a client, aware that my role as counsellor would have to take precedence from an ethical point of view. I was nevertheless very surprised when the interview took a remarkably different turn, especially as up until this point Tarif had maintained he would only use counselling for something that wasn't too personal. I felt it was important that I acknowledge his difficulties with the same sensitivity as if he were my client, whilst finding a way to contain the issues so that a follow up counselling appointment could be arranged. I explained that this would give him the time and opportunity to explore the issue more in-depth, which wouldn't be possible in the interview. This intervention worked. I acknowledged with him that at one time, such prohibition was also the case in this country but that things had changed, thanks to protest against oppression, which had made it possible to live in a more open society. And

even with permission and freedom of expression as it exists here, I reassured him that occasionally local students also struggled with this issue and came to counselling to discuss it confidentially. This seemed to steady him to continue with the interview. He also attended counselling post interview, as offered.

There is one problem I'm going through lately, it's regarding sexual orientation. It has been affecting me for a couple of years. Right now I don't know what's right and what's wrong. It's like it has infected my brain. I really can't think what's morally right, what's religiously right. It's always a constant battle between my heart and my brain. My heart and soul say something else and my brain says No this fact is wrong'. There's nothing about whether Islam encourages. I really don't know what the holy book Qur'an clearly states or not. But its something that's not even in the society. Its completely prohibited in my country (Tarif, Bangladesh)

Not only was Tarif concerned for his own welfare but that of his parents. Despite his fears regarding their reaction, he was more concerned about the impact this would have on them because of the societal prejudice.

This is not something I can go and talk about with my parents. Even if they do understand, there's a social pressure to reject it, like it's going to destroy them. So I really don't want them to go through that phase. It's disturbing to me because now I'm growing up and I really don't know what to do about it. I've tried hard to get it out of my mind and the more I try, the harder it gets. (Tarif, Bangladesh)

I didn't have the chance to check out what would be the role of Tarif's cultural group in this situation but I had the impression that he would go to great lengths to ensure that this information would remain strictly private. It would seem that the new cultural situation had offered Tarif an outlet to express a part of his identity that had formerly been hidden for fear of reprisal due to cultural censorship.

The interplay between the needs of the individual to express his/her identity, be it sexual identity, spiritual identity, cultural identity when it brings the person into conflict with the identity of a group to which that person belongs, is a serious dilemma. Tarif felt tortured by his divided allegiances to satisfy the needs of his parents, not to provoke rejection from his cultural and religious group and still find a way to be true to another vital part of his identity his sexuality. He was at a loss to know how to reconcile these seemingly disparate parts in order to satisfy the most natural human condition of seeking intimacy in a relationship with a significant other. Seemingly, the prohibitions made it impossible to reconcile these elements of his identity and still remain a member of his cultural group, whilst in Bangladesh. It was as if there was an unspoken sacrifice required to suppress some aspects of his identity, in order to keep faith with other aspects. Having geographical and cultural distance from the dilemma, perhaps taking flight to a more permissive setting was the 'time out' that he needed to process these profound reflections for his identity development.

Omar from Yemen, studying in India, presented a similar issue. In India, homosexuality is a criminal offense although there have been strong recent attempts to have it decriminalised. In India, the punishment can be imprisonment up to life imprisonment. In Yemen, the punishment is the death penalty. India could hardly be called a permissive society, but compared to Yemen there was a degree of more liberal thinking and if nothing else, legitimate protest was tolerated, in some quarters. It is against this backdrop of serious prohibition that Omar spoke about the issue of sexual orientation. Not surprisingly the content was much more veiled and obliquely approached but nevertheless, the angst this engendered in him was unmistakable. He referred to the issue as "an unspeakable truth". Like Tarif, he presented the conflict of the needs of the individual against the authority of the cultural group often resorting to an intellectualised response to what he saw as a precarious, intractable and dangerous dilemma. His strong sense of loyalty as an ambassador of his cultural group exacerbated his frustration regarding the groups' intransigence on this personal issue. He talks about an "exit from these expectations" involving breaking bonds with the group, which may be necessary and would be a sacrifice.

I will be suffering for a while until I find the right resolution. You in your country are all right. But here when you talk about sexuality, it's unwelcome, it's

an unspeakable truth. The other person is a friend because we are abroad. But our culture is inherited in us. Of course I can try to ignore it, but I feel this aspect will hurt me. I know in some things you have to express your feelings, you need someone to talk to, to deal with problems. All these things relating to sexuality, it is something natural, it is something we have to speak about and to know. It's the same like what kind of food, about clothes, about religion, about politics, about everything. But when it comes to this, it is a very sensitive issue in my culture. (Omar, Yemen)

The intensity of these insights was very powerful to witness. Omar was grappling with very serious and conflicted thoughts that seemed to exist at the very core of his identity. He had a strong sense of self and knew his sexuality was not 'wrong' despite the threatening messages from the culture he inherited and the society to which he belonged. He was very proud to be Yemeni despite the negative aspects of the culture, which he regarded as repressive. He described how he felt torn between putting the needs of the group first and then fleetingly considered the reverse situation of putting his own needs first. Breaking the ties of tradition implies betrayal. If followed through this would be a sacrificial act.

If you are within the Yemenis group or community, I know it is my right to speak. I feel because of others I must speak about it. But if you ignore your community, you are also violating something relating to them, which is not the right way to correct those conceptions. If I behave in any way that contradicts or insults the Yemeni culture, their expectations will be broken. Sometimes I feel I need to do this to help me solve my problem. It's a kind of sacrifice. I know they will be hurt. It is also a problem for the group. (Omar, Yemen)

He goes on to expand his thinking, outside the bounds of his individual issue. By considering the implications of related cultural repression for others in his cultural group, he is motivated to question what can be done to address it.

There is a lack of sex education, which is blocked in our country. If I want to correct these misconceptions, it is a huge project. If they consider it a challenge to their norms and customs, they will not listen to you or your research. We have to take them to the future and show them how to how to correct the curriculum

from inside. My problem is also their problem at the same time. (Omar, Yemen)

Typically collective in his approach, discussion of cultural repression did not make Omar want to reject any part of his heritage or identity but rather to find ways to bring new perspectives to aid reform, so that the Yemeni people could benefit. This was inspired from his studies, travel and exchanges with people from different backgrounds: the influences at work in his own acculturation.

The experience of the shifting identity can be viewed as occurring to the individual but can equally be applicable to populations, subjected to a myriad of different change agents, be it returning students educated abroad, passionate to make an impact, internet organised protest, collapse of an economy or change of leadership. Thus, group identities can expand and change too, redefining the cultural meanings and agreements of membership. In Omar's ponderous oratory, I often caught sight of his visions for a better future, not stifled by the seemingly meaningless restrictions that can force the individual to be culturally bound within their own identity. The shifting identities of individuals has potentially far-reaching implications, not only for the individuals themselves in terms of self-development but for the impact they will make both individually and collectively in their lives.

8.5   Conclusion

Identity is an elusive concept. It would seem safe to assume that identity is made up of various different elements, for example cultural identity, personal identity, sexual identity, spiritual identity, gender identity, political identity. They encompass both the idiosyncratic dimensions associated with individual qualities and attributes combined with group identifications such as cultural, religious and political affiliations, to name but a few. All of these identity elements can shift according to circumstance but not usually at the same time. Some are stable and others flexible, a balance of which seems important to enable self-development for an evolving and achieving identity.

So what is the impact of studying abroad on a student's identity? There was a general consensus amongst students interviewed, that opportunities to live and study abroad were indeed life changing in a variety of ways. There is probably an inherent self-selection, represented by a higher number of students in the sample, who possess the kind of curiosity for exploration that is a necessary pre-requisite for such a commitment in the first place. This aside, there was a remarkable amount of commentary and reflection from the students about the changes they observed in themselves, as a result of their experiences. The most obvious of these changes is the purpose for which they travelled: an education in their chosen field. However in addition to the obvious, there were many other changes that students regarded as significant to their development. This ranged from the everyday ordinary observations, relating to acquisition of new life skills like cooking and laundry to having a part/time job; ability to embrace one's own solitude and develop greater self-reliance; the ability to develop more liberal thinking based on real human exchanges with people from other cultural groups; being able to revise one's prejudices and refuse the stereotypes gained through cultural conditioning, through to serious disclosures of a suppressed sexual identity. For the two individuals who disclosed what had been and still remained a hidden part of their identity, it was apparent that they could only begin to examine this issue in the host country because cultural prohibition and political reality would have made it impossible at home. Therefore within a spectrum of shifting identities, some could be described as more gentle and subtle changes to moderate adjustment through to others that are radical and ground-breaking, all of which will have a bearing on the student's identity development and concept of self.

The seeming paradox of flexible and stable aspects of identity would seem to offer some insight into the conundrum of why such shifts can be experienced as self-development for some and not for others. Those who are coping well and probably seeking help appropriately as needed are the same students who experience shifts in identity, which are not threatening and can be positively managed. Those who are unable to find accommodation or resolution for their conflicting identifications from the heritage culture and the new culture are therefore more at risk, not just in terms of lost opportunities to develop their identity, but crucially are more likely to suffer existential crisis. For this reason, greater cultural engagement on the part of student support services with students from non-European backgrounds, is essential to support not only the

educational experience, but to provide favourable conditions for their identities to shift and evolve. This is likely to enable more of them to achieve their natural potential. The role of student support in taking a lead on 'enhancing cultural engagement' will be the focus of the next chapter.

Enhancing Cultural Engagement

What are the psychological problems for a student? How can we make a good environment for students to be more productive? The University is taking a huge amount of money from the government and from students. If the administration and the government don't care about the students, the outcome will not be good.

Omar, Yemen

9.1 Introduction

Why is cultural engagement key to the improvement of existing services for international students and how can it be enhanced? The term cultural engagement was used by more than one interviewee as a way of describing a two-way process of communication that is interactive and implies a concerted effort on

the part of both participants to meet the other 'more than half-way'. The latter suggests a deliberate act of crossing into another culture as part of a learning endeavour intended to be a meaningful human encounter. A study that is faithful to the phenomenological approach must seek illumination from the students themselves as 'wise experts' and aim to tap into an underused resource of knowledge that can give insight and direction on the subject.

Cultural Engagement can take place at a variety of different levels: between counsellor and student; between academic staff member and student; the organisation at a structural and policy level understanding the students' needs and between international students themselves with students from other cultural backgrounds including local students. The previous chapters were based on a distillation of individual interviews of eighteen students from three different sites. Emergent themes then were clustered under the organising concepts of super-ordinates, which gave rise to the chapter headings. The same principle is continued in this chapter. In addition, the study design includes one modification, in that a group discussion (taped and transcribed with participants' permission) of four interviewees on the Dublin site is considered. The reason for including the group discussion, alongside the eighteen individual interviews in the analysis, occurred following my observations and reflections on a workshop prepared originally as a testing ground for a talking/writing group. I realised that the group discussion was indeed an embodiment of cultural engagement where four of my interviewees from four different cultural backgrounds (known to me through the interviews but not to each other) were actively and productively engaged with each other. For them this represented something quite unique – a chance to share their experiences of living and studying abroad, in a safe supportive environment. The quality of the sharing between strangers who had just met was intimate and moving and afforded new and confirming insights of the phenomenon being researched, namely the help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies of non-European students. For this reason, it seemed too valuable a resource to pass over. I will devote a section to the Dublin interviewee discussion group entitled 'enhanced cultural engagement in action' which can be found in Appendix D.

9.2   Reflection of students on how to improve support services

Most students expressed a lack of awareness and knowledge about what support services actually delivered, even if they were in place, and attributed this to the lack of proactivity on the part of student support to promote their services effectively. By this they meant that no special effort was made to advertise directly to international students to make them feel welcome.

Elim from Kenya, studying in Dublin spoke to me about financial problems he was experiencing at the time of interview which were threatening to derail his academic career. This has been discussed in more detail in chapter *Impact of Transition*. His perception of student support services, which he had not used, was that they were general to all students, therefore not specifically equipped to deal with issues particular to international students. This may have been compounded by the fact that he was seeking financial hardship assistance, which is not available from the host country to international students, but is available to students resident in the country.

There does not seem to be a particular service of support for foreign students. The services that are there are just the general ones (Elim, Kenya).

I wondered about the origin of this incorrect assumption. The efforts made on the part of student support to emphasise the inclusivity of their services and to avoid unhelpful labelling, whilst being well-meaning, may have other unintended consequences. Clearly Elim needed some confirmation that international students like him could expect a service flexible and adequately resourced to deal with more specific needs. The 'one size fits all' or the 'one stop shop' mantra, of which University student support departments like to boast, did not seem to induce confidence in his case.

Khalid from Yemen, studying in India highlighted the attitude adopted by the University of Hyderabad, which seemed to make no distinction between the

needs of the local Indian students and international students.

The situation is I am far from my country and this is new to me. As a foreigner I have my own problems and they are dealing with me as if I'm an Indian. (Khalid, Yemen).

There is an ironic parallel with Elim's experience in Dublin. In Hyderabad, the generalist approach seems borne out of neglect; in Dublin, it seems borne out of a questionable deliberate policy to ensure inclusivity and non-discrimination. On both sites, the significant variation in fees between the two groups (local students and international students) fuelled resentment. There were no apparent extra measures taken to welcome international students especially in Hyderabad, let alone culturally engage with them in the new set of circumstances.

Omar from Yemen also studying at Hyderabad gave a description of what it was like to contact services that were not 'in-house' but outsourced. There was a perception that such a service was peripheral and remote and in this case not even available.

I have seen a notice. There is a number for a person giving psychological assistance. It was a joke at the time with my friend, but I actually felt he needed some help. I tried calling that number to connect him, but no answer. And I didn't know where this is. (Omar, Yemen).

Omar went on to say that the impression that remained with him afterwards was that the university and the government don't care about the students, despite the lucrative revenue received.

Even where there existed in-house counselling facilities which had been used and praised by the interviewees, as at Ulster, those very students commented on an initial difficulty of not knowing what support services were, how to access them and whether or not they included international students in their target audience.

It is not highlighted. When you join, either your supervisors or department secretary should give you clear information. (Amit, India).

Another student Alma from Saudi Arabia studying at Ulster, who like Amit had used the services, also re-iterated the need for outreach.

For me, I didn't have any idea about student support and how they can help me except for my module co-ordinator. (Alma, Saudi Arabia).

Lin from China studying at Ulster commented on how crucial it was to convey information as early as possible to students. She recommended that this be done at the pre-sessional courses for those students who arrive for English language lessons, before their course begins.

I think if you can recommend these services in the pre-sessional course, maybe on the last day before the first semester big start. If international students know how important that service is to give benefit for their studies, they will come. If you can make examples of problems, then people will think if I have that problem in the future, I can go to counselling services. (Lin, China)

Lin recommended an educational approach, which she thought would make the service seem more accessible especially as it was located in an educational context. This notion had resonance with other students too. Often when students advocated such an approach there was a suggestion that it be done in a pro-active, outreach fashion to increase the likelihood of a positive response.

Kavinda from India studying at Ulster identified with this viewpoint. She was also mindful that others, fresh from their country of origin, would have greater difficulty accessing the help, than those students like herself, who had studied in European and American universities.

I've had an international exposure. My mind-set is open to take help from student support but that's not necessarily the case for other international students.

I wish it was more of a proactive mode of approach. I think there should be an emergency procedure that allows the student support to intervene, not wait for the student to ask help. (Kavinda, India)

The point at which student support should intervene when there is a suspected impending crisis, as discussed in the Chapter *Living with Challenge: Coping* remains a vexed question. The balance between considering and respecting an adult's autonomy which includes their right to ask or reject help, over and against the risk to their health and well-being due to mental ill health, is a dilemma counselling services and practitioners are continually faced with. When does pro-activity in the quest of enhanced cultural engagement become meddlesome, patronising and undermining and when is it beneficial or even necessary for improved culturally sensitive relations? There is also a place for 'rescue' which a pro-active approach enables, which is sometimes necessary following a risk assessment. Undoubtedly those crisis situations, which of course can never be removed altogether, may be reduced in frequency and seriousness by an earlier intervention, aided by enhanced cultural engagement. In a well functioning 'helping community', communication is essential between departments such as library services, academic staff, security, accommodation and counselling, who may all have a vital perspective on the risk management of a disturbed international student. When all parties are able to engage with each other and the student in a manner that suggests they are sensitive and respectful of the student's cultural differences, there is every chance of an improved outcome.

The cultural engagement is therefore likely to take place on different levels: at a departmental level between departments/services in respect of the student's needs, at an organisational level directing the policy which will influence the student's future at that university, between student and individual staff members, be they counsellors, nurses, tutors, security personnel or accommodation officers. In any event, minimising risk and maximising the student's experience are twin probabilities increased by closer networks of inter-connected members in a 'helping community', as in the afore-mentioned example of services. Being able to engage with each other 'about the student and with the student' in a culturally sensitive manner, is the challenge that can define a better pattern of working for all concerned, with better results.

This provokes some deep questions about the way services define themselves. One student Isla from Nigeria, studying in Dublin questioned the ethos of offering help as conveying an attitude of belittling or infantilising the people whom it seeks to serve.

I think the service is portrayed to a lot of foreigners as somewhere to go if you have a bad illness. I think you don't want it to be phrased as 'getting help' because it looks as if there is something wrong with you. (Isla, Nigeria).

Alma from Saudi Arabia, studying at Ulster offers a related point on the perceived inaccessibility of services for international students.

Sometimes international students will feel shy to ask different questions. I have problems and I couldn't go myself. I needed someone to advise me, to tell me to go there and to push me to go in that place. If each School or module coordinator could do this, that would be good. (Alma, Saudi, Arabia).

Alma's reflections reveal how much expectation there is on academic staff to link international students to the appropriate services, therefore confirming the need for good internal relationships between university departments. Whilst this is a desirable condition from which all students can benefit, participants' recurrent responses indicating a reliance on this channel of communication, reveals just how important the mechanism is. Alma, Amit and Lin all studying at Ulster benefited from the internal network. Each had received services from student support and commented positively on that experience. Doubtless, without the signposting from academic staff and the campus nurse these students would not have visited student support of their own volition.

Across the three sites, Hyderabad, Ulster and Dublin, international student interviewees consistently intimated that more proactivity on the part of counselling services to reach out to international students would be welcome, desirable and even necessary for them to consider help from this source. A majority of the participants, regardless of whether or not they had direct experience of counselling services, identified a need to educate students (and sometimes staff)

about what counselling is, how it could be useful and how it could be accessed. Ideas on how to achieve this varied between individuals. The best kind of support, experienced or imagined, seemed to be an inter-connected 'community of helping', not only of resources internal and external to the university, for example university counselling and external community psychiatric services but also the connectedness between internal resources such as links between academic staff, medical staff, counselling services, student support office, accommodation office and security services. The more established the relationships are between such services, the greater the sense of safety and containment for the individual student and ease of referral and access. Ultimately, the community of international students could benefit from a 'community of helping' services in close proximity, which attempts to understand their needs, responds accordingly and tries to stay engaged in the endeavour of enhancing cultural engagement for the benefit of all concerned.

9.3   Barriers of Resistance

In the profession of counselling, the concept of resistance is instrumental for understanding the barriers that may be blocking progress and development in an individual's therapy. When examining the phenomenon of help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies of Non-European international students, there is a not dissimilar parallel of needing to understand their resistance to engaging with Student Support, before it is really possible to talk of enhancing the cultural engagement. As discussed in the previous section, students expressed opinions about lack of knowledge and awareness, precipitating suggestions and recommendations about greater pro-activity initiatives for outreach. This carries with it explicit suggestions of the responsibilities for improved cultural engagement residing with the Student support services. However, many students moved beyond the point of locating all responsibility for change, outside themselves, and were prepared to share at a deeper level some of their reservations about engaging directly with counselling services. Naturally lack of knowledge and familiarity figured strongly, but perhaps more revealingly many spoke about a lack of trust.

Amit from India studying at Ulster had a positive experience of support services, following referral by his academic tutor and the campus nurse. Casting his mind back, he tried to capture the nature of his early reluctance.

I would talk to people who are supportive without being official. We did get leaflets and booklets when we arrived on campus. But somehow I did not even go through the details of what are the services provided by Student Support. Probably it's a kind of avoidance. Maybe we think that we don't need it initially, so we just ignore it (Amit, India).

Amit went on to elaborate by referring to trust issues.

Anything you reveal has to have this trust factor and if that's missing, you won't do it. (Amit, India).

The concept of confidentiality in regards to personal counselling, was not well known or understood by many of the interviewees. There were a few students who asked for explanation. Certainly the fear of disclosure of personal information may play a role in their reluctance to approach the student support service. Notably for one student, Tarif from Bangladesh, studying at Ulster, this explanation changed the course of the whole interview. This is discussed in depth in the chapter 'Shifting Identities'. His disclosure of sexual orientation and decision to accept subsequent counselling appointments, post interview, hinged on this very issue.

How will my information be protected? I don't know how that could be established but if I had that belief and confidence that what I'm sharing with you would be in this room only. But if I have fear in my mind, I won't be coming to you and sharing anything. (Tarif, Bangladesh).

As discussed in chapter *Living with Challenge: Seeking Help*, Isla's avoidance was compounded with other reservations such as her tendency to trivialise her own difficulties in deference to the big survival issues such as malaria, drought and bad wars which were part of her heritage perspective. Unlike emotional

issues, these constituted 'real issues' which could precipitate real illnesses.

Because they (western people) don't have these illnesses, there has to be another illness that is as serious that needs to be treated at the same level (Isla, Nigeria)

Its not surprising that there were no issues that Isla felt were important enough for her to seek support within university counselling, as a young student. As discussed in chapter *Shifting Identities*, Isla's attitudes and responses had shifted in the ten years since she arrived in Ireland. She observed that in Ireland she felt

People are more inclined to help, inclined to listen and can probably relate to a problem in a more constructive way. (Isla, Nigeria).

Yet she openly admitted that she lacked trust in professional counselling where the issue may relate to a cultural issue.

I'd be very wary if the counsellor talking to you can fully understand the background, especially if its culturally related (Isla, Nigeria).

The feeling that counselling services probably aren't equipped to deal knowledgeably and appropriately with cultural matters was raised directly by two other students. Selma from Uganda, studying in Dublin was quite outspoken in her reservations. Omar from Yemen, studying in India was concerned about misunderstandings resulting from poor communication and language difficulties.

What are they (counsellors) going to tell me apart from what is in a textbook? (Selma, Uganda).

As discussed in chapter *Living with Challenge: Help-seeking*, Selma actually used the interview space as a fact-finding opportunity to learn about what counselling services can offer students and in the course of that exchange began to modify a negative pre-awareness. Although she was suspicious and sceptical about what kind of cultural engagement was possible, interestingly she confided that although she had not used these services and probably would only consider engaging as a last resort, she was glad they were there.

I like that the services are there, it is important. Different strokes for different folks. Some people do need the services. (Selma, Uganda).

Omar from Yemen studying in India raised a reservation about trust issues connected to language difficulties. He worried about harmful implications.

Sometimes, when we have an emotional issue or psychological or financial problem, it is difficult to explain it to the Indians. Even though it's in English, some people don't have enough English to express their feelings. So, there might be some misunderstanding and the doctor or psychologist might misdiagnose the problem and multiply the problem (Omar, Yemen)

The self-imposed barriers of self-judgement, perhaps culturally determined are also much in evidence. The concept of 'Being strong' which was discussed in chapter *Living with Challenge: Coping* figures prominently for the male interviewees.

Sometimes when you have a lot of problems, you might think of consulting a psychologist, and then you forget it. From the time I was small, I was brought up "to be a man". (Khalid, Yemen)

In a similar context, the fear and scourge of weakness is commented on by another student

Some people who are weak from inside face a small problem. They can double the problem, even by consulting others. (Omar, Yemen)

Although less strongly asserted, female interviewees also express contempt for vulnerability. Selma from Uganda studying in Dublin gives a flavour of this

What I don't want is to get into a kind of super-dependency of "Oh, I'm feeling so low, therapist see me." (Selma, Uganda)

This is matched by an incredible spirit of resilience which no doubt played a major role in enabling Selma to overcome her depression, without professional help, in her early months in Dublin.

In some things, you have to give it a try to know you are capable for it. If you undermine yourself in the process, you don't grow. (Selma, Uganda)

Health and psychological services in western systems are very much couched in the Eurocentric model of delivery, where the individual is responsible for looking after oneself and/or locating the appropriate services, as needed. It may well be that such an expectation placed on those international students who have grown up inside a more collectivist society are doing exactly what comes naturally to them: expecting figures of authority to share responsibility for their care. This is not an unreasonable expectation but may differ in degree, compared to European/American and local students' expectation of pro-active intervention.

Clearly there are various aspects that create barriers of resistance or at least contribute to a much commented upon reticence amongst international students of Non-European backgrounds, in regards to consulting and engaging with student support services. For some, particularly the males, it may feel threatening. The risk of opening up and exposing vulnerability may feel like surrendering virility, especially where there are culturally embedded values about what constitutes weakness and strength. Even the females are affected, but to a lesser degree. The risk of misunderstanding from professionals who may not have a sufficient training, understanding or language communication in culturally related matters, surfaced repeatedly as a concern. The assumption that such services were either too general or official was a conclusion that many had arrived at. It would seem that such a belief remained and was only modified by recommendations from other respected sources such as academic staff or a medical professional such as a nurse. Where this was the case, the uptake and view of services changed remarkably when good experiences followed, as for the interviewees discussed. The passive attitude of waiting or needing to be taken there or 'pushed' was possibly indicative of a different response to matters of health and well-being responsibility.

9.4 Organised Programmes of Cultural Engagement

On all three sites, Ulster, Dublin and Hyderabad, the universities offered a programme of orientation, usually run by the international office. Students were not asked about this directly, but unprompted two students out of eighteen spoke about this experience. Both students were female, one studying in Dublin and the other in Hyderabad. In both cases, this was a very positive experience.

Selma from Uganda, studying in Dublin shared that, as a sporty person, she resolved to engage in as many physical activities as possible. This was something of a lifeline when she was feeling depressed in her early months in Dublin, before becoming a student. Not only did she enjoy the activity but it also brought a social dimension, which linked her to others with a similar interest. Later when she enrolled as a student, she became aware that the university also offered these opportunities, such as the cycling and hiking clubs. Commenting on the orientation programme, which linked her into this, she said.

They provide a good opportunity to see places, to see the world, introduce you to cultural aspects of Ireland. It makes so much difference in terms of anxiety for a person that is coming into the country. (Selma, Uganda)

Clearly, the orientation programme was very successful. It was greatly appreciated by Selma in terms of the opportunities provided for cultural engagement with other international students, and with the geography and heritage of Ireland, which helped her to feel more grounded. Although she had researched most of this as an employee when she first arrived in the country, she did not hesitate to avail of this resource when it was offered through the university. Perhaps the difficult experience of connecting with people and place, following her arrival, was the unwitting catalyst that propelled her to fully engage in the orientation programme, when she became a student.

Only one other student, Maya from Guyana, studying in India, highlighted the benefits for cultural engagement, resulting from an orientation programme organised by her University department. She explained that there was a system of mentoring operated to encourage mixing of 'seniors' and 'juniors' within the department.

Everyone here has a fresher, to welcome the juniors and that helps a lot. We played games and we mixed up. That's how we learned to talk to our seniors. After that if we had a problem we could talk to each other. with them. (Maya, Guyana)

Culturally contextualized positive experiences can provide new vantage points thereby encouraging engagement into the new culture. It would seem in these examples, the conditions helpful for successful engagement arise out of directed input that bring students together; activities such as local sight-seeing trips, cooking events or a departmental ethos that encourages the older students to befriend the younger students. Common to all, is the idea that social interaction opportunities can enable bonding between students and staff and set the foundations for a more secure attachment with the new culture that will become the student's base over the next few years.

9.5 Cultural Engagement in Action

As referenced earlier in the chapter, I am including for analysis in this chapter, a group discussion designed to facilitate an alternative to the individual interview. The inspiration came from a Professional Knowledge seminar given at the Metanoia Institute, entitled 'Reflexive Writing for Academic and Professional Development: The Memory Work Method' led by Mona Livholts, in March 2013.

The chosen sections of dialogue from group interviews on which analysis derives are to be found in Appendix D.

It was moving and uplifting to observe the way in which students picked up each other's points, openly sharing personal experiences and remarking on their

commonality and sometimes difference. I felt privileged to have facilitated such a discussion, for which it has only been possible to highlight some chosen aspects that illustrate cultural engagement in action. Not surprisingly, students differed in the degree they emphasised themes. It is of particular note that in the group setting, students still covered the same issues, identified in the individual interviews as superordinate themes: *Impact of Transition, Living with Challenge-Coping, Living with Challenge-Seeking help* and *Shifting Identities.* Although this group of students did not directly raise issues addressing the need for enhanced cultural engagement, it was a powerful statement and testimony to the experience of cultural engagement that they were unselfconsciously doing just this. There was no formal directed input, other than creating an opportunity to meet. By example, they showed through their empathy, respect and curiosity about one another, what it means to engage culturally.

9.6 Conclusion

Cultural engagement as a term has many layers of interpretation. In the context of this study, I have defined cultural engagement as respectful and meaningful dialogue between individuals and groups that implies an effort to cross over into the other culture to try to explore a perspective from another viewpoint. It can take place between international students themselves, as shown in the group discussion; between a counsellor or researcher with students, as evidenced in the interviews or in conversations about students when cross-disciplinary working between departments is a feature of practice, for example between academic staff, security personnel, medical staff or residential staff, when dealing with a student at risk. Crucially it is also a conversation that needs to happen between the policy makers and senior managers with staff who deliver services, in order to influence the ethos and culture of the university, in terms of its attitude to international students of Non-European backgrounds. The underpinning knowledge in all the conversations is a desire to understand a person whose background and needs may differ to one's own. Being able to learn from the students themselves may provide the insights for creating a welcoming and creative educational space that will enhance the cultural engagement and thereby the university experience.

The inclusion of the group interview at the Dublin site, as an illustration of 'cultural engagement in action' was a late inspiration. It was revelatory in terms of the issues raised: *Impact of Transition; Living with Challenge-Coping; Living with Challenge-Seeking Help* and *Shifting Identities.* They followed the pattern of themes constituting superordinates, which had formed the basis of the analysis chapters. Not only was this surprising; the discovery was a salutary endorsement of the research outcomes, so far!

In summary, direct cultural engagement with the students themselves helped to unlock the wisdom of these experts, a plentiful commodity as the evidence from the interviews and group discussion reveals. The challenge is to make use of this valuable resource, by presenting the research to those "hard to reach" audiences like Heads of Services, Senior managers and Vice Chancellors who have the power to shape policy that will impact at every level. An ethos that nurtures and invests in cultural engagement as a defining feature of the organisation's 'modus operandi' will not only benefit international students of non-European background. It will enhance the experience of all students and staff alike by encouraging learning about each other across differences, cultural and otherwise.

"

Discussion

*Unless you conduct yourselves with more restraint and moderation
towards them (international students), they will be driven into aban-
doning their studies and leaving the country – which we by no means
desire* (Elsey & Kinnell, 1990).

Henry III addressing the people of Cambridge in 1231
as quoted by Colin Lago, AUCC conference, 2004.

Despite the passage of 800 years, there is still an enduring truth in this exhorta-
tion to the hosts of international students. Creating a supportive environment
that enables international students in fulfilling their potential, has a modern
resonance never more relevant for the consideration of today's educational in-
stitutions, in the delivery of services. And the benefits are reciprocal, in terms
of enhanced reputation, revenue and the possibilities of a two-way knowledge
transfer between students, academic staff, managers and policy makers who

shape the landscape of future decision-making and consequently the lived experience of the students in question.

This study explored the phenomenon of help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies of International Students of non-European backgrounds. Five key areas of understanding emerged as super-ordinates or key organising principles for many related sub-themes in the interviews. The areas that international students identified as significant defining experiences were: *Impact of Transition* which characterised the early stages following arrival in the country; *Living with Challenge* – how they cope, drawing on an extensive repertoire of strategies; Seeking Help whilst *Living with Challenge* – who from and why and at what point, followed by *Shifting Identities* – self observations of how these experiences have affected who they are as persons and finally *Enhancing Cultural Engagement* students' reflections on changes that may improve their overall experience. These were the subject of analysis in the five preceding chapters and represent the findings of this study. A central precept guiding the style of presentation was a desire to illuminate the experiences of the students by giving their actual words prominence within the text. A vivid, rich account from 'experiential experts', whose knowledge is usually not sought let alone valued, supports the integrity of the study's phenomenological underpinnings.

This chapter explores a number of issues raised by the phenomenological work documented in the preceding chapters. They include a number of open questions that can now be addressed in a meaningful way: the relationships between the super-ordinate themes, dialoguing with both the literature cited in the literature review and new literature visited in the course of the analysis and an examination of implications for practice. Reflections on the process of my doctoral journey will form the basis of a concluding chapter.

Impact of Different Contexts of Data Collection on the Data Collected. My group of eighteen students from three sites, two in Europe (UK and Ireland) and one in Asia (India) made for a rich diverse sample group. The differences and similarities in the students' experiences and the researchers' experiences at the different locations have been explicitly commented upon and interwoven throughout the text. Whilst it is not a comparison study of Asian and European, it is probably helpful to briefly comment on the effect of those contexts on the data collection and the data itself.

On the Indian site, the students had usually travelled less geographical and cultural distance to their chosen university than those who had travelled to Europe. They had also moved from one collectivist society to another, but in most cases, India represented a much more liberal society than many of the students' countries of origin. I had an assumption that less cultural distance meant less culture shock, but interestingly this corollary did not seem to hold. The effects of culture shock can be supported and mediated by actions of the host institution by welcoming initiatives like orientation trips, English language classes, etc. There was evidence to suggest that the European sites had made significant efforts to assist in the transitional experience, which was appreciated by the students. On the Indian site (with one exception), students seemed to think that such efforts were missing and believed not to be necessary, perhaps because the cultural/geographical distance was smaller. The students frequently said that they were treated the same as the local Indian students, when their needs were clearly different. So any 'gain' in greater familiarity with the culture for the students studying on the Indian site, seemed to be offset by the frustrations about the attitudes and values of the University management. One could say the management had a universalist approach to treat everyone the same (arising out of a place of neglect and possible ignorance), which was not deemed helpful. Interestingly, there were also examples of a universalist approach on the European sites, with a deliberate intention of not targeting International students, in order to be inclusive. Both attitudes, albeit with different motivations had a similar effect in Europe and Asia, with students feeling overlooked. On the Indian site, it was compounded further as the universalist approach of treating everyone the same did not extend to American and European students, who were perceived as receiving superior treatment. This was identified as a form of racism on the Indian site. On the European sites, no racism of this nature was reported, but racism was experienced in different ways in terms of harassment from local people. No one I met in India spoke about that particular experience of racism.

On the subject of medical and psychological support, one could be forgiven for assuming that facilities must be better resourced in Europe. This is not always the case. The students at the Indian site had a more accessible medical care, having doctors and nurses on site. Both European sites did not offer this, apart from a nurse service at Ulster University. The psychological support on the Indian site was outsourced in the form of a help-line for initial contact. At the

time of the study, the access to psychological support was more immediate on the European sites but has since been cut back at Ulster University to resemble the provision on the Indian site, of an outsourced service. This was negatively commented upon by the students in India, as being remote and inaccessible.

The role of the researcher has a significant part to play as has been discussed elsewhere, in terms of the impact and influence on data. On the European site, students were slightly more restrained, talking about their frustrations with the new culture and host institution, whereas the students on the Indian site were more outspoken and vocal, especially where they felt let down by the Indian authorities. I had my own reflections on this. I was an 'outsider researcher' and not from the Indian culture, which gave them permission to speak freely. On the European sites, I was regarded as being from the same culture and someone 'official' on one site, i.e., my own university. I wondered about their censorship of material that was probably judged not to cause too much offence to someone like me, a native of that culture. It is true to say that much more formal effort, at least, was made on the European sites to accommodate international students. The students on the European sites were generous in their gratitude for this, even if those efforts didn't go far enough.

This seemed to contrast in the main part with those who were studying in India who were quite vocal about the inadequacies of the official services and their daily frustrations, experienced inside and outside the University. The students studying in India did not seem to absorb the same level of self-imposed responsibility that they needed to change to adapt and conform to Indian expectations. I wondered how much the historical power imbalances between eastern and western, developed and developing countries were influencing these attitudes. Whilst this is not an analysis of Asian versus European experiences of study abroad, when there are remarkable differences in how the students describe their personal process, it is imperative to record emergent insights, with or without speculation, about their cause. As this was a phenomenological study, I felt those differences were best represented through the transparency of a reflexive narrative. Conditions on each site, were never intended to be replicated across the study. There are factors on one site that may be deemed favourable to an extent, for non-European students settling into the new context, but then these can be offset by other conditions that pose challenges unique to that setting. The personalities, age, experience of travel and exposure to other cultures, grasp of the English language are other factors (additional to location), which are part

of the complex matrix that can impact on findings. For this reason, I am loathe to place undue emphasis on one factor over another, but rather to elucidate that complexity of influences, as fully as I can.

Relationship between Super-ordinate Themes.   The analysis focused on the specificity of the separate superordinate themes. On the one hand, this was helpful in carving out the concerns, thoughts and feelings that guide international students. On the other hand, however, a more holistic approach needs to recognise the relationships between the super-ordinate themes. For example the dynamic relationship in the connection between culture shock and shifting identities; the context of *Living with Challenge* overlapping and in fact concomitant with the *Impact of Transition*; the behaviours of coping and help-seeking that characterise each stage and are precipitated by the context of transition and challenge; and finally *Enhancing Cultural Engagement*, which is the 'hoped-for' consequential reality both at individual and institutional levels, when other conditions are satisfactorily negotiated. Cultural engagement is also the 'red thread' that runs through the entire piece, as all efforts of relating and communicating across cultures, successful and otherwise, constitute a form of engagement. These connections will be evidenced in the ensuing dialogue between the findings of my study and the extant literature.

Findings of this Study and Previous Research. What are the major findings of this study and how should they be placed into the landscape of previous research on the subject? The preceding chapters followed a phenomenological approach to give ample scope for the idiosyncratic voices to be heard whilst at the same time trying to ensure that the coping and help-seeking behaviours are seen for what they are themselves and not filtered through the lens of previous work. Now the register changes with a view to facilitating a dialogue between the findings of this study and that of previous work in the area. This activity essentially constitutes another hermeneutic circle, as I weave in and out reflexively, stitching together the meaningful pieces of knowledge that will ultimately fashion and complete the project. Hitherto, this knowledge had necessarily been "bracketed off", although no doubt had penetrated my consideration and interpretations at some subliminal level of awareness.

Culture Shock. Participants of the study took a literal interpretation of the term 'culture shock' choosing to respond to its inherent dramatic emphasis. Whilst not in line with the interpretation of the literature which posits the view that this

phenomenon can occur over weeks and years until the individual reaches a place of ease and contentment, the term nevertheless was a useful entry point into their experiences. Many students took exception to the word 'shock' emphasising that this description did not adequately convey the correct emotional intonation. Some even felt the word was misleading and misrepresentative, based on their literal interpretations.

On reflection, the word 'shock' may have hinted at 'not coping' or feeling over-whelmed, a description that most students were uncomfortable with and were at pains to downplay or minimise. The examination of the concept was confined to the chapter addressing *Impact of Transition*, but in reality the experience of culture shock, which includes withdrawal, anxiety, aggression, depression and somatic behaviours equally resides within the experience of Living with Challenge – coping and seeking help. Indeed it is present within the experience of a Shifting Identity. The latter could be seen as encapsulating a time period when the student is wrestling with conflicting customs and values from the culture of origin and the host culture, in an attempt to find an accommodation of both. This would be consistent with a second or third stage in the Culture Shock models. The fact that the effects seemed to be more acutely felt in the early stages, following arrival, was the rationale for emphasising 'culture shock' as part of *Impact of Transition*.

Participants experienced multiple dimensions of transitional experience, mediated by the age and stage of development; previous experience of study abroad; presence of a nearby cultural/faith community within or outside university; whether they were accompanied by family members and degree to which formal or informal attempts were made by the University to welcome and support their integration.

The concept of 'culture shock' as examined in the literature review is consonant with the experiences of the students of this study. The term has been criticised as simplistic and clichéd (e.g., Ward, 2006). It may fail to appreciate the extent of the challenges placed on those who suffer the process, which can include illness and emotional breakdown (Lago, 2006). This observation highlights the shortcomings of the model, which seems to pay little attention to variables of the social and environmental context. For international students of non-European backgrounds, the variables can be profound and wide ranging, including subjects

of social history suggesting legacies of inequalities and discrimination, past and current.

Colin Lago remarks in his AUCC conference address in 2004, that each person idiosyncratically experiences culture shock but that some students cope better with it than others, although there has been no conclusive research to explain the basis of this. Lago's revision of the earlier Culture Shock models, which he refers to as a Tibetan Buddhist analysis of transitional experience in a three-stage process, probably resonates most closely with the lived experience of my study's participants. The first stage is experienced as "endings" where the person feels disenchantment, disengagement, disidentification, and disorientation. This corresponds with the idea of a 'detachment' to some degree with one's own identity. This was a feature observed in my study, enabling a space within which to grow and expand one's identity for self-development. It's an idea that also finds resonance with Greg Madison's doctoral study on the experiences of voluntary or existentialist migrants, published in his book *End of Belonging.*

To be totally identified with one's own culture can prevent the self from developing. Exposure to other cultures can lesson restrictions, allowing one to experience others' beliefs and views without having to be identified with them (Madison, 2009).

This has echoes of familiarity with Beverly Costa's research on the identification of space opened up for new emotional expression, when a client enters therapy using their second language (Costa & Dewaele, 2012). The experiential evidence within my study corroborates the idea of a "neutral zone" as a hypothesised second stage of Lago's culture shock model. This is described as a temporary stage to be endured, a place of emptiness, constituting an existential gap. Out of this phase a new stage can emerge called 'new beginnings'. The latter can provide a fitting explanation for the phenomenon of self-development, an experience that most of the participants actively sought. Most were notably rewarded in this expectation, although in ways that were sometimes surprising, unanticipated and potentially challenging for their cultural identity.

Migration. The construct of migration is another way to conceptualise the experience of moving to a different society and to understand the impact of that transition, beneficial for some and not others. Berry (2009) conceives of three stages of adjustment: Pre-migration, Migration and Post-Migration and within these occurs a process of acculturation, informed by pre-migration

factors such as personality, education, social status, economic conditions. The Post-Migration adjustment may be related to the nature of the new society, how migrants are welcomed and what their aspirations and expectations of the new culture are (Berry, 2009). Migration is the subject of much current debate, which divides and incites impassioned response across many sectors. One type of migration however, that of International Students, probably receives less attention, than any other. The transient and fluid nature of student movement may even exclude it from the common definitions of migration.

A useful definition of a migrant is someone who has moved from one culture to another where the second culture is experienced as significantly different from the first - for a sufficient duration, the person is engaged in daily activities and is challenged to undergo some adjustment in the new place (Madison, 2009). It is estimated that one in every thirty-five people in the world is an international migrant. Whether chosen or forced migration, both categories have to face considerable cultural, linguistic, social and spiritual challenges, which are rarely acknowledged in the public domain (Christodoulidi & Lago, 2008).

The students of my study exemplify this statement. Obviously they are voluntary migrants and without doubt represent an inherent self-selection. They have possessed the kind of curiosity for exploration, that is a necessary pre-requisite for a 'study abroad' commitment. They are resourceful, proud, successful in past endeavours and therefore have vested interests financially and emotionally to realise their end goals. In this sense the students of my study probably typify the profile of many international students from non-European backgrounds. Within a university setting, they can all too often be 'the quiet group' (Mori, 2000) whose needs are easily overlooked.

Acculturation Stress and Relationship to Mental Health. Research on acculturation stress has emanated out of culture shock studies, which informs the bedrock of understanding. Berry's acculturation model offers four modes of classification: integration, assimilation, separation and marginalisation, which have gained much recognition as indicators and predictors of mental health status. Where the immigrant has achieved a reasonable level of integration with both cultures, this would imply the least amount of acculturation stress. Clearly, this is the desired state to achieve, yet is difficult to quantify.

In my study, it is evident that the repertoire of coping skills employed as a self-help in the first instance is very important. Undoubtedly, that repertoire relates

to resilience capacities; the existence of a cultural group, the role of faith (which will be discussed later); the ability to access help from others which invariably involves a social component – be it family, friends, cultural/faith community members, academic staff, medical or counselling staff and the perceived welcome from the host institution. These are the key factors in understanding the degree of acculturation stress and how to reduce it.

It would be difficult to be prescriptive in creating the ideal set of circumstances to support the International student of non-European background. However, implications for practice will be discussed in a later section. Strikingly, there was a randomness that characterised the type of events which later determined whether the students "fared well" or struggled to "keep their heads above water", in the ensuing tumult of complex emotions. A dominant characteristic emanating from the analysis was the interplay between individuals' resilience and the nature of the situation (judged favourable to hostile) in which they found themselves. The combination of resilience and situational factors seemed to reliably predict and determine how the person will cope with the challenges presented.

To illustrate the finding of the important relationship between resilience and situational factors for determining a course of life events, I formulated a descriptive model that offers predictive interpretations. It is organised around two trajectories of students' experiences of health and illness, i.e., mental/emotional distress (Figure 10.1).

Both positive and negative experiences start off in the same way where students rely on a range of usually self-motivated strategies such as 'coping by being strong', 'coping by personal resources', e.g., exercise, writing, art, and 'coping by faith and spirituality'. When challenges increase, these resources are under strain and possibly overwhelmed; then there is 'reduced coping' and 'not coping' which leads to 'seeking help' or 'not seeking help'. At the point of seeking help, there is a complex decision about involving a social/interpersonal interaction, with the hope of positively influencing the outcome. For well-functioning individuals, this is a more integrated experience but for many seeking help, especially outside family and friends, it is a last resort. The student who has a good level of resilience and supportive conditions is likely to cope well and succeed, illustrated by the 'health' trajectory. By contrast, the student on the
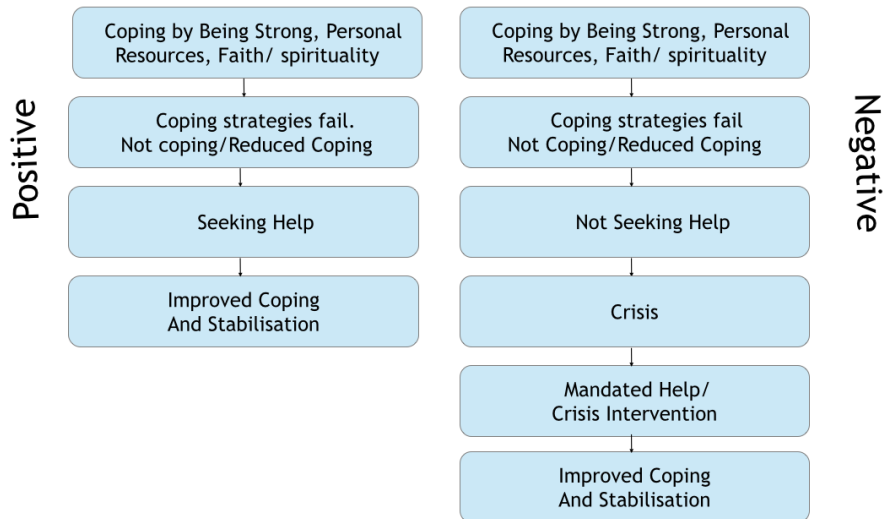
Figure 10.1: Resilience and Coping

'illness' trajectory who has a low resilience and poor support, who is not coping and not seeking help, is more likely to hit a crisis. The seeming inevitability of these events need not play out to their random conclusions. If the supportive conditions can be strengthened through better cultural engagement, even those whose resilience may be lacking, they are likely to benefit hugely.

The possibilities to intercept the natural course of events, comes within the remit of caring responsible services, dedicated to understand the complexities inherent in seeking help and competent in the skills needed to engage the wary or sceptical student. This means recognising their identities, so that they feel trusting of the quality of help offered and acknowledged for who they are. Kohls (1996) talks of 'identity re-inforcements' in a culturally familiar landscape where persons are permanently surrounded by symbols, family members, roles, and physical landmarks which sustain a person in their identity. Such a loss has a serious impact on identity, not to mention the many conditions emanating from this such as resilience and stability, necessary for successful study. Colin Lago in his keynote address to the AUCC conference, 2004 asked the poignant question "What is the effect of transition in someone who has always lived in a collective culture, with the concept of a 'we', who suddenly finds themselves thrust into a culture with an individualised 'I', without his/her familiar traditional support?"

And I would add, what if all those around insist on the student seeing the world through the lens of the individualised 'I', because they are insufficiently aware of other worldviews that deviate from their own perspective?

Hierarchy of Helping.   For the purpose of the study, I distinguished 'coping' as an individually motivated action to aid stress relief and 'seeking help' as involving a social component. This was an heuristic separation to assist a closer phenomenological enquiry. In reality, in well-functioning individuals there exists a more integrated approach, which would consider the appropriateness of each, at any given time. In spite of this expectation, there emerged quite a clear view that most participants would rely on their own resources to the point of exhaustion, before involving others. There seemed to be an unexpressed anxiety about admitting a failure to cope, which is closely related to seeking help. This was especially evident for the males who emphasised the need for 'being strong' and not appearing weak, a coping mechanism or self-reassurance existing at the intersection of many identity references, including self-concept, family, culture and gender.

Most of the participants came from developing countries, which in political or economic terms have a high ranking on the traditional and survival scale as portrayed in modernisation theory. This is borne out by the frequent references to survival, pride in toughness, scepticism, reluctance and even contempt for self and others in having to ask for help. It is magnified further if the helping sources are psychological/counselling services due to stigma associated with mental health concerns. The latter option was reserved as a last resort, when all else had failed.

There emerged a preferential order of helping sources, which I termed a *hierarchy of helping*. Here, family and friends (sometimes interchangeably) exist at the top, as the first port of call, when individual coping strategies are under strain or not delivering (Figure 10.2). This was followed by faith/cultural community members, then academic staff, followed by medical services and finally at the bottom of the pecking order of helping sources, counselling/psychological services. Usually, the counselling services would only be consulted on the recommendation of a more trusted and familiar source such as an academic staff member or medical professional. Interestingly for the three participants out of the sample of eighteen who had consulted counselling, the placement of coun-
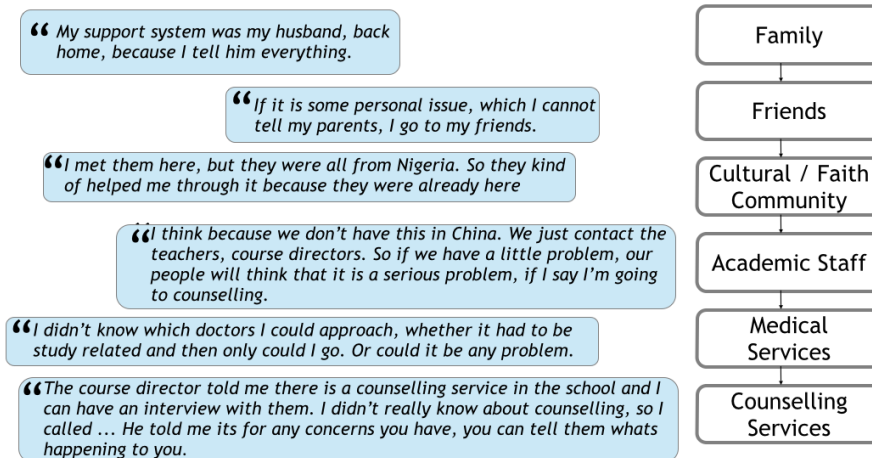
Figure 10.2: Hierarchy of Helping

selling within the perceived hierarchy improved greatly, as each had a positive experience. A negative experience would have entrenched reservations beyond the point of further consideration.

A qualitative study on 15 undergraduates in a Turkish university concurred with the findings of my study (Koydemir et al., 2010). The students sharing many cultural attributes with the participants of my study, preferred informal sources of help and generally did not seek psychological assistance. Significantly they were only willing to seek help from a professional if the problem seemed extreme (ibid).

Personal Choice and Individualistic Societies. This strong reluctance leads me to raise a complicating factor arising from the concept of help-seeking, which was highlighted within the study. It is the perception of personal choice, which is central to individualistic thinking and informs key principles of self-responsibility integral to Eurocentric counselling/psychotherapy training. It is something of a mismatch when applied to individuals operating strongly from a 'we' consciousness. It is not surprising that as a starting point for building mutual understanding, it fails to connect. To compound matters further, the individualistic 'I' perspective informs a 'way of being', that most westerners believe is 'normal', i.e., the base line to which all forms of differences are compared. Within collectivist societies, the homelands of all my participants, personal choice was

something of an alien concept. This goes some way towards explaining why mandated help, usually offered in the context of a crisis intervention, is the only form of help some international students of non-European backgrounds actually receive.

Where there is no collaboration with other services or attempts to create other points of access with university counselling services, then this is an inevitable limitation and consequence of the traditional counselling model, in this setting. It would appear that mandated help is seen as an extension of the institution or community's duty of care, shared and delivered by trusted authority sources like an academic staff member, a nurse or a cultural or religious figure. Where counselling services desist from a pro-active role in networking, creating and training collaborative 'communities of helping', within the organisation, unfortunately these will not be safe and nourishing places of education for these students.

Personal Choice and Collectivist Societies. Describing how collectivist connections work, in the context of understanding mental illness across cultures, Pittu Languani offers useful insights for cultural outsider researchers like myself. He says personal choice central to an individualistic society, is virtually non-existent in a communalistic (a term he prefers) or collectivist society. Speaking of Indian society, he says that occupations are largely caste-dependent and caste is determined by birth. Pressures from elders and threats of ostracism ensure that individuals stay within the confines of the group. One's life centres around the extended family.

On the whole, this would seem to provide inbuilt safety measures against mental disturbance but on the other hand can prevent a person choosing his/her future and lead to severe stress and psychiatric disturbances (Laungani, 1989, 2006). Offering a perspective on traditional Chinese societies, Yang (1997) comments on the importance of subordinating the personal interests, glory and welfare to the family interest. Many cultures have the psychosocial unit of operation as the family, the group or collective society, making it important that students are identified with their family or community (Sue & Sue, 1990). These observations certainly resonate with experiences shared by the participants of my study.

The context of a literature hinterland enables a more profound understanding about the deep ambivalences students felt when exposed to both cultures-native and host, whilst attempting to integrate. For those who had struggled, the experience might have been better described as assimilation or marginalisation (and

not integration)- two other forms of acculturation, with poorer mental health outcomes (Atri & Sharma, 2006). The tension of trying to reconcile opposing and conflicting value systems (of their native collectivist society and usually the individualist host society) was one that . engaged participants in sharing spontaneous accounts of their current realities. This serves to highlight the repercussions of such dilemmas for everyday living, with reverberations manifested in a shifting identity. It highlights the importance of cautionary advice to counsellors that they need to support students to consider how their values and perceptions are changing due to their stay in another country (Khoo, Abu-Rasain, & Hornby, 2008).

Self-Development-Shifting Identity.   There was a general consensus amongst students interviewed, that their studies brought life-changing opportunities, the most obvious being an education in their chosen field. Other changes remarked upon as significant for self-development were the acquisition of new life skills; the ability to embrace one's solitude for greater self-reliance; the ability to develop more liberal thinking based on meeting real people from other cultural groups; the ability to revise one's prejudices and refuse the stereotypes gained through cultural conditioning, and finally the serious disclosures of a suppressed sexual identity.

Originating out of the experience of culture shock and transition, self-development as described by some of the participants, seemed also to include intentions to embrace a more liberal western lifestyle. Those students favourably disposed to these new elements, were the same students who felt that aspects of their identity were suppressed in their country of origin. The most notable and poignant of these were two male students of a gay orientation. A study by Al-Bahrani (2014) that closely resembles my own, examined the help-seeking process of students from Oman studying at an Omani university. It was an ethnographic phenomenological investigation based on interviews with 20 students by a female researcher from the same Arab culture. The sample group although not international students, share many comparable cultural aspects with the participants of my study, as discussed below.

Collectivist vs Individualist.   In terms of the 5 dimensions of culture, conceptualised by Hofstede, the Omani students studied by Al-Bahrani (2014) came from collectivist societies. This means the 'we' consciousness dominates; there is a high masculine index where men should be assertive, woman nurturing, there

is a high power-distance index, emphasising inequality where everyone knows their place in a hierarchy; there is a weak uncertainty avoidance meaning that uncertainty in life is taken for granted and the society aims to minimise the uncertainty by providing career stability; the society does not tolerate deviant ideas and believes in absolute truths as evidenced by a high spiritualism Hofstede (1984). These common influences shaping cultural identity of both the sample group and my sample group, provide a fitting backdrop to the comparison of the studies.

Almost all the students in the Omani group experienced 'cultural shock' and multiple challenges on their psychological development but mainly due to the novelty of academic life in a mixed environment where males and females mingled freely. The author remarks on the uniqueness of the Arab cultures, especially Oman which praises the separation of the sexes, operating a social system where socialising only occurs with the same gender. My 'taken-for granted' western expectation of gender mixing went virtually unchallenged, in my study. The exceptions were one Arab male studying in India, who remarked on the greater freedom enjoyed by the Indian women who could go out without wearing a hijab, if they chose; the only other related remark made by one of my participants, referred to the strict segregation of the sexes before marriage. Consequently this aspect of gender segregation had slipped under my radar. In Al-Bahrani's study, the anxiety provoked especially in females by having to give an oral presentation, in front of the opposite gender emerged as one of the primary reasons for students approaching Student Support centres. This experience was not shared by any of the participants in my study, but of course this does not mean that such experiences did not occur or perhaps I had missed the cues.

Role of researcher. This led me to reflect on the selecting and censoring process, undertaken by participants (perhaps even unconsciously) where the students discuss only those experiences, which they feel the researcher will understand and not judge. In a liberal western democracy, the source of my cultural conditioning, participants may have felt visiting this material may have risked them being judged as conservative and backward. It puts me in mind of the 'proxy self' (Thomas, 1992), which has also been remarked upon by Ryde (2009) when clients from a different cultural background, will present to a white counsellor the 'safe' issues. It is deemed risky to venture into areas that form the substance of many stereotypes held by white people.

Gaining the insights of a female Arab inside-researcher, in terms of the different lived experience discussed in the Omani study, was quite revelatory. For example, female participants did not even allude to romantic relationships, presumably as both women would have known of the importance of 'appropriate behaviour', which means having self-control and maintaining ideals of honour and propriety in social life. To disregard these maxims or fail to comply sufficiently, can risk a woman's reputation and indirectly marriage prospects. These prevailing norms would also have shaped traditional western thinking and attitudes more than half a century ago. But such norms have greatly diminished in an ever-increasing secular society, thanks to higher incomes and higher GDP. Conditions, once unthinkable, now promote creativity and permission for greater self-expression in individualistic societies.

In reference to the debate on Modernisation Theory, Inglehart and Welzel provide a political and historical context, another useful backdrop to illuminate the cultural hinterland shaping my participants' experience. Traditionally the family represents the basic reproductive unit of any society. Consequently traditional cultures tend to condemn harshly any behaviour that seems to threaten reproduction and child-rearing within the family, such as homosexuality, divorce, and abortion. But in post-industrial societies with advanced welfare institutions, a strong family is no longer necessary for survival (Inglehart & Welzel, 2007). In western societies, changing norms around such issues as homosexuality, co-habitation, and divorce have been widely accepted. However, in developing countries, which represent the homelands of the participants of my study and the Al-Bahrani study, survival concerns and existential insecurity still dominate the national mind-set and therefore the cultural norms.

There were other points of divergence between my study and the Omani study in that some non-European females opened up to me in the interviews about romantic relationships (although not Arab women). Two males, including one Arab male, opened up about non-traditional sexuality concerns, relating to their sexual orientation. Al-Bahrani remarks that no participant in the Omani study discussed issues that deviated from the cultural norm. This would seem to highlight the variations of insider-outsider researcher positions, in terms of the different emphasis within participants' narratives.

Faith and Spirituality. Another important distinction, setting my study apart from the Omani study, was that no participant of my study indicated that

having a faith would prevent or preclude other options for seeking help. In fact those who professed a faith, emphasised an interconnectedness of relying on their own efforts, help of others namely friends and family, in conjunction with spirituality, as a means of achieving a meaningful life. Participants seemed to emphasise the cultural-community base, as the bedrock of a spirituality that permeates into all levels of life, and can be relied on to provide relief from stress, at difficult times. By contrast, one of the findings in the Omani study, was that religion was one of the most significant factors contributing to the reasons for not seeking help, and in particular help of counselling services when experiencing psychological distress Al-Bahrani (2014). The idea of enduring suffering and a belief in pre-destination, that defines hardships as an inevitable manifestation of God's will, were the underlying reasons.

Another related divergence with my study were the significant references to jinni and magic spells accounting for sudden or drastic changes of behaviour and emotion, mentioned in the Qur'an and the consideration and consultation of faith healers as an important source of help. The majority of my participants who professed a faith were Muslim, yet no one made references to jinni or faith healing. This would seem to support the notion that the students may also have been 'bracketing off' certain information that they deemed not suitable or even risky to share with a white western researcher, for fear of confirming prejudices or stereotypes that I may not even have realised I had. It may also relate to a greater level of acculturation in the participants. In a qualitative study of muslims in Britain, Weatherhead & Daiches (2010) revealed that the majority of participants attributed mental health issues to life events. This would correspond with my observations from the study that symptoms attributed to supernatural causes are more likely to be correlated with the acculturation of the help-seeker. However depending on how the person experiences their faith, their acculturation may not be the dominant influence in terms of how a relationship with God is communicated and felt.

Bridging the divide, on this controversial and highly sensitive issue is a conciliatory reflection from Suman Fernando, an eminent authority on mental health, race and culture, from perspectives of psychology and psychiatry. He likens contact with the spirit world or 'spirits' as non-physical beings with human characteristics, to some aspects of Western psychological theories of 'forces' exerted by unseen entities such as the 'ego' and the 'id' (Fernando, 2007). This is not a common perspective, but is characteristically bold in its challenge of Eu-

rocentric thinking, not in a way that disparages its worth but rather epitomises a view that seeks to see the merit and relevance of different ways of thinking, connecting and sense-making, according to context.

For all participants who spoke about the importance of their faith or spirituality, which included more than half of the sample group, they framed the effects in a positive manner, believing their faith enabled them to cope better with challenge. No one spoke about faith/religion in negative terms. Additionally many mentioned the positive value of having their faith/religion recognised and respected by the institution, academic staff or peers. This would seem to constitute a reassuring 'identity landmark', a phrase coined by Lago (2004), in describing ways in which students can be welcomed authentically by being recognised in their identities. There is significant literature supporting the idea of a reliable association between religiosity and well-being, which includes lowered stress and depression (e.g., Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001). Some studies have specified the type of religiosity – 'intrinsic', meaning internalised religion motivated from a secure relationship with God, as associated with higher levels of well-being, compared to 'extrinsic' religiosity that is externally imposed, not examined and therefore representing a tenuous relationship with God (Pargament, 2002). As the students of my study were not asked directly about faith, but volunteered the information naturally and spontaneously, I would assume that their faith was of an 'intrinsic' nature, therefore accounting for its positive coping power.

An interesting perspective is offered by Grandqvist (2005), who refers to Bowlby's attachment theory, based on the early infant-carer relationship. The author suggests that the type of faith/relationship with God that individuals develop is based on their attachment histories. It was found that insecurely attached individuals are more likely to turn to God in difficult situations, God being seen as a compensatory attachment figure. To this end, insecurely attached individuals are more likely to rely on religious coping. Although the study was carried out in a European context, based on 200 Swedish participants from Christian backgrounds, other smaller studies have been conducted in Iran with Muslim participants. These were based on earlier studies on positive and negative religious coping, using RCOPE, religious coping measures devised by Pargament, Koenig, & Perez (2000). Eshan's study as quoted by Loewenthal (2007) is one of the first studies to examine religious coping amongst Muslims. Negative religious coping was correlated with poorer mental health outcomes. However the

positive corollary of positive religious coping and improved mental health was not established due to methodological sampling problems, in this case. This aside, the general picture seems to hold across the religious traditions examined, (with more limited work on Islam and Judaism), that positive religious coping strategies improve mood and lower distress (Loewenthal, 2007).

Furthermore, the protective effect of religious group membership, providing social support has been described in Muslim, Jewish and Christian groups (Maton, 1989; Shams & Jackson, 1993; Lindsey, Frosh, Loewenthal, & Spitzer, 2003). This supports the findings of my study in regards to faith and spirituality as important coping strategies for those participants professing a faith. Faith and spirituality were both personal and social experiences, connecting participants not just to God, but to other believers sharing similar convictions, culture and community. The effect of this was to strengthen and re-inforce identity by reducing isolation (actual and spiritual), and thereby foster the kind of resilience and stamina needed for the life journey.

Making sense of the exceptions. To hold knowingly and with care, the internal phenomenological tension between the nomothetic dimensions of seeking patterns of commonality and difference, yet staying faithful to the idiographic content of participants' experience, is a matter of some delicacy. By employing certain terms and models in order to expand the scope of awareness, I am ever mindful of the propensity of generalities to diminish individuals, by their broad brush treatment. Yet the unavoidably reductionist aspect of 'simplified knowledge', e.g., what constitutes behaviour and attitudes, within a collectivist society (usefully supplied by theorists like Geert Hofstede and Edward T. Hall) has been vitally important for opening up the cultural hinterland that shaped the 'lifeworld' of many of the participants of this study and many beyond. But there are exceptions, those whose experience exists outside identified patterns, and remain so, no matter how carefully one seeks to disentangle and understand. In a way, the beauty of such observations grounds me in the idiographic underpinnings of the study, encapsulated in the detail of one 'exceptional' student voice telling her story. Her remarks typified idiocentric tendencies. She felt that she only started to make meaningful friendships when she left her native country, to live in a western society. In fact, she preferred friendships outside her culture or with those who had, to some extent, been acculturated by their study abroad. This contrasted starkly with the other participants who displayed more allocentric traits, relying greatly on their cultural groups for support, of-

ten making concerted and determined efforts to connect, and in some cases organising this prior to their arrival in the country. This puzzling phenomenon was referenced by Dinesh Bhugra in his keynote speech *Students: Acculturation and Adjustment* at the Mental Health and Cultural Diversity conference, UK Universities, 2012 in London which I attended.

Within both collectivist and individualist societies, there are those defined by personality types, who are better adapted for a particular style of relating. For example idiocentric individuals from a collectivist society will settle down better in individualistic societies. This sheds light on the aforementioned participant's experience. Allocentric individuals from collectivist societies, if socially isolated or alienated, will have difficulty in settling in individualistic societies and are therefore at greater risk (Bhugra, 2012). This is an important observation, as it would seem that allocentric traits are more common in students from a collectivist society, as displayed by the majority of my participants. What does it mean for them if there is no support congruent with their need, except what they are able to create for themselves, through the coping and help seeking strategies discussed? It would seem that its time to match that incredible resilience shown by most, by trying to meet them, if not on their own territory (because that would require a leap of faith and imagination beyond most people's conception), but at least half way between our differing perspectives.

I was particularly struck by the work of Ryde (2009) addressing 'head-on' issues on 'Being White', the title of her book, based on her doctoral studies. Out of her extensive experience and interest she developed a project aimed at attracting and working with refugees and asylum-seekers in what was a predominantly white counselling organisation, (Bath Centre for Psychotherapy and Counselling), and in an area whose demographic is also predominantly 'white'. The processes involved in bringing such a project to fruition, through careful and dedicated networking, recruitment and publicity, is indeed astonishing. She remarks that against the odds the clients, the asylum seekers came, although they would not normally have considered sharing private affairs with strangers. Explaining the unusualness of the circumstances, she reflects these are not normal times for them, and sometimes counselling is their only resort, if they were able to find someone to listen to their distress and attempt to understand their disturbance (ibid). This is one testament of the fact that it is possible to create the conditions necessary for effective transcultural engagement in a therapeutic setting which is the hardest challenge of all. The correct support from the envi-

ronment, congruent with the person's need, organised from a place of cultural knowledge and empathy, potentiates opportunities for effective work.

Under-utilisation of Traditional Counselling. One of the major motivations for this study as mentioned in the introduction, were my observations that international students of non-European backgrounds seemed reluctant to use traditional counselling and often only became known to university services in a crisis. An earlier pilot study for this research examined the experiences of nurses and counsellors in my department, when working with those students. One of the findings highlighted the under-utilisation of counselling services by this group, but by contrast a perceived over-reliance on medical services. The strong inter-disciplinary working model between the nurses and counsellors ensured that appropriate referrals and information-giving about counselling took place, resulting in some students, attending counselling, albeit in proportionately low numbers and usually for one session on a study matter. Without this intermediate step, it is likely even fewer students of Non European backgrounds would visit a counsellor. I have written about this in an article for '*University and College Counselling* which I am referencing here. I had wondered if

(the students) perceived counselling services as 'not for them'? Were their experiences disappointing? Had there been too narrow a focus on individual or psychological issues consonant with Eurocentric paradigms, the backbone of our counselling training? Did the students not feel sufficiently recognised, to want to return after one session? The persistent sense of unease, curiosity and unknowing that accompanied these reflections prompted even more questions. What are these student's experiences, how do they cope; whom do they seek help from (if not counsellors) and when, became the questions that galvanised me into action and ultimately shaped the agenda for this research (Conn, 2015).

There was a perception, not uncommon, shared by a number of staff participants that students of non-European backgrounds were more likely to somatise their emotional distress, explaining the preference of medical services over counselling. This led me to include a question in the student interviews about the connection between emotional and health problems. Without exception, each participant said "of course they are linked" going on to offer examples of how stress, distress and all kinds of human misery manifest both at an emotional and physical level. I had a gnawing suspicion that the notion of somatisation, being more associated with people of ethnic cultural backgrounds, may be something of

a cultural stereotype. Difficult to reconcile with such an impression, is the historical contribution and deep legacy of many famous Muslim scholars to Health and Science. Ibn Sina, better known as Avicenna (980–1037), one of the most significant thinkers and writers of the Islamic Golden Age, wrote about the mind and its relationship to the body by linking physical and psychological illnesses and using psychological techniques to treat his patients (Haque, 2004).

A deeper perusal of the literature confirmed what I had already deduced from my participants, that contrary to some opinions, they were not predisposed to somatise their symptoms because they lacked the emotional expression or psychological understanding. Littlewood & Lipsedge (1989) vehemently object to the idea of higher somatisation levels in certain cultural groups, as a derogatory racist stereotype, portraying individuals as less capable of perceiving emotion.

In a large British study, Bhui, Bhugra, Goldberg, Sauer, & Tylee (2004) compared somatic symptoms of 206 Asian Punjabi woman and 173 English white woman attending primary care in London, revealed that a higher number of Asian woman experienced depression. And significant somatic symptoms were similarly experienced in both groups. Other studies by Bhatt et al. (1989) and Beliappa (1991) confirmed that Asians did not demonstrate higher somatic complaints compared to non-Asians, which negated earlier studies by Sue & Sue (1990).

It is more generally recognised that all ethnic groups somatise their emotional difficulties and that it is more probably an effect of education and class rather than ethnic origin (Johnson & Nadirshaw, 2008). Loewenthal (2007) discusses the idea that there are culturally carried "idioms of distress" in some languages, often involving somatisation and beliefs in spiritual forces. The fact that mental and emotional distress, especially in tight-knit collectivist cultures are more heavily stigmatised than somatic symptoms, would explain some of the variations, arising from probable denial of emotional symptoms. The sufferer may receive less blame and bear less responsibility for putting his health in order again (Perkins & Moodley, 1993). This would be especially important where there is high expectation of academic success, placed on the individual. In essence attending the medical centre could be regarded as a form of coping and a protection from judgement or blame.

According to the participants of my study, physical weakness did not hold the same horror of shameful self-judgement or feared group rejection. In fact

there were "secondary gains" from being physically sick, alluded to by some participants, as they later received more care and sympathy from family and friends. There would seem to be a distinction between knowingly presenting emotional/mental health concerns as physical complaints to avoid stigma, as opposed to experiencing distress as physical symptoms because of being unable to identify the psychological origin. The former is clearly not somatisation and is the description that fitted some participants' understanding of a 'sometimes' useful coping strategy.

The reasons for a distinct preference of medical services over counselling appear to be related to other factors such as participants' unfamiliarity with counselling; a lack of knowledge about what is offered; compounded by a lack of trust that whatever is on offer probably is not relevant for them; a perception that they don't need it as there are other helping sources better known and more trusted (cultural community figures, medical staff and academic staff) whom they would approach first.

To uncover some of the dynamics around the "hierarchical" aspect of help-seeking was quite revelatory. Previously I was only aware of the preferential decision of medical help over counselling and only hazily aware of the bigger spectrum, in which more trusted sources of help existed higher up the imaginary pecking order, such as family, friends, cultural figure, academic tutor. And only if those higher authority sources recommended or referred to counselling, would the participants consider it (Figure 10.2). Worthy of note, however, was the fact that for those participants who had contact with counselling services (3 out of 18), their positive experiences caused them to re-examine their perceptions. Essentially, counselling moved up in their consideration of help sources, as being more accessible and relevant.

There is widespread agreement about under-utilisation of traditional counselling services (Martinez et al., 1989; Brinson & Kottler, 1995; Mori, 2000). The reasons given include cultural variables such as individualism versus collectivism (C. Yeh & Wang, 2000) and a perceived stigma (Shea & Yeh, 2008), which present as barriers to utilising psychological help. The earlier referenced Turkish study revealed formal help to be a sign of weakness and only to be considered in extreme circumstances (Koydemir et al., 2010). Those findings are consistent with my study. The idea of a last resort effectively places counselling services at the bottom of the 'hierarchy of helping' (Figure 10.2). There are possibilities

to change that recurring reality, which I believe was already starting to happen, through programmes of better cultural engagement, at my University. I devised such a programme for an academic department, embedding cultural awareness within the curriculum, with a view to rolling this out for other departments. This will be examined in a later section on implications for practice and will form part of the subject matter of Appendix C.

Unfortunately, when there exists a phenomenon like the under-utilisation of services, which many universities across the sector can attest to, it can invite a creeping complacency. There is the suggestion, that if services are offered and not taken up, counsellors and institutions are absolved of any further responsibility. Mori (2000) offers the viewpoint that the most important obstacle to international students' use of services is the shortage of culturally knowledgeable and sensitive counsellors. She is speaking to the American context, but the statement is just as valid for the UK context. The underutilisation of counselling services does not mean a general incompatibility between international students and counselling services. It points out the need to modify counselling services so that they are more culturally relevant (ibid).

Implications for Practice

What are the implications for practice? This must surely be the crux of the research that will ultimately judge the quality of the work, its ability to impact and whether it will have a legacy. Having immersed myself deeply into the enquiry of the help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies of International students of non-European backgrounds in order to come "experience near" (Eatough, 2012), I feel my understanding of the complexities of the students' 'lifeworlds' has increased enormously. So has my understanding of how that informs their sense-making. This signals a point at which I feel entitled to make pronouncements, based on evidence, that can substantially enhance support services and the way they are delivered for International Students of non-European backgrounds.

Naturally the availability of knowledge and awareness (through dissemination of the findings) must be 'taken on' and endorsed by authority figures like heads of services and senior managers to create a cascading goodwill effect with practical resources, necessary for innovation. Linking the awareness to practice is essential

for change-making. In this context, the change-making is the enhancement of cultural awareness, which can occur at a number of different levels:

- Hearing the student voices and being prepared to listen and learn from them.

- Being proactive for outreach; offer alternative entry points, e.g., psycho-social-educational contact as a different point of access with counselling services. Achievable through collaboration with departments open to change and innovative thinking.

- Embed cultural awareness and cultural empathy training through staff development programmes for all universities and colleges. Already instigated by the Irish Government on 11th June, 2015, resulting from a 3 year research project, which the government commissioned the Irish Council (ICOS) to carry out.

- Integrate cultural competency training into all professional counselling training accredited by BACP and IACP for newly qualifying counsellors; make available continuing professional development (CPD) training options in cultural awareness and cultural competency for qualified staff, who are working with diverse client groups, e.g., in educational settings.

- Ensure a more diverse profile of counselling staff with either an international background and/ or specialist interest in transcultural counselling with training and experience to match.

- Invest in projects to improve the contact between international students of non-European backgrounds and the local students, e.g., Trinity University Dublin, "The Global room". This initiative offers a student social space and event venue. In doing so, it promotes the informal mixing of Irish and international students, informed by ICOS (Irish council for International students) and UKCISA (UK Council for International Students' Affairs) best practice guidelines on international student integration.

The change-making proposed to enhance cultural engagement, depends on a complex matrix of factors coming from different directions: from professional training, government and institutional policy and culture, departmental/ group ethos, individual staff, student bodies and individual students. Ryde puts this eloquently when she says its not a matter of institutions just coming up with

better policies or individuals changing their consciousness. Rather it's a case of working together synergistically, just as drops of water make a pool and a pool is full of drops of water (Ryde, 2009).

In the manner of the hermeneutic circle, I will link the implications for practice back to the student voices, the original starting point where it all began, as I come full circle into the final phase and the completion of the study. Like many organic, living and therapeutic processes, of which research is one, an ending is not just an ending but heralds the beginning of another stage, concerned with the implementation of projects arising out of new knowledge and new opportunities. I sincerely hope my work carries this potency and that my metaphorical roles of "architect, builder and social entrepreneur" (Derek Portwood, Metanoia seminar, 2007) uncovered and discovered in the deliverance of this research, will continue to find new inspiration and expression. A more condensed view of the implications is presented in Tables 11.5 – 11.6.

Making Services Visible, Accessible and Acceptable. Of the findings that have the potential to inform practice, there was a startling consensus around a lack of knowledge about what counselling services were and how they could be useful to international students of non-European backgrounds. Students identified the services as mainly for the home/local students, perceiving the services not to be targeted to them. A generalist approach, either out of neglect or an attempt at being inclusive by not "singling out" international students, did not seem to inspire confidence or hint at good practice, as revealed in a typical comment "the services that are there are just the general ones, not a particular service of support for foreign students". It would follow that there is an onus on counselling services to perform "outreach" to make the services more visible and accessible and to offer alternative entry points that are not advertised as "getting help". As one student remarked (seeking counselling) "looks as if there is something wrong with you or you're not doing something right". The sensitivity around seeking help was revealed as being highly problematic and in danger of triggering feelings of inadequacy. A collectivist, traditional and usually spiritual background that emphasises "being strong", especially for the males, underlines the delicacy of accessing help in a way that does not demean, patronise or activate archaic shame-based feelings of "not coping" or "being weak".

Raising Awareness of Counselling. An important finding with implications for practice is the timeliness and type of information conveyed, regarding support services. The information should be given at the beginning of the semester, preferably through more informal routes and involving academic staff. The information should be clear, concise and contain examples or case studies of situations where "help-seeking" is appropriate. Typical situations of "not coping" would be important to highlight, as this could help change perceptions about who could benefit from counselling support and how. This would be especially important if services are not "in-house". Third party services, e.g., outsourced counselling or private health insurance, proved even more difficult to access for those students faced with that scenario. Such services were regarded as peripheral and remote. Repeated statements such as "if we had got that information in the orientation, we wouldn't have been in a panic situation" and "if you can recommend these services in the pre-sessional course, before the big semester start, (we) will come, if it is to give benefit to (our) studies", makes the point emphatically.

Clinical Significance of the Research Findings. Clinical significance can be interpreted at a therapeutic level and at a service and institutional level, in terms of proposals for positive change. The therapeutic context will be considered here, whilst the service and institutional context will be covered in related sections within "Implications for Practice".

What is the potential of the research findings to translate into clinical practice? To answer this question I will briefly reference the outcomes of this study and briefly spell out a couple of clinical scenarios enabled by the research, within my own practice. The central findings of this study are (a) five key themes emerging as super-ordinates: Impact of Transition which characterised the early stages following arrival in the country; Living with Challenge – how the students coped, drawing on an extensive repertoire of strategies; Seeking Help whilst Living with Challenge – who from, why and at what point, followed by Shifting Identities – self observations of how these experiences have affected who they are as persons and finally Enhancing Cultural Engagement – students reflections on changes that may improve their overall experience. Each of these themes characterise the "inner world" of international students under stress. For clinical practitioners, insight into the inner world of clients without negative judgement, contributes to the acquisition of essential knowledge for cultural competency. This is one cornerstone of the necessary "dimensions or ingredients of multicul-

tural counselling competencies" (MCC), conceptualised as a process of three or four components: attitudes and beliefs, knowledge and skills (Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). These concepts are elaborated further in a subsequent section entitled "meaning of cultural competency". Knowledge from my findings, illuminating the phenomenological experience of students' lives, combines with the other MCC dimensions of counsellors' attitudes and beliefs. These include working with one's own identity and culture, including stereotypes and prejudices and being aware of socio-political influences, such as migration issues, racism and discrimination.

Components of knowledge, attitudes and values help to enable skills development. This can take the form of interventions or strategies aiming to take account of and be congruent with the client's world view. For example, in my university this took the form of proactive initiatives such as psycho-educational workshops to overcome cultural barriers that restricted access to traditional counselling.

The very idea that one needs help because one is not coping, is anathema to many students of Non-European backgrounds. Values such as being strong, high importance on academic success, fulfillment of family expectation and fierce loyalty to one's cultural group, potentially are beliefs that can discourage the uptake of counselling. A sense of failure, even shame can be invoked by help-seeking outside known and trusted sources, e.g., family, friends, tutors or religious/cultural figures. But to work knowingly with the barriers, to change the reference points, by enlisting support of the trusted sources such as tutors, is a bold and culturally competent step for counsellors. To connect with the students' educational aspiration, offers a flexible, non-threatening approach for raising awareness and trust building. Making contact in a way that promotes a study benefit, for example, is much more likely to engage these students, than an invitation to offer help for stress/distress. It is a kind of re-framing that emphasises the positive benefits of seeking help, but in ways that are acceptable to the students' sense of worth.

It then hopefully follows, that through the practice and experience of gaining such contact, it is possible to work inter-subjectively across cultures and that a 'good enough' transcultural relationship can develop. Many of these opportunities can act like a pre-therapy where the prospective client can assess the authenticity, relevance and indeed the cultural ethics of what's on offer from

both the counsellor and the service. Sue & Sue (1990) describe the integration of the MCC goals of attitudes/beliefs, knowledge and skills for clinical practice "as an active process that is ongoing and never reaches an end point".The statement acknowledges the limitations of the counsellor and the ongoing need for ethical supervision, consultation, training etc., to not only gain cultural competence but to continuously re-assess and improve practice.

Interestingly, the interviews themselves presented a psycho-educational opportunity to find out about counselling, thus enabling two students to negotiate the cultural barriers and later decide that the service had something useful to offer them therapeutically.

The trust-building, checking out process, occurred within the interview, with a student who was struggling with his sexuality. He was particularly concerned about confidentiality issues, not just for privacy but for self-protection, as homosexuality was a criminal offence in his country. At times he feared he was going mad as the effort required to contain and suppress the conflict "between his head and his heart" as he put it, was a form of torture, affecting sleep, concentration and of course like most emotional issues, affecting his study. It was important for him to have reassurance that many students suffer in silence, before being able to discuss with someone whom they can trust and who will not judge. This opened up a space where I was able to invite him to talk about the troubling matters within the complexity of circumstances, already acknowledged in the interview. This allowed us to "walk around" the issues in dialogue, to try to find possibilities for managing the situation that were unique to him and would fit his needs from a life, cultural and educational perspective. This approach was a flexible, multi-faceted exploration that had an educational starting point but became therapeutic. The transcultural relationship of respect, knowledge, skills and values/attitudes found a new level, which was robust enough for the client to continue in counselling.

A second therapeutic scenario developed from the interviews with another student. She had discussed in the interview her concerns about a friend, about whom she was very worried, and who was displaying symptoms of a suspected mental health condition. This was very frightening for the interviewee, from the point of view of wanting to help her friend but not knowing how. Through the interview process I became the "trusted person" through offering her the chance to discuss her fears and find some solace in the fact that other "trusted

persons, e.g. medical doctor" had also been engaged to help the friend. Her return to counselling to discuss further the personal impact of a friend's emotional breakdown, was a result I'm sure of my acknowledgement and awareness of the complexity of issues involved, e.g. shame based feelings around mental health issues. Offering a non-threatening, non judgemental way of exploring such a highly sensitive subject, allowed her to examine critically some aspects of her culture that she did not feel comfortable with, without feeling she was condemning or betraying her culture. As with the other clinical example, "walking around" the issues in dialogue, looking for various ways to fit the requirements of her life, educationally, culturally etc. without judgement, in the space held between us, helped our transcultural relationship to develop.

Psycho-Educational Workshops through Collaboration. Stepped approaches of other points of access to counselling such as psycho-educational groups are pointers of good practice. 'Maximising study benefits' is often the ticket by which they sell. Activities organised collaboratively between departments such as the International office and Student support, pre-sessional English classes and peer mentoring, raised by the participants in my study, make an early and lasting positive impression. Such experiences provide valuable information when thinking about the well-known, well-identified, 'hard to crack', concept of under-utilisation of counselling services by international students of non-European background.

Collaboration with other departments to create opportunities that are study related was my way to raise the profile of the counselling service, making it more accessible, whilst doing something "helpful" that was not called "counselling". Knowing of the poor attendance at open-access groups, I overcame this hurdle by negotiating with academic staff in the department of education to offer a cultural awareness programme, embedded into the curriculum as a "preparation for placement". Students on TESOL courses (Teaching English as a second or other language) preparing for teaching practice in Hungary, were my candidates. A similarly styled programme, but incorporating writing was also offered as a 'post-placement' reflective debrief. Both will be elaborated on in more detail in Appendix C. This is an example of a psycho-educational group that facilitated a cultural engagement of a proportionately high percentage of International students from non-European backgrounds and local students working together. They examined their own cultures in relation to each other and to the imagined Hungarian teachers and students whom they would soon meet on their teach-

ing placement. It was an experience immediately relevant to their study and supported by academic staff who are currently perceived to be more reliable, trusted "helping sources", as revealed by the 'hierarchy of helping' finding.

The evaluations of the cultural awareness seminars I conducted over three years, confirmed a very positive response. The success of this programme highlighted possibilities for the "rolling out" of similar models for other academic departments. This will be further considered in related sections within "Implications for practice".

Cultural Competency Training for Professional Counsellors. A perceived lack of cultural understanding amongst counsellors and psychologists, leading students to avoid discussing cultural matters, was another startling finding. Yet it was entirely recognisable and not surprising. Here is a flavour of some observations and typical student statements: "I'd be wary if the counsellor can fully understand the background, if its related to home, especially if its culturally related"; "What are the counsellors going to tell me apart from what they have read in a textbook?"; "The psychologist might misdiagnose the problem and multiply the problem". If the profession is going to overcome this resistance, which is sadly well-founded in many instances, then a "wake-up call" is urgently required to address key areas, such as professional training. My study has highlighted a need to embed cultural competency training within professional training for BACP and IACP accredited courses for newly qualified counsellors. In my own training twenty years ago, cultural competency was conspicuously absent from my Eurocentric training, which did not in any way equip me to work with clients from diverse backgrounds. Unfortunately, I discover that not much has changed since. However, there are some new authorities – indeed pioneers who are making waves, by producing research that challenges the comfort zone of a mainly white middle class profession. A profession, content to keep reproducing counsellors of a similar profile, risks professional insularity and marginalisation. The result may be a service not "fit for purpose" in some settings.

The training deficits highlighted are of urgent concern, if counselling services wish to stay relevant to an ever-expanding diverse client group, in a variety of settings. Universities and colleges are but one example. As part of that re-balancing "reform" there is also the need to attract in greater numbers, prospective counsellors from diverse backgrounds. Naturally the success of such

endeavours will be predicated on the extent of internal changes within the profession and their power to positively influence its culture and ethos. Counsellors from a variety of different backgrounds with cultural competency skills, are a desirable and necessary asset in a university or college counselling team. Ideally the make-up of a counselling team should reflect the diversity of its client population. Of course there are difficulties in reality to implement this standard, as the workforce mainly derives from the local geographic area, which is not a representation of the student population it serves. Taking this into account, my recommendation would be that a university or college counselling team should comprise of at least one counsellor with an international background and/or has transcultural training and experience. Having someone within the team with a transcultural interest means a higher profile for transcultural issues and probably more commitment to work creatively to enhance cultural engagement.

Current and recent pioneers of transcultural research, who have inspired my research journey, include Isha Mckenzie Mavinga and Judy Ryde. Both women have brought a long overdue scrutiny to areas of transcultural counselling from a black and white perspective, respectively. McKenzie-Mavinga (2009) addresses the treatment of Black issues in counselling training courses, from the viewpoint of a black practitioner in her book "Black Issues in the Therapeutic Process" based on her doctoral study. In her book "Being White" Judy Ryde addresses similar issues of working with Black, Asian and ethnic minority clients including refugees and asylum seekers, based on her doctoral study, from the viewpoint of a white practitioner (Ryde, 2009). Their work presents a much-needed challenge to professional training institutions to revise their training programmes to take account of cultural issues. The absence of an embedded emphasis on this work is out-of step with the needs of a changing demographic of prospective counsellors and clients from diverse backgrounds. The findings of my research, backed up by my own experience, lead me to the same conclusion that this omission is an unacceptable state of affairs.

Cultural competency needs to be at the heart of training as the profession moves on in the 21st Century. For those counsellors who are already qualified, CPD options in cultural competency would be essential for those who are working with diverse client groups, relying mainly on their core Eurocentric training. Which principle should cultural competence training follow? According to both my own cultural experience when conducting this study and the research done in this area, cultural competency training should put the multicultural counselling

relationship centre-place. The three areas of MCC, i.e., attitudes, knowledge, and skills are integral to a cultural competence training as they are necessary but not sufficient conditions for a multicultural counselling relationship. This begs the question what else is required. The training is bound to convey factual knowledge, but it needs to reach other layers of the person in particular emotions, attitudes, convictions by way of appropriate delivery format, e.g., psycho-educational workshops or group discussion. This can be a stand-alone activity or a preparation for therapy (as discussed in products). Increasing internationalisation, especially in educational settings, ensures that interactions with people from different cultural backgrounds, are becoming more commonplace. As geographical and cultural boundaries become more traversable, the increasing tendency is to view oneself more as a globalised citizen and universities as globalised providers of education. In the process of a cultural competence training the cultural frame of references might be challenged or revised. But when transcultural interest is highlighted, it opens up possibilities for working creatively to increase cultural engagement. This means implications for new knowledge, skills and perspectives for identity development and identity shifting, of both clients and counsellors.

Cultural Competence Training for University Staff. Where there is better cultural understanding and sensitivity, the more likely the chances for early detection of distress. This happens randomly and informally for the most part, in institutions, but doubtless could be improved upon with cultural competence training for all university staff, who have direct contact with students. This need has already been identified by a study carried out by ICOS (Irish Council), commissioned by the Irish government and launched on 11th June 2015. As a result, intercultural competency training will be offered to all staff in Irish universities and colleges. One of the authors, Louise Staunton, presented her research at the University of Cork the following week, at the same conference where I presented my research – a timely coincidence! She says, "the development of cross-cultural competency skills is increasingly becoming a hot button issue in the context of the forthcoming introduction of an International Education Mark (IEM) by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). The IEM is part of a Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training for International Students, which includes minimum requirements for their support in Higher Education (Staunton, 2015). This government-led initiative would seem to indicate that Ireland is more advanced than many other countries in terms of

the political will to implement such training. The author spells out the brief by saying the providers will be required to show that staff receive training and support regarding inter-cultural competence to facilitate appropriate and effective services to international students (ibid).

The related objectives (to my work) and synchronicity of timing, regarding the launch of this research with its promised implications, I found quite extraordinary. Although the "rolling out" of the training will be for universities and colleges in the Republic of Ireland, I am conscious that these events may signal an opening for me to investigate, pursue or create opportunities for a North-South Ireland collaboration where I could contribute substantially to a staff training programme and be involved in its delivery, in educational settings. This is an area of interest for post-doctoral work, putting the knowledge, skills and authority, gained through my research, to good use in a wider remit.

The Meaning of Cultural Competence.   Cultural competence is a complex concept that has led to many attempts to define it. Most authors agree that cultural competence involves a system of dimensions or ingredients, which are often conceptualised as a process. A considerable part of the literature on cultural competence follows the model of multicultural counselling competencies (MCC) initially introduced by Sue et al. (1992). According to this model, cultural competence is comprised of three broad areas: "(a) attitudes and beliefs awareness of one's own assumptions, values, and biases, (b) knowledge understanding the worldview of culturally diverse clients and (c) skills" (Worthington, Soth-McNett, & Moreno, 2007). A number of studies have been prompted by the seminal work of Sue et al. (1992), and some extensions have been suggested subsequently. For instance, Sodowsky, Taffe, Gutkin, & Wise (1994) found evidence for a forth factor, i.e., multi- cultural counselling "relationship". Clearly, the areas that make up the MCC, i.e., attitudes and beliefs, knowledge and skills, are indisputably important. And yet, conceiving of cultural competency in terms of components as models of MCC tend to promote a flattened understanding. There is a risk to overlook that some components are functional to achieve others. From my experience, attitudes and knowledge are prerequisites and form the bedrock for skills development. In turn, all three areas of MCC models are counselling prerequisites for establishing a multicultural counselling "relationship" as emphasised rightly by Sodowsky et al. (1994), which is essential for a sustainable therapeutic engagement. Speaking to the British context, Colin Lago takes this further in his proposal of seven inter-connecting and over-

lapping domains (Lago, 2010). This is a helpful definition mapping the various elements and qualities within the personality and practice of the counsellor, integral for demonstrating cultural competence in a natural and seamless fashion. The seven domains are:

1. Personal and Professional Qualities. Therapeutic relational competencies. This is at the centre and relates to the relationship itself, which is characterised by qualities such as acceptance, compassion, empathy, relational capacity and motivation.

2. Primary Knowledge. Understanding complex societal mechanisms that perpetuate oppression and discrimination and their historical and current impact on client and counsellor, in terms of the "gains" and "losses" for both individuals.

3. Further Knowledge for working with specific communities. This includes understanding of that group's concept of help-seeking behaviours, coping strategies, the cultural and religious beliefs and being prepared to involve other "helping agents" like a cultural figure or traditional healer. This can also include understanding of the effects of culture shock and the impact of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

4. Awareness of one's own culture, identity, communication style and how this may be perceived by the client. This is essential for a counsellor's self-development for enhanced transcultural work. It necessitates holding theoretical knowledge about the client's cultural background, whilst being aware of one's own stereotypes and prejudices, how this may be felt in the interaction between them and how it can be managed within and beyond the therapeutic space.

5. Professional competencies. The complex nature of the work requires a greater range of competencies, e.g., systemic family work, group work, involvement of interpreters, learning appropriate languages, greetings and being able to critically evaluate one's own value system in relation to the client's perspectives

6. Professional commitment. This relates to appropriate supervision, consultation, continued awareness and commitment to learning and research, links to local communities and support for trainees from minority groups.

7. Contexts. Being able to consider the role of environment on the therapy, the message being communicated to the clients through the location of agency, decoration of the room, advertising, with an intention to co-create a nourishing environment within the current realities.

Confronting Stereotypes and Working with Prejudice.   Students were concerned about western people's stereotypes informing their perceptions of students from Non-International Backgrounds. This is a more expanded version of the finding around students' fears regarding counsellors' cultural understanding. They discussed the misrepresentative and damaging stereotypes they believed Americans and Europeans had about them, and which held negative pre-dispositions for cultural engagement. For example an Arab student says "They think our people are very backward and conservative, that they don't talk to women, that they don't drink and they avoid them". Students who had travelled and lived in Europe and America often made assertions about unhelpful stereotypes. The following is an excerpt from an article I wrote on the subject of *shifting identities* for *Universities and Colleges Counselling*

> *I was struck by the honesty, in speaking so directly about stereotypes. Stereotypes prevail in every culture as a way of distancing and reducing those who are different. They can seriously damage the wellbeing of individuals from cultures, who feel repeatedly subjected to negativity, usually ethnic or religious groups, in a minority setting. In reference to the attacks and hostility directed at Muslims after the 9/11 atrocities, (Haque and Kamil, 2012) comment that it's important to be aware of the negative impact of misconceptions on the Muslims' psyche, especially on young people who are already struggling with identity issues. This carries an implicit exhortation to professionals to recognise our own biases and stereotypes, as well as acquiring knowledge of the client's beliefs and heritage, when working transculturally. Knowledge can help to bring to the forefront any biases held by the practitioner and help to decrease the impact of transference and counter-transference (ibid). This is an important aspect of building the therapeutic alliance and essentially contributes to culturally competent practice'* (Conn, 2015).

The presence of stereotypes (usually unspoken), present a barrier to relating at a genuine level, necessary for therapeutic work. Stereotypes are more likely

to persist if the counsellor has little knowledge of the cultural differences or the legacies of historical impact of past and present discrimination and racism. Mckenzie Mavinga speaks of racism, which affects both the victim and the oppressor and the need for intercultural learning to work through these issues at training level and in supervision. She goes on to emphasise how internalised oppression for the black client is a feature of the hurt and prejudice that affects a developing identity, terming the powerful feelings evoked by such discussions as 'recognition trauma'. An uncertain grasp of one's own culture, especially if white, and how this may be playing out in the transference and countertransference of a therapeutic encounter or indeed an everyday encounter, is an especially crucial area for practice and training. Questions to interrogate reflexively are raised by Lago and Hough: Are You White Aware? How does that awareness inform you? What impact has this on your clients...how do you behave in your whiteness to others who are white, others who are black or 'other'? (Lago & Haugh, 2006).

As a white counsellor, these issues have challenged my thinking, practice and research continuously, leading me into all sorts of new territories of consciousness and moral mazes, identity examination and identity development. Over the past decades, a number of racial/ethnic and white identity stage models emerged in the psychological literature (Helms, 1990; Carter, 1995; C. Lee, 2006). They are concerned with identity formation, how a person conceives of themselves as a racial/ethnic being, how this gives meaning to one's life and how it mediates one's relationship with self and others. Whites have traditionally enjoyed privilege in their relationships with people of colour in many countries and cultural contexts (Helms, 1992; McIntosh, 1989). How the client and counsellor view their cultural identity has an impact on the counselling relationship, a subject addressed extensively in the work of Courtland Lee, with reference to the conceptual frameworks of black and white identity development. When I first came across these models, I found them immensely useful for positioning my own development, tracing where I had come from as a white female with an early rural conditioning, without exposure and opportunities for cultural mixing, in my formative years. Absence of formal cultural awareness training in my early professional career did not help to address this lacuna of learning. That came much later, in part motivated by my intense discomfort about not feeling equipped and knowledgeable yet wishing, as a minimum, to "do no harm" when engaging with clients with diverse cultural backgrounds.

The desire to develop my awareness and practice involves continued engagement with issues examining my own stereotypes, my relationship with my privileged history, considering how internalised oppressions of others, including my own, make themselves felt in my interactions across the spectrum of clients' identity-whether clients are black, white, of mixed heritage or having shifting and plural cultural identities. What particularly resonated with me was the recognition that the counsellor needed, at least, to match the client or be further advanced in their identity development, for a helpful, constructive therapy to have a starting chance. Where there is a mismatch, in other words if the counsellor is not sufficiently cognisant with these issues, for example taking a "colour blind" approach, described as the first stage of white identity development, this can be particularly damaging for the client of colour. Thompson & Jenal (1994) describe such race avoidance as "falling prey to the colour blindness syndrome which ignores human diversity and uniqueness".

Ryde (2009) describes her transcultural way of working as inter-subjective and non-dualistic. Western philosophy on which Eurocentric training relies, favours dualistic thinking which means making sense of the world in an individualistic way, e.g., male/female; black/white; right/wrong. The focus of counselling and helping professions is often on a description of "other" cultures, with a base line of the white western culture as the norm. Focusing on "difference" in this way lies at the heart of a great deal of frustration that black people feel towards white people (Hall, 1992). This makes intersubjectivity an interesting and useful theory for understanding white awareness, particularly power imbalances.

Ryde explains that an inter-subjective way of understanding truth, is that it arises between client and counsellor, belonging to both and neither at the same time. It allows both the subjectivity of client and counsellor to be acknowledged (ibid), thus inviting a space for stereotypes and unacceptable thoughts to be safely owned and considered. It is likely that many counsellors are aware of their prejudices but push them aside, rather like "bracketing off" that which is regarded as not useful or helpful for the therapeutic alliance. In a process, not dissimilar and therefore reminding me of IPA, where the researcher loops back into their pre-suppositions to make sense of them, Ryde (2009) likens the process of examining stereotypes directly (either with the client or in supervision) to Winnicott's transitional 'play space'. This is a place where something exists between the internal and external world and allows something new within our self to emerge (Winnicott, 1974). The idea seems to embrace a more holistic

way of working that encourages practitioners to look critically at themselves and their practice. The non-judgemental trust and safety emphasis invites a constructive examination, one that goes beyond the historical guilt and shame that often prohibits or can even induce greater defensiveness from members of the dominant group. Such ways of working give hope and inspiration for the transcultural discourse moving forward.

A concept to frame a similar idea is the South African notion of "ubuntu", referred to by Barak Obama at Nelson Mandela's funeral; *We achieve ourselves by sharing ourselves with others and caring for those around us* (Obama, 2013). Desmond Tutu describes ubuntu: *In our culture, there is no such thing as a solitary individual. We say a person is a person through other persons; that we belong to a bundle of life ... I need you to be you, so that I can be me.* (Tutu, 2007). When this process is not enabled or understood, it is likely that the client will present a "proxy self" (Thomas, 1992), to conform with the expectations of a white western counsellor and stay with 'safe' issues. Ultimately, such an engagement is not sustainable and can explain an early exit from counselling or attendance at perhaps only one session.

Regarding the difficulty in encouraging black clients to engage in counselling, Tuckwell offers an explanation of endemic racism within the profession, which manifests itself as a silence. She says a frequent response of the black client is to stop and leave therapy, often silently. Another response is not to enter in the first place, which is the loudest silence of all (Tuckwell, 2002).

Mckenzie Mavinga asserts that when clients are not recognised, understood and accepted for who they are, the experience can result in "identity traumatisation" where the client's sense of self is threatened and seriously undermined (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2009). Although her assertions are more generally directed to a context of transcultural work with UK clients of Black, Asian and Minority backgrounds, the value of her research holds true for international students who share aspects of cultural identity. Such issues are an important area to be addressed within training courses, strongly suggesting the need to include compulsory embedded components to enable counsellors to examine their own culture, their own racism of which stereotypes form a part, and ways to work beyond one's culture that can be empowering and therapeutic for building relationships with clients of culturally different backgrounds.

Learning from current Good Practice. Sometimes it is easy to overlook current good practice in a fervent attempt to address areas of deficit. Such omissions would be unforgivable. Developing good practice and a culturally sensitive ethos is an incremental process that relies on a wide variety of changing input over years.

When participants of the study choose to highlight the benefits they had gained from certain programmes, actions or efforts on the part of the institution, this stood out as highly significant. These varied in nature from respect shown to individuals to group organised events. For example accommodating a student's observance of prayers during work/study hours; the provision of a quiet room suitable for worship or prayer; orientation programmes that included sight-seeing trips of local historic, environmental interest; pre-sessional English classes for students whose first language is not English; and a peer-mentoring programme, departmentally based, where older students are responsible for befriending the first years.

Such feedback offers pointers for good practice, which can be built upon and extended. Positive experiences like the ones mentioned, helped students cope with the impact of transition, enabling a more secure attachment to the new place. Feeling recognised in their identities, shown in details such as respecting religious observance, or acknowledging communication difficulties by offering English support conveyed a message of being considered and "thought about" in terms of their needs, as international students. Extending a warm welcome that demonstrates an understanding of things they may appreciate, such as get-togethers with food and trips offering social opportunities to meet others in a similar situation, was a powerful message whose impact was felt long after the actual experience was over.

These are events that are usually run by other services like an International Office, an academic department or chaplaincy who often have valuable experience in this area. Developing joint initiatives with other services can be a way for counselling services to become more visible and therefore accessible at the early stage following students' arrival. Where there are such opportunities to collaborate, networks are strengthened and cultural understanding increased by the sharing of knowledge and experience. Not only can this reduce stigma associated with counselling but serve to create 'a community of helping agents' with a shared understanding of the implications of their role. Being referral agents

who can help reduce and mange student risk, a concept discussed earlier with regard to the *hierarchy of helping*, may come as a surprise to some staff.

Often, students perceive their academic tutors, or religious figures, as more trusted helping sources because their authority is better known and understood. To become aware of this perception is a valuable resource as it can help to mobilise more collaborative ways of working and indirectly create easier routes of referral for 'troubled' students, who may seek out informal help in the first instance. Those students who do not seek help but withdraw into isolation, may not slip under the radar so easily, when staff are more culturally aware and less compartmentalised and isolationist within their own services. My experience of collaborating with the Department of Education to offer workshops on cultural awareness as preparation for teaching placement followed by post placement reflection, are testament to this assertion. These will be given more attention in Appendix C. Repeating experiences, with greater frequency, across different departments, inevitably encourages a perception of a more integrated 'community of helping'. It follows that co-creating an environment of better cultural engagement is better for all students, not just international students from non-European backgrounds.

Trinity College Dublin have embodied this aspiration to some degree, in the creation of a global room. *The Trinity Global Room – where cultures combine: A case study for informal integration activities, a conference paper presented at the CSSI (Confederation of Student Services in Ireland), University of Cork* by Caitriona McGratton, 2015. It is a new initiative, supported by the University to create a social space where international students can mingle with local students. It acts as a venue for an impressive number of culturally related events throughout the year and is run by one paid member of staff and eighteen part-time student ambassadors from countries around the world, including UK and Ireland. The concept addresses the difficulty of bridging the gap between local and international students, in a way that is fresh, fun and innovative. It is a cultural engagement that it is supported by Senior Management, by providing funds and staff resources. Although not always necessary, practical endorsement and institutional goodwill form an important aspect of a successful collaboration.

CHAPTER 11

Conclusion

The highest reward for a person's toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it.

(John Ruskin)

Reflections on the Doctoral Journey

This study has been conducted over six years. In that time period there have been many significant events and milestones documenting the doctoral journey. Naturally, there have been highpoints and low points, within the doctorate, as with professional and personal life, all of which have brought their own meaning and wisdom to bear. There have been plenty of monumental challenges and upheavals along the way, where the commitment to keep going has been sorely tested. Yet in spite of everything the end goal remained in sight and is now tantalisingly within reach.

But of course, as John Ruskin's words eloquently remind me, it's not all about the destination or the goal; it's the experience that moulds one's character and shapes one's identity that really matters. That's the true prize, which will go on nourishing and enduring far into the future. In this reflection, I will visit some of those defining moments and events and consider their impact.

No reflection of the doctoral process would be complete without paying tribute to the early stages of Part 1, which laid the foundations. With reference to the six phases of heuristic inquiry, the first year at Metanoia represented the initial *engagement*. The monthly attendance of *Research Challenges* provided a safe containing framework for me to develop and clarify my research focus, within a supportive community. Paul Barber's holding presence, acutely refined intuition and skilful management of group dynamics was a moving, grounding and inspirational experience. I was in thrall to the mysteries of his art. The process deepened my self-awareness: it increased my knowledge and understanding about the task I'd embarked upon, by showing me how to attend to "tacit knowing, intuitions, and felt sense" (Barber, 2006). The atmosphere and context enabled me to participate in the group's experience of empathic understanding of ourselves, by ourselves (Etherington, 2004). Undoubtedly this informed the quality of the empathic understanding I was able to extend to my co-researchers in the PEP and which was to evolve further in my main research with student participants.

The writing assignments of Research diaries and RPPL were well gauged for an early heuristic process. The activities renewed my forgotten enthusiasm for writing, whilst reminding me its usefulness as a therapeutic outlet, for myself and potentially for the students, participating in my research. This important realisation was to guide me later, in creating the 'products'. It has also helped hone my writing abilities for a public audience, whose appreciation and critique has opened up new levels of personal development. I came to understand this new form of engagement, as 'reflexive', a signature of the Metanoia style.

The "telling and re-telling of one's story helps a person to create a sense of self" (Burr, 1995; Cushman, 1995; Frank, 1995) as cited in Kim Etherington's book *Becoming a Reflexive Researcher*, goes some way towards describing the fundamentals of a process that have provided an enduring foundation. The subtle yet transformative power of a reflexive style of thinking, extending into writing, has expanded my vision and potential. Reflexivity would seem to owe

much to a phenomenological approach, which provides the underpinning to the entire study.

Dorothea Brande, who coined the concept of creative writing in the 1930's made astute observations that echoes across the decades. She sounded like an early exponent of the reflexive style, or a "born phenomenologist" (Van Manen, 1997), eloquently describing the two persons of the writer. The unconscious mind which flows freely and richly, bringing at demand, all the treasures of memory, incidents, scenes, intimations of character and relationships, which it has stored away in its depths. Then there is the conscious mind which edits, i.e. controls, combines and discriminates between the materials without hampering the unconscious flow (Dorothea Brande, 1934/1996:), as quoted in (Bager-Charleson, 2014). The dimension of the 'double hermeneutic' of making sense of interviewees, making sense of their experiences, as revealed in the encounter and then later through their transcribed and written words, adds to the complexity of the inter-lacing dynamics. Brande's timeless rendition regarding the writing, describes a somewhat nebulous, difficult-to-define process, and is resonant with the intentions that guided this work.

When I conducted the PEP, I believe I entered the *immersion* stage, relative to the whole research. Then in executing the PEP, I experienced every heuristic phase, which grounded me for the main project. The preparation of the 'Learning Agreement' ensured I remained immersed. Presenting the 'Learning Agreement' marked a definite half-way point. Fortunately, this was an affirming experience with encouraging feedback. It helped to anchor me within a structure that would help carve out the path for the journey ahead. *Incubation* came later when working with the audio files and transcripts of the interviews of my main research. At times I felt sentenced to hard labour, when working on the texts, trying to make sense and meaning from the raw data, in its fragmented chaotic and incoherent form. These were frustrating times and characterised many of the low points. *Illumination* came slowly during the analysis when patterns and connections became apparent. These were accompanied by periods of anticipation and excitement, like being on the edge of a new revelation, akin to watching the horizon, just before the sun comes up.

Finally, *explication* came in the writing up stage leading to a creative synthesis in the 'large' project. Each chapter written represented a stepping stone, with the stepping-stones seemingly getting further and further apart, in the river's

torrent, thanks to difficult life circumstances. I am borrowing this image from the poet Seamus Heaney who used it to describe his oeuvre in his Nobel Prize acceptance speech. It is also the title of the only biography written of his life and published shortly before his death. So impressed was I, by the poignancy and expediency of this image that I used it for my Professional Knowledge paper, as the defining image of my doctorate.

It is difficult to estimate the value of one's research, especially knowing that one's own analysis can never be the whole story. In the early days of *Research Challenges*, I remember great emphasis placed on having 'critical friends' to help with this job. Later I came across a rendition of a similar sentiment by Seamus Heaney, who is quoted as saying "there are two kinds of critics who help to create an audience: there's the appreciator(who says its terrific) and there's the adjudicator (who says I really wonder if this is worth having at all!) They are both necessary" (O'Driscoll, 2009). Echoing the aforementioned two-writers duality, I found myself also oscillating between the two-critics personas, for my own sense-making. Simultaneously, I have been helped towards a more reasoned and balanced opinion, by fortunate exposure to constructive feedback from friends, colleagues, academic adviser/consultant and more recently a public audience at a conference and a journal readership. I am keenly aware I will soon add examiners to that list.

The other consideration to this task of evaluation is that I am concluding my doctoral journey, at one remove from the setting that gave rise to the research. I am no longer employed as a counsellor in a University. My department of Student Support in the University of Ulster fell victim to the ravages of the private sector, last year. Services were outsourced and twenty-two people including myself were 'forced' into voluntary redundancy. Unfortunately the effective work and experience developed over many years has been lost to that institution with no opportunity to pass it on. There are no remaining culture-bearers, in any of the services, including counselling. The shared work and dedication from professionals with a combined experience of over 200 years, I believe is a profound loss to the academic and student community. The professional and personal aspects of redundancy and its effects on my work still reverberate one year on.

Such circumstances do not in any way dilute the findings or lessen the need for this research to be taken seriously. In fact it probably makes it all the more urgent. My redundancy is not a unique experience and unfortunately signals a

very worrying trend in the provision of university counselling services. In the current economic realities, they are often regarded as the "soft targets", which are the first to suffer brutal cuts to staffing, with little cognisance of student or staff welfare. In a recent publication in *University and College Counselling*, Sept issue, I wrote

> *Continuous lack of investment into university counselling services or worse – the degradation of a service, by outsourcing it completely, as happened in my (former) university this year – spells serious, irreversible damage to the delivery of counselling. "Hard to reach students", like the participants of this study, are often the most affected. The case, as made by Patti Wallace (2014), for maintaining and investing in embedded "in-house" counselling, gives some chance ... to co-create a culturally sensitive ethos, or at least spaces, for students' identities to shift, evolve and achieve. Such an endeavour relies on the will, perseverance and collaboration of all staff involved in the support and education of international students of non-European backgrounds. To disregard the evidence for good practice suggests a failure to acknowledge fully those students' human potential and indeed risks exposing the hollowness of public institutional declarations about commitment to student well-being* (Conn, 2015, p. 29).

What do the findings mean for practitioners, counselling trainers, heads of services and senior managers in educational institutions who together shape the cultural milieu, through policies and procedures? These seemingly intangible forces ultimately define the student experience. In a keynote speech at the AUCC conference (2004), Colin Lago emphasised the importance of a constructive and nurturing environment: "it is my opinion that sustained intentionality of goodwill towards the student body is facilitated by the goodwill and benign intentions of senior staff within the organisation, values that filter down through the organisational processes, re-enforcing and supporting staff behaviours and practices at the point of contact with international students". If the institution fits the description of Lago's "humanising organisation", naturally the prognosis will be good, yet this seems even more elusive and unrealistic, than it did when he made the remarks ... and at the same time all the more pertinent.

Unfortunately, such a 'humanising' ethos did not form the backdrop to my research. Rather my study was carried out in hostile conditions, battling each

of the organisational ambushes that came my way. Most of that negativity was fuelled by poor management, followed by "no management", i.e., no head of service for over a year, and combined with misguided thinking about how to apply cost savings. A new head of service, whose questionable reputation was already known, was brought in after a two-year hiatus, to implement a re-structure. This sealed the fate of our department. A fight to convince and persuade senior management of their misguided thinking and a challenge of their manipulative tactics, kept myself and my colleagues engaged in a pointless struggle for another few months.

Despite the stressful and dehumanising context, my immediate collegial support was sincere and steadfast. The shared adversity probably bonded team members across disciplines, more closely; at some level we realised that our professional futures at the university were hanging in the balance and that our days as a close-knit multi-disciplinary team were numbered.

Although needing to acknowledge the afore-mentioned circumstances, as they are integral to the narrative, I would not like them to overshadow the many highlights, that enlivened the doctoral story, giving me "jewels for the journey" (Coyte, Gilbert, & Nicholls, 2007) in memories to treasure.

My interviews in India, well described already, were truly inspirational. I think the role reversal of myself as the travelling, international 'doctoral student' committed to my study, to learn about the world from other cultural perspectives, was largely responsible. It was a different kind of *immersion*, to use another of Moustaka's stages of heuristic process.

The experience of creating a series of workshops, in collaboration with an academic department, with a joint focus on raising cultural awareness within the context of teaching placements, was also very enjoyable. Embedding the workshops within the academic curriculum was a small triumph. It was the solution to overcome the problem of reticence, which many international Students of non-European backgrounds have, in considering counselling support. But where there is a link with career and study benefit, their perspectives can change quite radically. Making such openings available, proved successful for raising the profile of cultural awareness generally, so that all students could benefit; and specifically for the students of this study, as it raised the profile of counselling services. Inclusion of my article in the university staff magazine *Inside*, describing the initiative, was a proud moment. At that time, I was full of hope

that the experience with the department of Education could be repeated with other departments within the university with similar success. Circumstances superseded which were to scupper those plans, at least in that setting. There is regret, that I did not get to build on the early success of that venture, nor did I get the chance to extend it to include staff participants. Offering cultural awareness workshops through staff development would have been the obvious next stage.

That regret put me in touch with possibilities to do this in a different way, for different audiences. It is an ambition, gathering momentum for a while, to create a specialism around cultural training. I believe I am well placed to deliver such, having investigated many related areas within the field, in the course of this research. It was therefore rather serendipitous to discover, through my networks, that mandatory cultural awareness training is soon to be offered to all staff in Higher and Further Education colleges, who teach international students in the Republic of Ireland. I am excited about these opportunities for creating new pathways for using and developing my knowledge further. It may also herald new cross-border initiatives, following recent good practice and better north-south relations!

Towards the journey's end, there have been two highlights to dazzle me! The experience of delivering my conference paper at the University of Cork, to my professional peers – to be regarded as someone of authority on my chosen subject has been truly uplifting. To use this empowered position, to influence thinking and action, that potentially can change the experience for international students of non-European backgrounds, for the better, was very gratifying. On a par with this achievement, was the recent publication of my article "Shifting Identities" in the BACP Journal *University and College Counselling*. Both represent forays into a changing landscape of new possibilities which include writing and training, which I had only dreamt of, before beginning this research. Those dreams emboldened me to begin that journey which is now almost miraculously coming near its end ... the hermeneutic circle will continue to turn, with a different 'whole' of new constituent parts ... and another journey will begin.

My hope is that my research can contribute to the ongoing challenge of how university counselling services can engage constructively with international students from different cultural backgrounds. It is of paramount importance that they lead by example, in a commitment to bridging cultures and traditions. This

means listening to narratives from the 'experiential experts' – the students themselves to find out what are their help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies. It means responding in a way that is helpful, creative and can transcend those inherited positions that traditionally alienate, i.e., positions often arising from the legacy of a social history of oppression and which can inhibit cross-cultural dialogue. By bringing some illumination to a very complex, often controversial subject, I hope my endeavour will bring new perspectives and insights that can raise the profile of cultural awareness and enhance cultural engagement, within educational settings for the benefit of all. Given the fact that these students are trying to cope with an extraordinary range and complexity of challenges and stressors, it is likely they need more support from University counselling services than other students, not less. To try to meet these students at least halfway, means changing the way support is offered. If my study achieves this aim, it will add value to the body research of transcultural counselling and positively influence the mind-set of those who are directly and indirectly responsible for provision of support to international students of non-European backgrounds. In the voice of one of my student interviewees, *One day we will bridge the gap (of understanding).* I hope that day is not too far away and that this research will have made a valid contribution.

Appendix A – Tables

Transcript	Notes
I: When you arrived, did you experience any degree of culture shock?	
S: Well, I will say culture shock, or anything like that – it's a bit too strong a word – but I don't know – due to stigma all that kind of thing happening now in this part of the world. But if I can tell you what kind of lifestyle I've been seeing. So It was a bit different from the kind of life I've lived but it wasn't like, it wasn't a challenge or, say, an inhibition or any sort of thing. It was fine, I was cool with it. There weren't really any obstacles, or it wasn't a problem, to be short.	Downplays the "shock" word, as he takes a literal interpretation. Careful not to offend by appearing to accepting the 'pub culture' although he seems affected by it. Does not want to criticise Irish flat mates and Irish in general.
I: Okay. Was there anything that stood out for you as being different to what you were used to?	
S: There is. Say back in my country like drinking is something that's prohibited in public. So but, like here it's not. I was staying with these Irish guys . . . it wasn't that they got drunk or did anything. But like, I'm coming to terms with the fact that drinking alcohol is something quite normal here. I mean, this was like one of the things which I see in this country.	Is aware of cultural difference but does not judge about them.
I: Yeah. There is what is called a pub culture in Ireland.	
S: It isn't a problem. It's just that I didn't have, like, any sort of experience back in my country, but it wasn't like the guys were misbehaved or did anything arrogant, it was nothing like that – it was just a bit significant in culture as you say, that's it.	Gives the impression that cultural differences are what they are. At least as long certain basic rules are kept.
I: Oh, okay. So you didn't find it intimidating, or threatening, or	
S: No, no. Not at all. Maybe there were, once or twice, there were a few times knocking my windows, it was like, after the Kelly's party, around midnight, there were some guys who used to do that. But it's all part and parcel of the game yeah. But it wasn't (laughs) the Irish guys I live with. But that's fine.	Seems to open up more now. Still keeping a tolerant attitude.
I: Apart from the difference in drinking alcohol – is there anything else that's significant?	
S: Back home the boys and girls find the independence they have here – making their choice – like I have done . . . well I mean, even at the age of 22, 23, you're more depending on your parents. It's like your parents are regarding you still as a child.	Individualism and family orientation seems to be a pattern around which these observations are organised.

Table 11.1: Extract from an Interview with Notes added

Interview Transcript	Emergent Sub/Themes	Superordinate Themes
It wasn't a shock I would say but we had significantly very much differences in the way people live and practice their religion.	Experience of culture shock	Impact of Transition
You really have to understand how they do it because people in different cultures, you're doing things differently ... I have to get along and know exactly what the meanings are.	Process of integration	
There are possibilities for of jobs, research grants, sponsorships and so on. And for whatever reason, international students are not been signposted to those agencies	Feeling of injustice	
From the time I was small, I was brought up to be a man. You have to be strong and carry this responsibility and no one has to know your weaknesses.	Coping by being strong	Living with Challenge – Coping
We ask God's help. It's a kind of relief. I go to pray and sit and revise my problems, my sins. We believe that these sins lead to stress and anxiety. So we go for forgiveness ... this is also a relaxation.	Coping by faith/spirituality	
I personally feel it is good to write a diary to get rid of stress. If I put it down on paper and read it later, then I think "Why did I feel sad for this?"	Coping by personal resources	
I go to my mother and my father in case I need any help. I ask them their advice I tell them I have done this wrong	Family	Living with Challenge – Help Seeking
Amongst Yemenis, I think no one has no friend. I don't think any Yemenis student in Hyderabad can live alone out of the group.	Friends	
I was in touch with them beforehand even before I arrived here in Northern Ireland. They kind of took care of us in the initial days. They very much supported us.	Cultural Community	

Table 11.2: Theme Development

Interview Transcript	Emergent Sub/Themes	Superordinate Themes
Before I was used to just one belief and one culture. Here you can talk to people of different attitudes, different faith. It had an impact.	Self development	
Sometimes I feel that my personal decision is being made by my parents and my friends. It is a collective decision. Even if I don't like it they will come to make a shield.	Coping as culturally determinant	Shifting Identities
Some people who are weak from inside, face small problem – they multiply the problem even by consulting others.	Perceived barriers – Distrust	
People in the decision making panel should understand what are the psychological problems for a students? "What is the right atmosphere? How can we make a good environment for the students to be more productive?"	Reflections on how to improve transition	
The services that are there are just the general ones for all the problems for any student. As far as I am concerned there is no really specific forum for foreign students.	Perceived barriers	Enhancing Cultural Engagement
So what we need to do is we should meet people and and talk to them to understand them. And one day we will bridge the gap.	Process of integration	

Table 11.3: Theme Development ctd

Superordinate Themes	Emergent Themes	Emergent Subthemes	#Sources	#References
Impact of transition	Experience of culture shock		15	104
	Process of integration		14	94
	Adaptation		2	2
		Reflection of adaptation	2	18
	Communication difficulties		17	28
	Opportunities for self-development		7	40
	Feeling of injustice		2	10
		Discrimination	2	10
		Exploitation	3	22
		Immigration	3	19
		Limited job-opportunities	3	26
		Racism	5	17
	Financial worries		4	32
	Link between health & emotions		13	45
		Health concerns	2	14
Living with challenges – Coping	Coping			
		by being strong	8	22
		by faith or spirituality	6	37
		by focusing on end goal	8	20
		by use of personal resources	15	82
		by use of natural medicine	2	4
		reflections on coping	3	11
	Not-coping		3	6
Living with challenges – Seeking help	Seeking help			
		Cultural community	5	31
		Faith community	1	5
		Family	13	57
		Friends	15	76
		Neighbours	2	5
		Medical Services (inside the Uni)	10	44
		Medical Services (outside the Uni)	8	24
		University	2	5
		Academic staff	10	44
		English language support	1	3
		University administration	6	8
		Student mentors	1	8
		Employer & Colleagues	3	7
	Not seeking help		14	48
		Isolation	11	27
		Crisis	14	103
	Perceived barriers		3	8
		Distrust	9	26
		Lack of knowledge	9	26
		Resistance	11	72
Shifting Identities	Coping			
		as culturally determined	3	11
		by being strong	8	22
	Experience of culture shock		15	104
	Process of integration		14	94
	Self-development related to culture shock		7	40
	Acceptance		3	12
	Adaptation		2	2
	Belonging		2	4
	Help-seeking		15	370
	Counselling		15	162
	Crisis		14	113
	Communication Difficulties		2	21
	Feeling of injustice		2	10
	Job opportunities		3	26
	Exploitation		3	22
	Immigration		3	19
	Money		4	32
	Perceived Barriers			
		Distrust	9	26
		Lack of knowledge	9	26
		Resistance	11	72
Enhancing Cultural Engagement	Reflection on how to improve transition		2	18
	Perceived barriers		3	8
	Process of integration		14	94
	Experience of culture shock		15	104
	Coping by focusing on end goal		8	20
	Communication		3	13
	Overcoming isolation		11	27

Table 11.4: Overall Occurrence of Themes for Sample Group

Findings	Implications	Discussion
Lack of knowledge / awareness about counselling and how to access it, leading to inaccessibility	• Making services visible, accessible and acceptable. • Raising profile of student support. • Stronger networks of well-connected services for referral and risk management.	• Inductions useful but timing questionable. Other 'outreach' activities recommended. • If medical and counselling services are not 'in-house', even more need for services to be proactive.
Hierarchy of help-seeking	• Cultural awareness training for all university staff to improve cultural sensitivity	• More trusted sources of help, e.g., academic staff and medical staff are relied upon as referral agents. • An ethos of greater cultural empathy will increase the effectiveness of cultural engagement and aid better understanding and identity recognition
Perceived lack of cultural understanding amongst counsellors/psychologists. Discussion of 'cultural matters' therefore avoided.	• Cultural competency training to be embedded into BACP and IACP accredited professional counselling training for newly qualified counsellors. CPD options in cultural competency, important for qualified counsellors working with diverse clients, e.g, in educational settings.	• Knowledge of how own culture and Eurocentric training impacts on therapeutic work with clients of colour. Developing different styles of therapy, e.g., working inter-subjectively. Knowledge of other cultures is important for cultural empathy. Working with own stereotypes and own racism, e.g., in supervision, is important for counsellors' identity development.

Table 11.5: Implications suggested by a Selection of Findings

Findings	Implications	Discussion
Fear that counsellor understanding may be skewed by stereotypes	• Need to confront stereotypes and prejudices at practitioner and team level. • Team should comprise of at least one counsellor with international background and/or transcultural training and experiences.	• When transcultural interest is highlighted, more possibilities for working creatively to increase cultural engagement.
Actions/efforts of institution to welcome and respect students are significant for attachment	• Learning from current good practice. Activities such as pre-sessional English classes, sightseeing orientation programmes, peer mentoring. Counselling services could collaborate with other departments to offer joint initiatives.	• Joint programmes with other departments strengthen networks and create easier referral routes for "troubled" students. Stigma of counselling reduced by being endorsed by other more trusted sources of help in 'hierarchy of helping'. • Collaborations increase visibility of counselling and encourage a perception of an integrated community of "helping". Environment of better cultural engagement is beneficial for all students. • Pointers to good practice in other services suggest alternative entry points for counselling.

Table 11.6: Implications suggested by a Selection of Findings ctd

Appendix B – Example Transcript (Individual Participant)

Student of Non-European Background

This study is based on eighteen interviews with international students from Non-European backgrounds taken from three different sites (Hyderabad/India, Dublin, Ulster). The interviews were conducted between 2012 and 2013. Below is one of the transcribed interviews.

I: "Okay, well – thanks very much for agreeing to participate in this interview."

S: "My pleasure."

I: "As I said, there are a number of questions that form the basis of a semi-structured kind of interview – so we'll have a bit of discussion around the questions and I'm hoping it'll be about 45 minutes in total. First question I have is, what country are you from, what course are you studying and what level?"

S: "Okay. I'm from Bangladesh. That's in South-East Asia and I'm right now doing my Master's in Biotechnology."

I: "Okay. And when you arrived at university, which is ... a year ago?"

S: "I came in September. Last September."

I: "September. So it's not even a year. When you arrived, did you experience any degree of culture shock? And if so, is there any significant experience that you would wish to share?"

S: "Well, I will say culture shock, or anything like that – it's a bit too strong a word – but I don't know – due to stigma ... all that kind of thing happening now in this part of the world. But if I can tell you what kind of lifestyle I'll be/'ve been? seeing ... So ... It was a bit different from the kind of life I've lived ... but it wasn't like, it wasn't a ... a challenge or, say, a inhibition or any sort of thing. It was fine, I was cool with it. But there weren't really any obstacles, or ... it wasn't a problem, to be short."

I: "Okay. Was there ... anything that stood out for you as being different to what you were used to? That may be wasn't a problem as such, but something you had to get used to?"

S: "There is. Say back in my country like ... , drinking something that's ... (mumble) it's ... like, prohibited in public. So but, like here it's, I was staying with these Irish guys who were having ... no. I really had no problem, it wasn't that they got drunk or do anything, it wasn't anything like that. But like, I'm coming to terms with the fact that drinking is something quite normal here ... "

I: "Drinking alcohol?"

S: "Like drinking alcohol. So I mean, this was like one the things which I ... seen in the country."

I: "Yeah. There is what they call a pub culture in Ireland and there is a lot of alcoholism and a lot of reliance on alcohol. More than necessary."

S: "It isn't a problem. It's just that I didn't have, like, any sort of experience back in my country, but it wasn't like the guys were misbehaved or did anything arrogant, it was nothing like that – it was just a bit significant in culture as you say, that's it."

I: "Oh, okay. Okay. So you didn't find it intimidating, or threatening, or ... "

S: "No, no. Not at all."

I: "Not at all."

S: "May be there were, once or twice, there were a few, like ... , knocking my windows but it wasn't them, it was like, but it wasn't them, it was like, after the Kelly's party, around midnight, there were some guys who used to do that, but it's all part and parcel of the game yeah. That's right."

I: "Right ... okay ...

S: "But it wasn't (laughs) Irish guys. But that's, that's fine."

I: "Ehm ... apart from the difference in drinking alcohol – is there anything else that's significant?"

S: "Probably ... er... no, I mean, like er, probably ... I don't know, I wouldn't say significant, but back home ... the boys and girls find the independence they have here – it ... making their choice like I have some, I have some guys ... here who have paying the education fees, working... this is something, like, back in my country like, well ... I mean, even at the age of 22, 23, you're more depending on your parents. It's like your parents regarding you still ..."

I: "Okay. In India."

S: "In Bangladesh."

I: "Sorry. I beg your pardon, in Bangladesh."

S: "In Bangladesh, and even in India, it's culturally (mumbles) like, there's a balance who will ... I mean, like, they will have a say in whatever position decision? you make. It's not that you have your 100

I: "Right, okay. And you noticed that as a difference, and you noticed that they seem to be more independent, and working, and money-earning ..."

S: "Independent, right. They're working, earning the money, yeah. Their faith ... obviously they're lots of ... of support that people out in Northern Ireland have – that we don't have back in our country – in terms of, like, health support – student support – like special loans for the students ..."

I: "Mm. Helps them be independent."

S: "Independent, yeah. It's like ... the kind of jobs guys here do, like, back in my country I won't be able to work in a restaurant or anything like that – it would be like demanding my position – something like that. But here it's like, any job is job, work is work. It doesn't matter – you're sitting in a nice air-conditioned room or whether you're working in the kitchen - it's all equal. That's what I really liked about it."

I: "Especially if you're a student and you're doing a menial job – that's okay, because you've got another life as a student. Whereas in Bangladesh that would be frowned upon."

S: "Kind of, yeah. I mean, it's like, if you're coming from a good, say, middle-class or high middle-class family you really don't need to do that."

I: "Yes."

S: "But as I said, your parents would be doing everything for you."

I: "Right. They would be providing."

S: "Providing. All your needs, all your leisures, luxuries, everything. But I they are.. they are, er, into you. I mean, as long as you are not into doing, in terms of doing jobs. After you've done your Master's or undergraduation, you're getting some kind of jobs where you're earning worth, that's where your parents will say, "My ... girl has grown up enough to take his or her responsibility before then that is a point of constant monitoring ..."

I: "Right, yeah. And that is very different lifestyle. In some ways it's less pressure and less responsibility – but on another hand it's less freedom."

S: "Freedom, yeah. That's about the size, yeah."

I: "That's an interesting contrast. And you've highlighted that very well. And quite an adjustment for you to make, I'm sure."

S: "Actually, I learned a lot also. Like, I was talking to my mum a few months back, and I told her that, like, this experience is not only the degree. The fact I'm living here – like, from the morning I have to (…) don't know what I'm going to eat – like, how would I plan my day – (…) I also worked for one, two days as to work … to study – like, I have to plan the whole day. Like, when to wash my clothes, when to do what … But back at home, it was like, everything was taken care of."

I: "Right. But by your mum … "

S: "By my mum, yeah. She used to make sure the breakfast was ready. We used come home from the school or college, the lunch or dinner was ready … But here's it's nice, doing everything by yourself – it makes you more responsible. Son now I know that when I go back home I'll well, like, equipped, well, to take care of my parents now – the confidence is much more in me. That's a very good thing."

I: "Sure. And probably when you go back home, your mum hasn't changed. So she"ll be expecting you still to be, er … you know, accepting of all these parental …"

S: "Yeah, (laughs) well – I will love that, I … she should also appreciate that I have learned to take care of myself. It'll be a relief for her - she would also have … like me to be self-responsible. And I feel I have come … to an extent, I have achieved that."

I: "Right. And she can … step back a little bit and have a bit more time for herself."

S: "Right. Right."

I: "And you can take on more responsibility in the family."

S: "Probably, like, I will do all the … grocery shopping now for them also.' (laughs)

I: "Right. Okay, yeah. So they're going to see a changed son, that … "

S: "Not fully.' (laughs)

I: "… with new skills that you share with everyone. That sounds very interesting. And are you aware of any professional support within student support here on campus, medical or counselling services? When you arrived here, were you aware of our service?"

S: "I was too, I was too. That there is like, student support where you can get medical support – may be sort of counselling if you are low – I did have a bit of information probably – I don't know whether it was my negligence or what, but I really didn't have a proper clue. I knew there was a student counsellor, but I didn't know to which doctors I could go and approach her or him – like, whether it has to be study-related and then only I could go - or it could be, like, any problem. I mean, there were things like, what were those? Like, objectives (…

. of) the student support were targeting – those things were not clear, but I knew that there are helping bodies in the university."

I: "Okay. We try to do induction talks with all the year groups. At the beginning and with the international students. Did you attend induction talks?"

S: "I missed that."

I: "Right. You missed that."

S: "... But I did know that there are helping hands here. Especially ... in-depth spark on us? you always have these leaflet on student support, depression, meningitis.. I think I could come and talk to some student support. So I knew that there's a good helping hand here."

I: "Right. So the information was there, and ..."

S: "Yeah Just one similarity."

I: "Okay. Right. And if you had a personal problem – yourself – that was causing you stress and affecting your ability to study – who would you talk to?"

S: "I mean, within university .. ..."

I: "Whilst you're here – in Northern Ireland, studying."

S: "I mean - it would depend on the kind of problem I'm facing. If it's something that's not very personal, probably I could come to the counsellor.'

I: "If it wasn't personal."

S: "If it wasn't very personal."

I: "Okay. Such as?"

S: "Anything to do with my ... say, love life, or something that's very ... say. .... to do with tension within the family, somehing like that ..."

I: "... relationships ... "

S: "Relationships, yeah ... "

I: "So, girlfriend, or parents ..."

S: "Parents, yeah – something like that."

I: "So, if it was very – did you say very personal ...?"

S: "Personal, yeah – I may hesitate to come and share, because I don't know whom I'm approaching, I don't know how, like – how much I could go and trust that person – so probably like, there would be an inhibition. But if you had anything like, something disturbing like, I'm not be able to study, due to like homesickness, which is a common thing, probably I could come and talk to you."

I: "Right. Right. But the other issues you would be more reluctant."

S: "Reluctant, exactly. Reluctant. Probably I would go and talk to my friend – who I know – or probably I could call back home and probably get some, like, someone with whom I'm more comfortable – someone who knows me better . . . "

I: "Yes. Yes. So you would turn to friends on your course? Er . . . like other Bangladeshi friends?"

S: "Like I've got some Indian friends with whom I'm very - quite close and I would go and discuss with him or her. . . . . my course director ... There's someone with whom I've already struck a bond with."

I: "Yeah – that's interesting. And because people like ourselves are outside of that, you would . . . kind of have your assumptions that maybe they wouldn't totally understand you."

S: ". . . student support or student counselling is not very common back in my country. I'm not really aware of the existence of student support in the university – so probably someone who has grown up here, he or she will be used to, like, going and talking to the, I mean – he or she must know that student counsellors seem to help you and whatever problem you're facing or not, but I don't have that practice – so suddenly coming and trusting her, it will be a bit difficult."

I: "Yeah. You have a different reference."

S: "Right."

I: "Frame of reference."

S: "Exactly."

I: "No, I understand – I totally understand. And – how have you coped with the challenges of living and studying here? What has helped you?"

S: "I think the financial part was well taken care of by my parents, so that helped me a bit in coping with the different – ehm, I don't see there's any problem with the way that subjects were taught as the education was concerned. It was like – no, I found it very easy, like, to mix. It wasn't like anything big or pressurising – the course was very nicely outlined, the professors were more than helpful. So like, academic-wise there wasn't that sort of pressure. And . . . I think weather-wise it was a bit tough, because I come from a country where the coldest night is spring . . . (laughter)."

I: "Umm. It's a challenge."

S: "So weather-wise it was a bit tough, but it wasn't like . . . , I had my warm clothes and good . . . stock. But I think I can speak on behalf of other students like who have come on a loan. They probably found it to be something a bit more challenging cos they have to, like, have this constant apprehension or . . . that they have to have this thing taken care of that their . . . loan is getting paid on time. But I don't really have that worry to take because like, I was . . . "

I: ". . . on a scholarship?"

S: "... just my parents were paying for it. I mean, I could pay them whenever I wanted to. It wasn't like they were charging me or they had the hammer on my head – it wasn't like that. So I had that sort of security. So ... ."

I: "It means a lot."

S: "Financial support, financial security means a lot. Like, "cos I have seen enough people like my friends who have come here on a loan and ... for them all is left is to ... have a job. If they don't have a job, then it's like a gift ...."

I: "Yeah. No, I can appreciate that. And that stress, it permeates into all areas of your life."

S: "Yeah, it does."

I: "Including health."

S: "Health, yeah. It does. And for a ... week. striking a balance between your work and studies, I think, like, if you want to start doing a part-time job, the initial first month is very difficult because I was having a problem back at home also, because my grandmother fell ill and she expired later on – so, having that family problem – and here, I decided to work ... I don't know, balancing both the things – because I'd never worked and studied before and between I was working for one year, but at that time I didn't make undergraduation so I was completely devoted to my work. But here I was, like, trying to work in the night and working, er, studying in the morning ... So these were a bit tough, but later on I got used to it."

I: "Okay ... and what do you do for your part-time job?"

S: "Like, I used to work twice a week. It was in er, in a restaurant."

I: "Right. Okay."

S: "Most of the time I used to clean the stairs, or customer service at times."

I: "So you'd never done anything like that before?"

S: "Never."

I: "So that was really ... a big thing for you."

S: "Yeah, a big thing. Because honestly, initially I hesitated to tell my parents also. Because they won't expect, er ... their son to be doing all these things. It's nothing wrong in that, even they understand that, it's like, except we don't have this practice back at home."

I: "Sure. Yeah. That's interesting. And you had a little bit of extra income. Which is always welcome – for a student."

S: "I used that as a – I didn't, like, have much of a pocket-money but what it was, it served me for the week ... . Which was more than helpful. I really didn't have to depend for my pocket-money on my parents. So it helped"

I: "Yes. And it gave you that greater freedom. Independence."

S: "Freedom, yeah. Independence. It was not ... here, the things are always a bit expensive."

I: "Sure, yeah. And I guess it brought you into contact with more people – which is another aspect ... "

S: "Right. With more local people. And that was something like I really appreciated. Because I really came to know more of the local people – the kind of liked to be have tourist food ... and the kind of have liked to be ... that's exactly. So those things are something I won't have been able to know if I couldn't find anything ... I never seemed to get personally."

I: "Oh, okay."

S: "No, I got that exposure which helped."

I: "That helped. Yeah. Good, good. It takes a lot of courage to step out of your comfort zone like that."

S: "Right. But it was nice. I think that people ultimately helpful ... – that's something I've always found. "Cos I know, I was in London also – and London's a more busy city – like, people don't have the time to, like, to really look at each other. But I'll ... – I don't know, if you walk down the street and someone looks at you, he or she will smile at you, say "hi, hello'. And that was really encouraging, because like, initially when I came I had certain apprehensions, like, in terms of .... umm ... the language problem, so, you know, the dialect or accent – Northern Irish accent. Then there was, a few of my friends, as I'm told there might be a problem of racism, and whether it was as I'd said before .... But fortunately, I really didn't have to worry about ... this .. this were all taken ... I mean, I really don't think I've ever felt any ... others being attacked ever since ... from a ... point of view? I mean, it's nice, when you're walking the street, specially if you're of different colour – if someone looks back at you, smiles, will say "hi' or "hello', it helps."

I: "Sure."

S: "And it helped me during my initial days. Like I felt a bit more ease."

I: "Good. Good. So you didn't feel any hostility, or ... "

S: "No, no. Not at all. People are very helpful, very cooperative. Like when I'm wearing party clothes or when I'm dressed to go out in the town, and as to ask someone, he or she'll be more helpful to help me. So that's the best part of Coleraine life, I must say."

I: "Right."

S: "People are really helpful."

I: "Well, I'm glad you've got nice memories. You'll have a lot of nice memories to take away with you."

S: "And when I go back home I'll go and tell people who said there's racism well, there's nothing such as that. It's like, it's up tp you. If you, if you make yourself – I think if you,'re good to people, people will be good to you. That's straight and simple."

I: "Umm ... generally."

S: "Generally. "Cos no-one wants to be bad to anyone. So I think it's more down to the person. Individual. How are he, like . . . present himself in the society. That's it. I think. For me. . . . out here are quite good."

I: "Good, good. And are there any issues that would prompt you to seek professional help from a counsellor? I know you've said before that if it was very personal you felt you wouldn't. Are there any issues that you would consult a counsellor for?"

S: "Er . . . probably something of which I may not be able to talk to my parents also. Of that I would come and talk to a counsellor. Someone who could give me . . . I mean, there is at least a situation in life where you find that, probably not knowing anything about that person helps. Like it gives you a more, say, unbiassed solution to the problem. There are such instances and problems."

I: "That is the basis, really, of our work."

S: "Cos if you go and talk to someone who already knows you, probably he or she will think of your parents and then give you a solution. And someone who . . . will know you or the part you will give you more, as I said, unbiassed solution to it."

I: "So you can envisage that there may be situations where you would consult someone like me – a professional counsellor."

S: "Right, right."

I: " You've not actually done that . . . ."

S: "No. "

I: ". . . , is that right. But you're not against the idea of it – you think there may be some instances . . . ."

S: "I think it's up to the person. . . . a person who will open up more easily than a person who will be more introvert. So it depends on the person."

I: "Yes. It depends on the counsellor."

S"The counsellor. How well he or she makes that person confident in here."

I: "Yeah. Yeah. Absolutely. It's a two-way process. And particularly the counsellor has to step outside their own frame of reference to meet you more than half-way. Because it's harder for you to make that bridge. Because you're coming from a different place. So – are there any issues that would make you reluctant to seek help and what would they be? And if there's any examples, if you'd want to share that."

S: "I once . . . talked about confidentiality. Like, how will my information be protected. I don't know how that could be established but if I had that belief and confidence that what I'm sharing with you would be in this room only . . . "

I: "Yeah."

S: "... obviously that would help me to come and share everything. But if I had that fear in my mind, that would be a reluctance and I won't be coming to you and sharing that."

I: "Yeah. And you're absolutely right to say that. I mean, that is one of the core conditions of our profession that we offer that confidentiality and the only exceptions to that confidentiality would be an extreme case of risk."

S: "Okay."

I: "And those extreme cases would be risk of harm to yourself or somebody else. So they are very, very exceptional and very rare. And in those instances we may have to refer the student to a doctor so they can have other support alongside counselling."

S: "That's brilliant."

I: "And if they needed to have some medication, for example, that's something they could discuss with the doctor. So that could be alongside the counselling if necessary."

S: "Ah – that's good."

I: "To help stabilize them.'

S: "This bit of information I didn't have. "Cos as I said back in my country it isn't a practice, so someone who has been brought [up] in Northern Ireland, he or she know what the counsellors are supposed to mean, so he or she can come more easily – but as I said, ... good point you make – I didn't have any idea about that."

I: "Okay. That is the basis of everything we do. The ethics and the relationship you're building – you can't build a relationship except there is that trust and understanding – and that safety. Because that safety creates the basis for developing the relationship – and if you haven't got that, you haven't got a starting point."

S: "Okay, that's brilliant."

I: "It's very integral to the training and the practice. Ehm – have there been any times when you've delayed in asking for help when you've had problems and you've just tried to manage it yourself – and what was that like?"

S: "Umm – no, I really didn't – sorry, can you repeat the question?"

I: "Have there been any times when you've delayed in asking for help when you knew you were in trouble but you avoided it – and just tried to manage ... ."

S: "Umm ... not really ..."

I: "... and denied the problem – and then it got worse. "Cos often that's what happens when people avoid the problem and they deny that there is a problem and they don't ask for help."

S: "Yeah ... It happened, er."

I: "Has it ever happened to you?"

S: "Yep."

I: "Yes. And is it anything you would feel comfortable to share?"

S: "Umm ... I think there's one problem that's, like – I don't know what I could say about it ... But it's like, I'm going through a problem lately – it's regarding the, er ... sexual orientation – and, er, it has been, like, ... affecting ... a couple of years or so ..."

I: "Okay."

S: "And right now, I don't know what's right and what's wrong – so that's something like – that's somehow – it's like it's infected my brain or something ... I really can't think what's morally right, what's religiously right. It's like it's always a constant battle between my heart and my brain – like the heart, the soul says something else – while the mind says no, this fact is wrong – it's like a ..."

I: "It's a conflict – yes. Right, okay. So the issue about sexual orientation would come into contradiction with your faith ... "

S: "It says ... I mean, it's, no. There is nothing about whether Islam encourages. I really don't know what the holy book, Qur'an, clearly states or not – but it's something that's not – even in the society – it's completely prohibited in my country, that."

I: "Really. Goodness."

S: "Yeah."

I: "It used to be like that here – and things have changed and – you know, there's a lot more openness to discussing issues around sexuality and sexual orientation. But that's really come at the back at a lot of protest ..."

S: "Uh/huh ... "

I: "... people who have been advocates of freedom of speech and freedom of expression have made it possible to live in a more open society. And, yeah, part of our ethic is that we accept people of whatever race, whatever religious background, whatever sexual orientation, that's a given – that, you know – we respect that person regardless of what their background is."

S: "Okay."

I: "So I mean, if this was something that you wanted to discuss in confidence, wih a counsellor, that would be perfectly okay. Er ... in fact – I've had quite a number of students who've come for precisely that reason."

S: "I think it would help me, I mean, I really need to talk to someone ... . Like, whatever thinking is my own brain – I really don't know – I really don't have any helping hands right now. This isn't something – not something I can go and talk with my parents."

I: "Yes."

S: "Cos personally, I don't know whether they will understand or not. Even if they do understand, ... theres social pressure to accept it – like, it's going to destroy them. So I really don't want them to go through that phase. It's disturbing to me ... because now Im growing up and I really don't know what I want."

I: "Yes. And it's getting harder and harder to hide that issue."

S: "I won't . . . . I really don't know who I am or what I want – so it's like, no, it's a bit tough."

I: "Yes."

S: "This constant conflict between my soul and my mind."

I: "And that's where talking to an independent professional person can be useful, because they haven't got the prejudice about that – if they are well-trained and totally adherent to the principles of their profession as everybody would be here – they haven't got that particular bias. Who you are, your identity, is who you are – that's to be respected."

S: "Exactly. I've tried hard to get it out of the mind – and the more I try, the harder it gets – and the more . . ."

I: "That's often the case – the more you try to run from it, the more it follows you. And sometimes you have to stop and face that issue."

S: "That's right."

I: "I know that's not really a subject for more in-depth discussion in the interview – but if you wanted to come back as a client, if you wanted to consult our services so you could have that confidentiality to talk that through – you're very welcome."

S: "Thank you."

I: "And – I mean, it is a very good example of an issue that many people – whether from a non-European country or whether they're a local student – it's one of those very sensitive issues that people often delay seeking help for, because they're worried about the impact on friends, or worried about how it's going to be received by their family, or worried about the judgment of society – and that's including Ireland and the UK. Yeah. So . . . you know, it's a very good example of a difficult issue."

I: "And . . . have there been any crisis situations – yours or anybody else's – where you've known someone to have maybe an emotional breakdown. Has there been anything like that?"

S: "Uh-huh, yeah. . . ."

I: "Within your life or in your circle of friends?"

S: "One of my friends. Shes my classmate. She was going through like a bad bash like mentally – she was missing her home. And then she came to the student support also for help. And – I don't know, I really didn't go back to her to ask her how – benefitted she has been or not, but as far as I know she came to the student support to seek help."

I: "Okay."

S: "Because she was, like, having this homesickness a lot."

I: "So you – that was a crisis in terms of how it destabilized her in her life and her work."

S: "... she used to cry a bit more – she found it difficult to concentrate on her studies."

I: "Yeah. Yeah. But you don't really know how that was handled, you ..."

S: "I ..."

I: "Yeah. Yeah."

S: "... still went to the counsellor, someone said ... I really don't know what was her answer – I think the counsellor advised her to read something, some books or something that would just diverge her – I mean, just get her mind out of ... her family or something – to do some extra-curricular activities. That was her answer ... I really don't quite remember what ... was prescribed."

I: "Right. Okay."

S: "But there was an incident, yeah."

I: "So you weren't – you don't really know whether she found that helpful or not."

S: "Uh-huh."

I: "Right. Okay. And are there any changes that you think could be done to the present system of student support within the university that would make it a better service for people like yourself and your friends you mentioned?"

S: "I don't know – probably you have this ... in English?"

I: "Yes."

(conversation inaudible for about 8 seconds)

S: "Well, I think that you could have ... you could like, er ... have an elaboration of what kind of services you offer. You probably could get some few examples like the students who have benefitted from them – and how you have actually helped them to get better. I think you could have some international faces Id say, international officers ... like someone from, say – if I see someone from my colour .... It's not like it's ... like men who come from .... certainly come from Asia, yeah – people have, whoa! A white complexion. It takes ten time to get used to them. So probably if I come and see someone, an international officer, who hails from my region. I could go more ... approach him more easily."

I: "Yeah. Sure."

S: "Having someone – I think a mixed culture of people in international student support office would be great."

I: "Yes. I understand. And I agree, absolutely, with that. I was actually thinking of doing some sort of a group for international students, like a self-help facilitated group where people can get together from, well, non-European countries, probably – although it could be open to other students as well – in the way of trying to foster support. So people can talk about anything they want – different things, like who is writing, you write things down – creative

expression, maybe to read things out, narrative, biographies, stuff like that – so they can bring elements of their own . . . "

S: "Culture . . ."

I: ". . . . story and share that. And then, you know, or any other coping mechanism where they use their their faith . . . you know, to cope with everyday things . . . There could be an emphasis on different types of coping mechanisms as people experience them. And not only would it have benefit in terms of like, the activities discussed, but in terms of fostering support within the group – so people, you know, they're aware of . . . you know, Bangladeshi students get to know some Chinese students – they get to know some students maybe from India . . ."

S: ". . . from India. That's nice."

I: ". . . Arab states . . . ."

S: "There is, I think there is an international food festival or something like that."

I: "Oh – right."

S: ". . . at university, where the students were asked to cook something from their own country and come and present."

I: "Oh – right! Yes."

S: "They argue, like, ...in the university, that's good to . . . have a mixed culture. It's always nice to know people from other countries – their, the way of the living. It's nice."

I: "And you attended some events like that? The food festival . . . "

S: "I think I had a submission, a science submission on that very day. So I really couldn't make it. But one of my friends, actually she was from my corridor, she went there and she said it was the nicest event."

I: "Right. Okay. And that was in the university."

S: "In the university."

I: "The common room."

S: "No, it was like, er . . . near the Spa? The bridge?"

I: "Oh yes, okay. The beginning of term?"

S: "Umm . . . it was some time in October. I think it was October."

I: "Right, okay. So those kinds of events would facilitate the mingling, the social mingling."

S: "Oh, there was also this reception hosted by the provost for the international students. It was like the . . . here. That was also nice. I got to meet more . . . some Indian people, Greek, Spanish, French . . ."

I: "Oh, okay . . ."

S: "So that evening was quite nice."

I: "So you made some contacts."

S: "I did, I did."

I: "And did you continue with any of those contacts, or ... events?"

S: "Like, it's like ... even ... Ill go to gym sometimes and there I met some guys from ... Spain. ... It's like we're ... on a very good ... it's not like we're very dear friends at all, but it's ... yeah, a very formal, nice, good relationship."

I: "And knowing a few familiar faces, it makes you feel more connected."

S: "It's like ... I have a few distant circles. right now."

I: "And you had to work quite hard to build that up by the sounds of it. You had to go to different things."

S: "But it was nice. Everyone was like, no, was very receptive, very friendly – so, it wasn't that difficult also. I can ... occasions like this evening – meal, evening meal, evening coffee or food festival or something that I went to this same practice ... of the church were like, I got to meet some locals, some European students, some non-European students. So actually, it was quite a mixed pack, it has been quite nice."

I: "Good. So the more things like that that can happen, the better."

S: "Exactly."

I: "It's the ice-breaking exercise that you need to start making some friendships."

S: "And at senior accommodation it's like, there are lots of Chinese people, Hong Kong people,so like, I interact with them, I know what they like, what they ... do. I stayed with local Irish people, and I came to know about their food habits ... "

I: "Right!"

S: "Or what they talk about usually. It's mostly rugby. Or, say ... "

I: "X-factor!"

S: "Yeah, music. So it was nice."

I: "And kind of learning what are the conversations, so you can tune in – and hopefully the interest is there as well from their side – the things to tune into ... "

S: "Right. Even they asked me what it was like in my country, such as the peculiarities of the weather."

I: "Right. Yes! The weather is so completely different there. Well – I mean, it's been absolutely fascinating to talk with you, and Id like to thank you very much for giving me this interview."

S: "Right, that's fine. I love sharing – I will be ... !"

I: "It was an absolute privilege to hear these stories and those reflections and I just want to thank you very, very much for taking the time."

S: "You're welcome."

Appendix C – Products and Resources

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> *It may be hard for an egg to turn into a bird. It would be a jolly sight harder for it to learn to fly, while remaining an egg. We are like eggs. You cannot go on being just an ordinary, decent egg. We must be hatched or go bad.*

<div align="right">C. S. Lewis (1952/2001, p. 198 –199)</div>

Introduction

Early in the doctoral process there was mention of 'products' as an integral component of the practitioner doctorate. This incorporated the notion of tangible outcomes that are findings-led and capable of making an impact on a variety

of audiences. I remember a feeling of trepidation and mystery surrounding the concept, as it was hard to visualise just exactly what form the 'products' were going to take, how they would be executed and how they were going to be useful. The ability to be open, reflexive, and attuned to the unfolding material, whilst resisting the temptation to be pre-emptive or prescriptive was a balance of competing tensions, continually requiring attention. Making the knowledge of my findings accessible, (or if I was to fulfil the Metanoia brief), aspiring to make them transformative, seemed like a tall order indeed. My concern manifested itself in repeated self-interrogation about whether my research had anything to contribute to the transcultural discourse, and if so, what could that be. At a much later point, these nervous ruminations were superseded by a desire to share the growing knowledge of what I'd found, in order that it should be known, understood and passed on in wider forums of influence. For those less familiar with help seeking behaviours and coping strategies of international students from non-European backgrounds, e.g., academic staff - they would be invited to think about the issues, perhaps for the first time. And for those well acquainted with the subject matter, e.g., counsellors and Heads of Services for Student Support, they would be forced to think again about their responsibilities, to positively shape and enhance counselling services for this under-represented section of the student population.

The products are created at different stages of the research journey reflecting the emerging findings at the various levels of the explication process. To use the metaphor provided by C. S. Lewis, there was a 'right point' at which to 'hatch' the products, and intuitively I knew when those moments had arrived. In the early phases, there was an innate sense that the process should not be rushed. My ideas and awareness felt not even half-formed. There was much work to be done in deepening my understanding of the issues discussed by my participants; widening my perspectives to develop strategic networks to support the research; being open to learn from the many experiences gained along the way; and to process these reflexively for positive outcomes. It was generally understood that the products would assume a variety of formats. I fantasised about some kind of metamorphosis of the raw data into something not yet recognisable and constituting spectacular revelations with far reaching impact! Grand delusions can be terribly inhibiting, as I found out, and had a startling ability to generate a near paralysis of process, which could be very difficult to break free from. There was no substitute for the humble relentless devotion to

material that required one to think, feel and breathe research day and daily, consciously and unconsciously working it into something of value.

Coming across a statement from the philosopher William James, I felt greatly comforted by his reply in a letter to a friend who had congratulated his ability to 'dash things off'. James took exception to the remark saying he didn't

> ... *dash anything) off – if there is aught of good in the style, it is in the result of ceaseless toil in re-writing. It is forged with blood and sweat and groans and lamentations to heaven and vows that I will never start to write anything again.* (William James quoted by Knight, 1950, p. 47)

How such exasperations echo down through the decades! Steadied by many similar reassurances, from the grand literary figures to real flesh and blood human support, a measured and deliberate pace ensued. This characterised the early building stages of the research, particularly where products were concerned.

Then, by contrast, there was a sense of urgency in the later stages. This necessitated an avid chase of journals and conferences, in order not to miss vital opportunities as the 'hatching' should not be overdue, lest the product might 'go bad', to borrow and transpose C. S. Lewis's metaphor into this context. At this point, there was a coming together, a synthesis of all the disparate elements, achieved through the writing up stage, which took place in sporadic bursts of creativity over many months with some unavoidable and significant disruptions along the way.

The early products include a series of cultural awareness training and expressive writing workshops, conducted within my own university, over three years and one given at another university for a group of my interviewees. These experiences were later documented in a feature article, published within the University of Ulster's Staff magazine, *Inside*, published May 2013. In describing the development of the training and by making this information publicly available, I raised the profile of cultural awareness in the local context of my university. The intention was to promote further collaboration with other departments, based on the success of the then current initiative, of embedding cultural awareness training into course curriculum, for one department. Later products included an article for the BACP journal University and College Counselling based on one chapter of the thesis, entitled *Shifting Identities* and a paper presented in

Type	Description	Date
Workshop at National College of Ireland, Dublin	Expressive Writing	Oct '12
Workshop at University of Ulster	Cultural Awareness	Dec '12, Dec '13, Dec '14
Workshop at University of Ulster	Post-Placement Reflection	Apr '12, Apr '13, Apr '14
Misc Media Coverage	Article in University of Ulster Staff Magazine titled *Raising the profile of Cultural Awareness*	May '13
Conference Paper	CSSI Conference, University of Cork	18/19 June, '15
Journal Article	BACP University and College Counselling Journal titled *Shifting Identities*	Sep 2015
Conference Paper	BACP Research Conference, Brighton	20/21 May, '16

Table 11.7: Products and Resources

June 2015 at the Confederation of Student Services in Ireland, (CSSI) at the University of Cork. Each product will be discussed in the following sections (see Table 11.7) and can be found in Appendix C.

Early on, probably even before I started this research, I was very conscious of needing to raise the profile of cultural awareness within my university. This was supported by my experience of conducting the research in this setting: the resistance and dismissal from senior staff level of its importance, the lack of cultural training within the entire staff team of student support - thus explaining the low priority given to cultural issues and probably most significant of all, the reluctance and poor up-take of counselling services from students of non-European backgrounds. As discussed elsewhere, the exceptions to the norm were as a result of crisis intervention and/or solicitous concern from individual academic staff who facilitated referrals to counselling. Medical staff were the other 'gatekeepers' in their vigilance of student distress, thus providing bridges of understanding to enable referrals to counselling. The early actions of dedicated staff often averted many pending crises. Whilst much of this is exemplary on the part of individuals, there was no unified approach in the way of training or policy to guide action and response. It was rather a case of not directly addressing issues of cultural sensitivity until issues of risk became apparent and then the general protocols would be activated, as would be the case for all students.

Initially I had intended to set up self-help/well-being styled groups, specially targeted to international students of non-European backgrounds, but possibly including local students and other international students from Europe and America. The idea was to use other techniques such as writing as I was very interested in the remarkable research conducted over three decades by the American psychologist James W. Pennebaker (1980s to present), which demonstrated the efficacy of writing as assistive for coping.

As discussed in my learning agreement, many studies report on health and emotional benefits for those participants, e.g., reducing pain and fatigue for women with fibromyalgia (Broderick, Junghaenel, & Schwartz, 2005); reducing viral load in HIV infected adults (Petrie, Fontanilla, Thomas, Booth, & Pennebaker, 2004). Expressive writing was also found to be beneficial for people not using their first language. Writing enabled them to use their first language or a mixture of host and first language (Lago, 2004, Wright, 1999). It has also been deemed appropriate for those who, for cultural or other reasons, are silenced by shame and feel unable to speak (Bass & Davis, 1998; Bolton, 1999; Etherington, 2000). The writing task seems to be valuable for various aspects of life across cultures, languages, education, and socio-economic status (Smyth and Helm, 2003). For this reason, it would be an appropriate medium to explore in working cross-culturally with international students to help them reduce stress (Conn, 2011).

Given the difficulty of recruiting international students from Non European backgrounds for interview at my university, I realised the challenge of finding a group of students prepared to work together on a self-help initiative might be fantastical thinking and a step too far. Other obstacles encountered were the resistance and inertia amongst staff as 'would-be' collaborators in raising the profile of cultural awareness beyond polite lip service. The general feeling was that things were fine as they were and such issues were almost an indulgence when staff already had overloads of teaching and/or client appointments. The austerity of staff cuts reducing possibilities for creative work within a seriously under-resourced staff team, a depressed team moral, interspersed with staff sickness contributed and explained many of the environmental difficulties. I discovered that having no 'head of service' for a couple of years due to long term illness and then a decision not to fill the post for another year (the practice setting context to the majority of my research), was infinitely preferable to the situation that later ensued. The subsequent installation of a head of service whose chief aim and brief was to follow a re-structuring agenda that would result in the eventual outsourcing of the counselling service, changed the focus and energy entirely. The academic year long duration of this process characterised the most stressful period of my work history and resulted in my eventual redundancy. I will give more detail on this in my concluding chapter, reflecting on my doctoral journey.

For the last couple of years of my employment at the University of Ulster, the team had long dispensed with any innovative projects and were fighting to save their jobs ... in vain as it later turned out. Against this backdrop of hostility, uncertainty and stressful working conditions, I discerned there was a finite time-window of opportunity, dictated by the environmental realities mentioned, the academic year and my doctoral requirements to produce tangible 'products'. The melding together of these considerations meant forging realistic options consisting of the resources available to me, in terms of staff support, student availability and a conscionable desire to keep my products 'findings-led'. That meant working with the unfolding knowledge, as a guide to highlight what might benefit students of non-European backgrounds.

After some local enquiries with Registry, I discovered there was quite a large representation of students of non-European backgrounds studying on Post-graduate courses, within the Department of Education. They were studying on courses such as TESOL (Teaching English as a second or other language) to gain teaching qualifications for teaching English to groups of non-native speakers. As part of my usual role as a counsellor, I often ran workshops to prepare students for placement and to support their return from placement. I identified this as a valuable opportunity to incorporate a cultural awareness training that could be beneficial for their teaching practice. There was an international mix of students: a significant proportion from non-European backgrounds, some Americans and some Irish students. They were all preparing for placement in Hungary, teaching English to Hungarian pupils of secondary school age. For some students, for example those from China and India, this represented an interface of three cultures. By virtue of embarking on this venture, they were constantly straddling three cultures at any one time. In many ways those students were more experienced in dealing with cross-cultural issues than their Irish and American counterparts. That allowed the students from non-European backgrounds to take what was probably an unusual lead, in the group exchanges, giving them greater confidence and authority during discussions in the experiential exercises. It also promoted a context of inter-cultural learning where the Irish, European and American students could avail of this knowledge with respect to their peers. In a natural way, it provided a basis for mutual sharing and relationship building. For all students this was a clear bonus and especially important for dispelling negative stereotypes and overcoming hidden prejudices on both sides.

Realising the potential offered by working with already constructed groups, with an embedded educational focus (therefore not alienating in the way an independent initiative from the counselling service might be), I forged ahead in making a collaboration with the Course Director. The objective was to embed the cultural training input into the curriculum and if the 'model' worked it could be done with other departments, on a similar basis. It transpired that there was a requirement to cover cultural issues within the course. This enabled a mutually supportive arrangement with the Course Director and resulted in us devising a programme that would both address the academic requirement but go much further, in terms of working experientially with the students in a more creative and personal space.

Workshops

Two workshops were offered in the year over two semesters. They were repeated each year for three years, modifying the content on the basis of feedback. Inspiration derived from a number of 'professional knowledge' seminars, attended at Metanoia. These included a seminar entitled *Reflexive Writing for Academic and Professional Development: The Memory Work Method*, led by Mona Livholts, (March, 2013); a seminar, entitled *Using Expressive Writing in Counselling and Psychotherapy* led by Jeannie Wright (2012), a seminar entitled *Academic Writing: Creativity within a Research Frame*, led by Marie Adams and Sophie Bager-Charleson, (Feb 2014) and a continuing professional development workshop offered at Queen's University Belfast, entitled *No Person is an Island: Culture, Race, Ethnicity, and Society. A Transcultural perspective on Psychotherapy and Counselling* (Sept, 2010), led by Colin Lago.

Workshop Series on Cultural Awareness

The content comprised an experiential part where students were invited to examine in small groups, issues of culture, race and ethnicity. In each small group there was a cultural mix of students- local Irish students, international students from Europe and America and international students from non-European backgrounds. They were asked to consider how they defined their own cultural background, how they thought that was viewed by others from a different cul-

tural group, and how they thought their awareness about their own cultural background shaped their interactions with people from a similar background and with people from other cultural groups.

Not surprisingly, most white Irish, UK and American students had not really given these issues much consideration and took their own cultural background, including English language as a norm. But as they were studying how to teach English to other groups, they were open for learning. Having students in their group who were from India, China, Thailand, Laos, to name but a few, had the effect of expanding discussions to bring in new perspectives. Those students from afore-mentioned backgrounds were much more comfortable and familiar with 'differences' and with some encouragement, they were able to share that expert knowledge of living in different cultures and to give first hand accounts. This enabled a sincere and quite profound level of exchange between students who would not normally have conversed with each other on a day-to-day level. In the evaluation forms, most students choose to highlight the discussions as the most enjoyable part of the workshop, particularly finding out about others' experiences.

As part of the experiential section, students were also invited to take part in a Role Play of a cross-cultural exchange between a student and a lecturer with an interpreter present. The idea was to demonstrate what doesn't work and why, in a fairly light-hearted way that can engage attention and provoke thought and argument.

The second part of the workshop was of a more educational style, providing substance and some enlightenment to the questions raised by the earlier experiential work. It covered theoretical content, addressing work carried out by Hofstede and E.T. Hall on ways of categorising characteristics of differing cultures; definitions of difference and diversity and cultural identity development models of white and black cultural identity. The knowledge input enabled students to position themselves in regards to how culturally aware they were at that point and to raise expectations of how they would like to develop that awareness, especially over the critical period of their teaching placement in another country. On return form their teaching placement in Hungary, (the location chosen each year by the University), students attended a Post-Placement Reflection Workshop. This was an opportunity for students to de-brief by sharing their experiences, first in writing and then in discussions.

Workshop Series on Post-Placement Reflection

In this workshop, I used a relaxation exercise to create the conditions more likely to promote a reflective stance for writing down one's thoughts. In a professional knowledge seminar I attended at Metanoia in 2012, Jeannie Wright used this technique. So I endeavoured to replicate the effect. I think I managed this with some success, as many students commented on the value of the relaxation exercise in their feedback. I also took Pennebaker's concept of the 6 minute uninterrupted freestyle writing as a way to continue the stress relief, as many studies had concluded that this technique produced significant health benefits. The first experiential exercise was a 'clear the head' exercise where students wrote anything that came into their head. This material was not for group sharing. They were later asked to write a 'memory piece' aiming to capture the detail and emotion of any cultural experience when they were on placement. They were advised not to choose anything potentially upsetting, as they would be invited to share their writing or an excerpt from it, in small group discussions. My inspiration for this came from a professional knowledge seminar, led by Mona Livholts in which I wrote a 'memory piece' based on one cultural experience in India. I read this aloud to the group as a 'story', to give them a feel for what was expected. But I also wished to share my own cultural awareness journey, which is a lifelong revelation of fascinating insights, interwoven with surprising and unexpected challenges. I was amazed how well people engaged with this exercise. Their memories of their teaching placement in Hungary were fresh and accessible. They lost no time in recording their experiences, as written stories to be told and later read aloud and re-told to each other in small groups. The atmosphere of liveliness, fun and laughter that characterised these sessions was quite remarkable. Most students were placed individually in different schools in Hungary, far distant from each other and had not previously had the chance to share experiences. They seized on this with vigour and seemed to really enjoy finding out how others coped with their respective challenges for cross-cultural interaction. I have included some excerpts from their material to illustrate their keen observational skills for cultural differences and how they responded in the situation. One student comments on the early confusion around greetings and goodbyes.

I wondered what I should say when I found everyone said 'hello' to me with smiles, when they were leaving to go home. After a while, I realised that 'hello' in Hungary can be used to mean ' hi' and 'bye'. (TESOL student)

Another student reflects on stereotypes and the legacy of communism.

I prepared a lesson for one of my year 11 classes. The subject was Tourism: How it affects a country, positively and negatively. What happened as a result of this topic was unexpected for me. Being Irish and travelling to other places, I am used to people telling me how much they love the Irish people as they are so friendly, welcoming and cheerful and we are generally a proud nation. So it was strange for me to encounter Hungarian students' negative opinions about their country. They spoke of tourists being taken advantage of by higher prices. They generally agreed that Hungarians were unfriendly and selfish and didn't care about others. I was so surprised that people accepted this stereotype of their nationality. Later I learned that post-communism attitudes have had an effect on people's mind-set, as we discussed this in detail. It was fascinating for me to hear their opinions and to realise how different our cultures are (TESOL student)

A student describes the informality of relationships between pupils and teachers.

The pupils were very polite and would volunteer to pick up your books, wipe the board and assist much more than I experienced at home. They had more of a relationship with the teachers, even being friends with them on Facebook. They called them by first name and could have fun with them. They could eat and run in the corridors. The atmosphere was more relaxed. It was very different to my secondary school, which was more strict because of child protection. It surprised me how quickly I got used to it. (TESOL student)

A student comments on the different attitudes to alcohol and how this made her feel.

I found that Hungarian people really like to drink. That is quite different from my hometown in China. Especially in the school. Teachers are forbidden to drink when they work. However in Hungary in the school where I was placed, teachers would celebrate their name day with their colleagues. All the teachers in the staff room would drink at least a cup of wine and eat some desserts, which were made by the person celebrating their name day. This was after the short breaks when one class finished and the next class began. All the teachers would continue to give lessons with alcohol smelling. This kind of day is not celebrated in my culture as our names were given by our own parents or can be found on the calendar. They do not depend on the Bible (TESOL student).

A student remembers Woman's Day, her surprise at being included in the festivities and her discomfort with cultural gestures of affection.

I still remember that day, full of flowers and blessings. It was the 8th March. I went into the staff room and prepared for my first lesson. After the bell ringing I went to the classroom and year 4 my most lovely little students were waiting for me. One of the most creative students who had showed me his magic, was standing in front of the door holding a beautiful sunflower in his hands. He said 'Today is Girls's Day in Hungary. Here is a flower for you. Happy Girl's Day'. This really was a surprise for me because I thought I'm only their trainee teacher for 6 weeks. I hugged him, but he seemed to want to do the Hungarian kiss and hug. It seems not very polite that I didn't kiss his cheeks. But its really a little weird as a Chinese to hug and kiss cheeks (TESOL student)

I was convinced that the act of recording thoughts through writing, and then later in a relaxed state, collecting memories and recording them as vividly as possible, was the basis for enlivened discussion. I saw the writing as a 'bridge' into the talking, a way to gather one's thoughts in a more private space thus enabling the experience to become more immediately accessible. It also paved the way for sincere in-depth sharing of experience. Students were in a position to censor what they wished to share with the group. They had more time to think through the processes, giving them more control. For those whose first language is not English, this presents some desirable aspects and induces a greater sense of ease into proceedings. Despite feeling convinced of the efficacy and suitability

of writing techniques for enhancing and promoting cultural awareness and engagement, I can concede that it is difficult to make this point persuasively unless alternative workshops offered the same content with no writing component and evaluations were carried out for both groups. This was beyond the scope and possibilities of this study.

Interestingly, in the feedback, students did not really appraise the arguably important part the writing played, in setting the scene for the discussions. Even when the positive effects of the writing seemed apparent in the workshops, there was little attention or credit given to its overall contribution. Some even said the workshops could be improved by reducing the time available for writing or that they did not feel comfortable writing down their thoughts. The students merely commented on how enjoyable the discussions were; they wished there was more time for discussion in fact they wished the whole workshop could have been a discussion!

I have included some feedback comments, for interest. This would seem to reveal some prejudice against writing groups solely as a form of relaxation or engagement. I had rather anticipated this, as only one interviewee out of eighteen interviewees in my research, had used writing a diary and blogs as a form of coping. My enthusiasm for the medium from personal experience, my knowledge of Pennebaker's research and my professional knowledge experience of the afore-mentioned seminars at Metanoia had firmed up my beliefs that writing incorporated into other forms of communication and cultural enhancement, deserved an investigation. My reasons for pursuing this were raised in my learning agreement, which I am referencing below

There are several aspects that relate writing to the research on coping and help-seeking that are worth re-iterating. Firstly, writing is often used spontaneously to externalise feeling, impressions or thoughts, which can help the writer to cope with new, moving or stressful situations. Secondly the medium possesses a certain universality as many cultures have a rich heritage of literature, poetry, story-telling etc. so it is not confined to a particular culture. Thirdly writing is accessible as an individual choice but can also be used in groups. A small study carried out with international students at the University of Sheffield revealed that personal writing for this group could be a useful adjunct to student support programmes, particularly in their capacity to assist awareness and well-being (Lago, 2004). A larger study (Nandagopal, 2008), examining the use of

expressive writing as an intervention to reduce stress was conducted with thirty Indian international students studying in UK Universities. The Pennebaker paradigm of 20 minutes free-style writing was employed where students wrote about stressful impending events on 3 consecutive days, whilst approaching the exam periods. The study revealed very positive results supporting the notion of stress reduction. (Conn, 2011)

Given my enthusiasm supported by research and practice, it was a little disconcerting that the majority of student participants of the workshops did not share that enthusiasm at the outset or acknowledge the valuable input that writing offered to the cultural engagement process. It may be that within an academic environment, writing is associated with study and work and not relaxation. However it could equally be asserted that an academic environment is one where most candidates are familiar with writing, suggesting that they might be more receptive to this medium. In other environments, where the successful uptake of writing for stress relief has been persuasive, such as health settings, it would seem no such prejudice was in evidence. Whilst the mixed reactions in the feedback were a little disappointing in regards to the writing input, this was balanced with overall positive comments about the experiences of the workshops in general. Here are a few of the comments.

Found insightful opinions from others about their experiences, helpful for developing my own teaching practice and re-thinking from a cultural view (TESOL student)

The relaxation exercise and discussions about the different cultures was very helpful (TESOL student)

The writing part could have been reduced (TESOL student)

I really enjoyed thinking about Hungary and the experiences I had there. It was great to share cultural experiences and get others' opinions on their experience. (TESOL student)

The exercises helped with my writing abilities. (TESOL student)

The workshop was a great idea and the relaxation technique was extremely help-ful. The facilitator was an excellent communicator and a very relaxing presence. She was very receptive and sensitive to all our comments. All in all, a nice re-entry to Uni after Hungary. (TESOL student)

Workshop on Expressive Writing

During the time of interviewing, I was experimenting with the concept of writing for individuals and groups as a form of engagement to enhance awareness and overcome isolation. Although international students are often referred to as a group and a section of the student population, they are by no means a connected group in a cross-cultural sense. Many people from different backgrounds find others from similar backgrounds and if they are lucky enough to have such support, often co-national groups evolve. When those circumstances are not present, it becomes all the more important that some infrastructure is offered to assist the mingling and connection between different cultural groups and with local students. Such efforts from the welcoming institutions are appreciated and serve to reduce isolation and risk of distress. With this motivation in mind, I invited the interviewees from the Dublin site of my research, to attend an expressive writing workshop. I had met each individually for interviews and was aware that they did not know each other. They were on different courses on different years and studying and working part-time. I saw this as an opportunity to bring them together to examine their experiences of living and studying abroad in another culture.

This workshop was the fore-runner and test-ground for the later workshops on Cultural Awareness and the Post-Placement reflection workshops for teaching practice, discussed in the earlier section. As such this workshop on Expressive Writing represented an important building block in the process of creating products.

Early in the session, I conducted a relaxation to enable students to settle down from the stresses of the day. Then followed exercises of 6 minutes 'clear the head' where they wrote down any thoughts that were pre-occupying them. This was not for sharing in the group. Later they were asked to write about a cross-

cultural experience, capturing as much emotion and detail as possible from memory. And a final exercise involved writing a letter to themselves, imagining that they had completed their studies successfully. The inspiration for this came from Jeannie Wright's professional knowledge seminar at Metanoia (2012).

The second half of the workshop was devoted to discussion where the students either read aloud excerpts from their pieces or re-told the stories to each other, with my facilitation. The discussion was recorded with their permission and later transcribed and analysed. The content of this is given extensive coverage in the chapter entitled *Enhancing Cultural Engagement.*

The productive exchanges that occurred represented a snapshot in time showing effective cultural engagement that was useful, inspiring and enjoyable for the individuals. It was included in the analysis as it was such a powerful experience and an example of what interesting interactions can come out of a proactive, creative initiative. There was minimum input from myself as facilitator. My part was to go with the flow, supporting each person to have a voice in the group and to feel their contributions were valued within the inter-group dialogue.

I've included some excerpts from students' writing. Two students below choose experiences relating to the impact of transition into the new culture. The first student had a positive early impression.

I arrived in Ireland in 2002. I was not sure what to expect. One of my greatest concerns was integrating into the society. I was surprised to see the diversity in my college in terms of culture. In my first week I met an Irishman who spoke a Nigerian language, Chinese and educated me about Islamic religion. It was nice to know there was the possibility of meeting other people who understood my culture. It made me feel at ease. It opened my eyes to multi-cultural Ireland! I told myself there is hope I will like this place. And here I am 10 years later! (African female student)

Another student shared a less positive first impression.

One of the memorable experiences I want to write about is the integration into the Irish culture. Having come from Africa where we have the culture of sharing amongst individuals and families, I found the Irish culture a bit difficult. I found mostly people like to have their own things and sharing was a bit limited. For example, even if you have a problem, people would feel sorry for you but to get an individual who wants to help you was a bit hard. In my culture we share

problems together and want to help in any way. It took me some time to learn how to survive since mostly you have to get a way of helping yourself. But as time has gone by, I learnt about the culture here and have come to respect that. (African male student).

In the following excerpt a student describes living with challenge.

Being on my own was a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge has been going with the flow, riding the high and low tides. Feeling lonely, frustrated at times. Feeling low and confused as well. Questioning yourself constantly "What am I doing, why this, why that?" Yet it's a massive opportunity as well – to grow, to see the high and lows, to experience myself in new ways, to meet many people who have become brilliant friends. People who have pushed me to be better. Such people I have learned to admire (African female student)

In the letters the students wrote to themselves, there were some remarkable insights shared about the journey and the imagined successful ending. One student addressing herself, as a parent would a daughter (her remark).

One of the main lessons you took out of this journey was keeping your eye on the ball and balancing priorities accurately. Naturally mistakes were made along the way but you learnt from these. I look back and tell myself 'Look where she is today. You went to Ireland with the purpose of getting a BSc and now you have a doctorate'. I can definitely say you learnt to adapt and adjust as life presented its challenges. You may not have had it all but you utilised whatever resources you had. Big pat on the back and a massive well done to you. From Me. xx (African female student)

All students were given an evaluation sheet. The responses were very positive on the whole. Interestingly however the remarks centred on the discussions and the relaxation and not on the writing exercises. Here are a few comments.

It was nice to know that other people shared similar experiences. (student participant).

At first I thought it was to test my writing skills and how I expressed myself. More time needed for open conversations. (student participant)

I found the workshop very useful because of sharing with others, ideas about their experiences. The time for discussion was not enough. (student participant)

An interesting way of getting people to open up and talk about personal experiences. Good for personal reflection. (student participant)

In terms of the writing input, I remain convinced of the power of this medium to enable people to reflect on memories, impressions and to make sense of these through the action of recording it. The arrangement of a sequence of events into a 'story' reduces its elements into a manageable coherent form. This ensures it can be communicated to oneself and others, if the person chooses. However the reaction from the participants would suggest that a writing group in its pure sense is just not 'sexy' enough to grab the students' interest and spark their imagination ... even when they clearly are capable of engaging through writing, in a meaningful way. It would seem that for the benefits of writing to be made available, it should be incorporated alongside other interactional styles, such as small group discussion or role-plays which at least superficially seem to be regarded as more useful and enjoyable.

Conference Papers

Towards the later stages of writing up, I became aware of the value of my research for other professionals working in educational fields. The earlier chaos, the seeming fragmentation of a process in which numerous activities had to be co-ordinated and executed in pursuit of new knowledge, eventually produced some kind of synthesis in the writing up. This was able to be condensed into an abstract, describing the help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies for international Students of non-European backgrounds: Implications for practice. Originally I had wanted to present a paper at either the BACP research conference in Nottingham, May, 2015; UK Council for International Student Affairs (UKCISA), in Sussex, July 2015 or the European Association for international

Education (EAIC), in Glasgow, Sept, 2015. I contacted these organisations in Jan 2015, at a point when I felt my work was mature, substantial, credible and therefore interesting and valuable for others. I proposed to give: either a workshop/seminar based on one chapter of the thesis, entitled 'Shifting Identities' examining practice implications for working with international students of non-European backgrounds or a presentation of the phenomenon of Help-Seeking Behaviours and Coping strategies for this student group, with implications for practice. Although I had encouraging responses, I was informed that the timescale is 6 months to 1 year for planning these conferences and that I had missed the November deadline by two months. I was invited to submit the following year. This was a low point. Circumstances connected with the stress of redundancy had already stalled the process. I needed to have another product if I were to submit in 2015. I felt a conference paper provided suitable variation in product, to the practitioner workshops described earlier, and to an article for publication that I was then working on.

Subsequently, I turned my attention to Conferences in Ireland, suitable for presenting my research for impact in the field of Student Support in Higher Education. I had previously attended the CSSI (Confederation of Student Services in Ireland) which is also attended by many international delegates. My previous boss, Dr Brian Caul, the former Director of Student Services at the University of Ulster, retired from post about fifteen years was the founding chair of this conference at a time when there was virtually no cross-border collaboration between the North and South of Ireland. It was set up to foster good cross-community relations, pre-figuring the peace process by at least a decade. Its mission was/is to help staff in University departments dedicated to Student support, to overcome institutional isolation and produce best practice by working together. Knowing the conference's conception also made this an attractive venue. My research aimed at promoting better cultural engagement, definitely embraced the same spirit that inspired the founding chair, many years earlier.

I submitted my abstract for this conference, on discovering that the CSSI's call for papers was still open for June as they operated a shorter timescale than UK conferences. My proposal was accepted and I delivered my conference presentation in June, 2015. My listing in what has been described as, a 'high impact brochure', was a great source of delight.

My experience of delivering the presentation to an appreciative audience, comprising professionals working in student support in universities across Ireland, was a high point of the doctoral journey. I had delivered many presentations in the course of my job, but this was the first time presenting my own research in a public sphere to my own profession. Surprising to myself, I felt calm and collected. I knew my subject in a deep way, having worked closely with the material over a long time and having read extensively on related literature in the field. This gave me something of an expertise, which I began to realise by the reactions of group members, shown through their respect and genuine interest. There were many questions afterwards, which confirmed my impressions that my work had resonated with them and that they had engaged well with the issues raised. The question and answer session earned me a warm second round of applause. This was a wonderful feeling, one to relish and build upon for my future endeavours.

Journal Paper

My final product is a publication for BACP's sub-division *University and College Counselling* journal, Sept edition, 2015. The article is entitled 'Shifting Identities' and is based on one chapter of the analysis. The original submission was to *Therapy Today*. I had hoped that the more mainstream *Therapy Today* would have accepted it for two reasons. I felt the subject matter had a much wider remit than Universities and Colleges audiences and that the content discussed could contribute valuable knowledge to the transcultural discourse. It was therefore disappointing that *Therapy Today* had a different view, deciding that the readership of *University and College Counselling*, their 'sister journal' was a more appropriate choice. The editor of *University and College Counselling* accepted the article but had a number of issues, which required the piece to be substantially re-written. She felt it was too 'researchy' which would not be attractive for practitioners. It should emphasise practice implications with only the briefest references to the origins, which gave rise to the knowledge. At the time this was frustrating as the rationale seemed to contradict the evolving wisdom of practitioners needing to get involved in research, to bring more authority to our professional practice. I didn't expect that mention of research, could potentially alienate readers, so must be relegated to the margins or written out all together!

However, I took on board the editor's requirements and duly obliged. The resulting piece I believe is much better for that. By that time, I had completed the discussion chapter of the thesis and was therefore able to bring in new material from a wider cultural hinterland. The conditions at this point were exactly right and well-timed for the final 'hatching' of a more rounded article. I haven't yet seen the article in print but am very proud of this achievement. As the journal has 40,000 circulation, I can be sure that many counsellors working in educational settings with students of non-European backgrounds will read it. Hopefully they will not just read it, but will reflect on their own practice and be inspired to take steps, in whichever imaginative ways they please, to enhance cultural engagement within those settings, for the benefit of all students.

Future Projects for Post Doctoral Work

There are a number of avenues I'd like to pursue. Currently I'm at a crossroads, effectively on a career break, precipitated by my redundancy last year. The unfortunate shift in senior management policy, that brought about the outsourcing of counselling services to external companies, is not just confined to University of Ulster. It represents a radical change in thinking across Higher Education and Further Education in Northern Ireland, with possible ramifications for the sector in general, if such policies are adopted more widely. Presently all colleges including Queen's University Belfast, the only other University in Northern Ireland, have all outsourced their counselling, believing that they now have a better service, for less (or at least that's the public rhetoric). There was much press coverage and outrage at the time those decisions were made. These changes have excluded possibilities for working as a counsellor in FE or HE if I continue to live in Northern Ireland. The chances to impact directly at that practitioner level within a service, are no longer available to me. But with every door closing, another opens.

I would like to create a specialism around my subject of working transculturally both in training and direct client work. As there has been a great identified need for cultural training, in my local contexts, there are possibilities to develop Continuing Professional Development workshops, perhaps through BACP with an accredited status. This could be of interest not only to those counsellors working with students from different cultural backgrounds but more generally for

any workplace setting, for example organisations with a diverse work force who may be interested in Staff Development, including cultural awareness training. With the body of material I have amassed through this study and the products delivered, especially the workshops, this gives me an excellent base for creating a Cultural Awareness manual. In this way my practitioner knowledge and experience could be disseminated to a wider remit.

When I attended the CSSI conference at the University of Cork, I became aware of initiatives by the Irish government to introduce compulsory Cultural Competency training for all education establishments from this year (2015), as part of a quality assurance regulation. I am interested in spin-offs from my research, which could mean contributing to the training schedule, either to deliver cultural competency training to universities and colleges in the Republic of Ireland or to develop a North-South collaboration that could bring much needed training to educational institutions in the North of Ireland. In the race to attract as many international students as possible because of their high income-generating potential, this might be a consideration for colleges and universities. Mercenary and mechanistic in its motivation yes, but there could be favourable outcomes for students of non European backgrounds, if their institutions see staff training on cultural issues as a worthy investment.

I am envisaging a number of future publications and /or conference papers. Each of my analysis chapters could constitute an article, given the correct re-framing and contextual consideration. This treatment has already been successfully performed on one of the superordinate themes – *Shifting Identities*. The other superordinate themes such as *Impact of Transition, Help-seeking Behaviours, Coping,* and *Enhancing Cultural Engagement* could be re-worked for a publication.

Having had to play down the 'research' part to get my article for *University and College Counselling* into print, it is my ambition to have a full resume of my research published as a longer article in *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*. I attended the BACP research conference in Nottingham in May 2015, as a delegate for the first time. I had a meeting with the editor Clare Symons with whom I'd earlier corresponded, in regards to an article for this journal. My need to have a publication before my doctoral submission in October had meant temporarily abandoning this objective, in favour of focusing on a more realistic goal, i.e., another journal with a shorter timelag. I managed to do this

successfully. However I am still in communication with the editor of CPR about producing an article summarising the entire research of *A Phenomenological Study of the Help-Seeking Behaviours and Coping Strategies of international Students of non-European backgrounds* and would hope to continue with that project, with a view to achieving a publication next year.

I endeavoured to create a variety of products that would be useful and create impact at different levels. The workshops were devised to achieve such, at a localised level within my university setting. The objective of raising cultural awareness was uppermost and to do so in such a way that, not only students of Non-international Backgrounds would benefit, but also other student groups including local Irish and UK students. The idea rested on the principle that a more culturally aware and informed peer group would naturally encourage conditions for better cultural engagement, especially if couched in an academic framework. There was certainly evidence within the workshops to suggest that this occurred. Whether it was sustained beyond the workshops would have been interesting to examine, but was not possible within the confines of this study.

The workshops could have been developed and adapted to support staff in developing better cultural awareness. If I had remained in employment at the University, this was an obvious next stage. As it happens my direct work with staff, addressing cultural awareness, focused on devising an appropriate curriculum on the subject, within one department. However my feature article in the Staff magazine had the advantage of reaching a wide circulation of staff, of about 5000 readers. Potentially the successful initiative could have been repeated with other departments. Unfortunately there was no opportunity for this, as the department of Student Support was 'wound down' the following year.

The conference papers and publication were products for a much bigger pubic forum. Together with the workshops, I believe this brings a complementary balance of influences. The individual and group experiences of students contemplating cultural awareness, investing in the notion of enhanced cultural engagement, happens often as a 'product' of professionals sharing best practice and research. Knowledge that is recognisable and resonant for a profession or institution can be a catalyst for change making, if other favourable parameters are present. This usually occurs by incremental degrees at local level, institutional level and beyond. By raising cultural awareness high on the agenda

through my chosen products, I believe that my research can have far-reaching reverberations in a number of contexts. The metaphorical 'hatched fledglings' have now flown . . .

List of products

The list of products and resources presented in this appendix includes the following items.

- Conference Papers

  - CSSI Conference, 18/19 June, 2015, University of Cork

  - Presentation at CSSI Conference

  - BACP Research Conference 20-21 May 2016, Brighton

- Journal Article

  - BACP University and College Counselling Journal

- Workshops

  - Workshop 1: Cultural Awareness

  - Workshop 2: Post Placement Reflection

    * Presentation Slides to Post Placement Reflection Workshop

    * Writing task 1

    * Writing task 2

    * Clear-the-head task

    * Memory-task

  - Workshop 3: Expressive Writing

    * Presentation Slides to Expressive Writing Workshop

    * Clear-the-head Exercise

    * Fact-Sheet on Expressive Writing

- Misc Media Coverage

  - Article in Staff Magazine

15th Biennial CSSI Conference,
University College Cork | 18th-19th June 2015
Brookfield Health Sciences Complex

CONFEDERATION OF STUDENT SERVICES IN IRELAND
CSSI

INNOVATIONS TO SUPPORT THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

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EVERSHEDS

15th Conference of the Confederation of Student Services Ireland
Conference Schedule 18th & 19th June 2015

Day 1 – Thursday, 18th June 2015
Brookfield Health Sciences Complex, College Road, University College Cork

Time		Title	Presented by	Room
09:00hrs – 10:00hrs	Registration			
10:00hrs – 10:30hrs	Welcome and Opening of Conference: Professor Ursula Kilkelly, Head, College of Business & Law, UCC / Dr Ian Pickup, Head of Student Experience, UCC			
10:30hrs – 11:30hrs	Keynote Speaker: Dr Elisabeth Dunne, *University of Exeter*			
11:30hrs – 12:00hrs	Tea & Coffee			
12:00hrs – 13:00hrs	**CONCURRENT SESSION 1**			

Session		Title	Presented by	Room
1A Theme: *Adult Learners*	Paper 1:	*Preparing for diversity: How do Irish HEIs provide for adult learners in terms of programme provision*	**Dr Geraldine Brosnan,** Director of Student Life Mary Immaculate College, Limerick	101
	Paper 2:	*Trial and error, trial and error! Responding to the needs of mature students: getting the balance right with orientation and induction programmes in Higher Education*	**Ms Sinéad O'Neill,** Mature Student Officer Cork Institute of Technology	
1B Theme: *Mental Health*	Paper 1:	*Student's use of mental health support*	**Ms Sandra Conroy,** Cork Institute of Technology	102
	Paper 2:	*Opportunities to improve students' health and wellbeing at the UCD Get in Gear Get Active health and exercise programme*	**Ms Carmel Keane,** Sports Education Officer, University College Dublin	
1C Theme: *Student Engagement*	Paper 1:	*We missed you – did you miss us? A hand held solution to retention*	**Mr Brian Hipkin,** Dean of Students Regent's University, London Vice-Chair AMOSSHE	121
	Paper 2:	*EXPLORE: From Idea to Impact. Student and staff co-creating innovations to deliver student and staff engagement*	**Ms Clodagh Barry,** EXPLORE Founder & Manager, **Ms Amber Walsh Olesen,** EXPLORE Coordinator, Students' Union, **Mr. Fionn Delahunty** Student, NUI Galway	
1D Theme: *Leadership and Management of the Student Experience*	Workshop:	*Managing and leading the student experience – challenges, opportunities and lessons from the field*	**Dr Ian Pickup,** Head of Student Experience University College Cork	122

Time		Title	Presented by	Room
13:00hrs – 14:00hrs	Lunch			
14:00hrs – 15:00hrs	**PLENARY SESSION**			

Session		Title	Presented by	Room
Theme: *Tackling Alcohol, Drugs and Sexual Violence in a Strategic Way*		• **"Rewarding Change: The REACT Project on Your Campus"** *Tackling alcohol-related harm in a strategic way*	**Dr Michael Byrne, Mr Dave Carey, Mr Martin Davoren,** University College Cork	G10
		Think About it: • **Alcohol, Drugs & Sexual Violence Prevention:** **An interactive online course for students**	**Dr Peter J. Novak,** University of San Francisco	

Day 1 – Thursday, 18th June 2015
Brookfield Health Sciences Complex, College Road, University College Cork

Time		Title	Presented by	Room
15:00hrs – 16:30hrs	**CONCURRENT SESSION 2**			

Session		Title	Presented by	Room
2A Theme: *Fitness to Study*		**Fitness to Study** - *A Master Class*	**Ms Margaret Gorman,** EVERSHEDS (Law Firm of the Year 2015)	101
2B Theme: *Disability Support*	Paper 1:	*Moving from the transactional to the transformational student: Lessons learnt from the Trinity College Disability Service three phased transitional student journey strategy*	**Mr Declan Treanor,** Director of Disability Services Trinity College Dublin	102
	Paper 2:	*The Culture & Language of the Deaf Community*	**Dr Peter J Novak,** Vice Provost of Student Life University of San Francisco	
2C Theme: *Enhancing the Student Experience: Initiatives and Limitation*	Paper 1:	*The right sort of Crisis?*	**Mr Gavin Douglas,** Deputy Secretary, Student Experience **Mr Mark Wilkinson,** Student Experience Project Officer University of Edinburgh	121
	Paper 2:	*The use of learning analytics to support the student experience: Ethical implications of collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners*	**Dr Deirdre Ryan,** Teaching & Learning Officer **Dr Geraldine Brosnan,** Director of Student Life **Mr David Moloney,** Coordinator of Blended Learning Mary Immaculate College, Limerick	

Time		Title	Presented by	Room
16:30hrs – 17:30hrs	**CONCURRENT SESSION 3**			

Session		Title	Presented by	Room
3A Theme: *Continuing Professional Development*	Workshop:	*Supporting and nurturing the workforce: developing a PG course in Student Experience/Student Affairs Practice*	**Dr Ian Pickup** Head of Student Experience University College Cork	101
3B Theme: *Continuing Professional Development*	Paper 1:	*A study of the help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies of International Students from Non-European backgrounds: implications for individual practice and staff training to enhance transcultural engagement*	**Ms Sarah Conn** Counsellor Formerly University of Ulster	121
3C Theme: *Student Development*	Paper 1:	*Dublin Institute of Technology Access & Civic Engagement (ACE) Student Leadership Launchpad. A model for student development*	**Ms Gráinne Burke,** Lead Project Officer **Mr John Delap,** Project Officer Dublin Institute of Technology	122
	Paper 2:	*Pathways to Success @ university programme*	**Ms Deirdre Moloney,** Senior Student Support Officer **Ms Celine Geraghty,** Student Advisor Dublin City University	
	Paper 3:	*Board of Irish College Societies empowering students to enhance the student experience, sharing best practice and promoting inter college activity*	**Ms Riona Hughes** Chairperson Board of Irish College Societies	

2C) Enhancing the Student Experience - Initiatives and Limitations | *Room 121*

PAPER 1:
The right sort of crisis?
Mr Gavin Douglas,
Deputy Secretary, Student Experience
University of Edinburgh.
Mr. Mark Wilkinson,
Student Experience. Project Officer.
University of Edinburgh.

Ed Catmull, President of Pixar Studios, reckons that there are only two ways to get real organisational change; the presence of a visionary leader - or being faced with "the right sort of crisis".

In 2012 the University of Edinburgh received some less than flattering public focus on the quality of its student learning experience as measured by the National Student Survey. It embarked on three major initiatives to enhance the student experience - a 3-year, multi-million pound Student Experience Project; the introduction of a major new Personal Tutor scheme; and a raft of other initiatives to tackle perceived areas of under-performance.

We will focus mainly on the Student Experience Project and a) summarise the activity that has been delivered b) show how we have developed innovative ways to measure impact, and c) consider the leadership lessons from this initiative and its effectiveness - and limitations - as a change management approach.

The Project has probably been the biggest and most ambitious of its kind in recent years in UK HE; setting out to improve student services and the student experience across 13 different strands of activity. Evaluation suggests that there has been considerable impact from the project already. But have we created underlying change in the University's norms, policies and objectives? We will use Argyris' (1978) model of single and double loop learning to evaluate the success of the Project and consider wider lessons learned for the management of change to the critical area of the student experience.

The session will cover key reflective questions that include:
• How to evaluate the impact of change initiatives.
• An appreciation of the value and limitations of projects as a tool for delivering institutional change in the area of student experience.
• Identification of alternative approaches to major culture change.

PAPER 2:
The use of learning analytics to support the student experience: Ethical implications of collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners
Dr Deirdre Ryan,
Teaching & Learning Officer,
Dr Geraldine Brosnan.
Director of Student Life
Mr David Moloney,
Coordinator of Blended Learning,
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.

Learning analytics is "the measurement, collection, analysis and reporting of data about learners and their contexts, for purposes of understanding and optimising learning and the environments in which it occurs" (Ferguson, 2012). With the advent of virtual learning environments (VLEs) the data that is captured, stored and available for analysis about our students' learning has burgeoned. This availability of data carries with it ethical and legal obligations; issues surrounding access to and use of this data are exercising the education community worldwide. The Joint Information Systems Committee (JISC) in the UK recently released its report *Code of practice for learning analytics: A literature review of the ethical and legal issues.* Some of the complex ethical and legal issues raised in this document with regard to collecting student data include; student consent to collect such data, if sharing the data we collect with students could influence their attitude towards their studies in negative ways (demotivation and dropout), and the question of labelling bias (given the diversity of the student population does profiling or labelling students influence an institutions behaviour towards them).

At the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning's panel discussion on the recently released report *Strategic and Leadership Perspectives on Digital Capacity in Irish Higher Education* the issue of learning analytics was raised. The consensus is that currently there is a lack of research in Ireland about the ethical and legal issues involved in the collection, storage and use of the vast amount of data now available about our student population. This paper will present a review of the type of data available, who this data might benefit and in particular the issues that arise for the ethical use of such data in tracking and supporting student engagement and learning - particularly in light of the growing diversity in the student population.

Concurrent Sessions 3

3A) Continuing Professional Development | *Room 101*

Supporting and nurturing the workforce: developing a PG course in Student Experience/Student Affairs Practice
Dr Ian Pickup,
Head of Student Experience,
University College Cork.

The professional development of student services staff has traditionally relied on an eclectic mix of generic and service-specific courses across relevant disciplines. In the US, Masters level courses in Student Affairs are common; these tend to attract recent graduates who have an eye on career pathways in the profession as opposed to experienced practitioners. In Ireland and the UK, there has been a rapid development of postgraduate qualifications in Teaching and Learning and some student service staff may have participated. However, 'student affairs practice' remains relatively under-theorised and under-researched and there is a need for a more structured approach to the professional development of the community of practice.

A Postgraduate Certificate in Student Affairs Practice (leading to Diploma and Masters Qualification) is currently under development following the identification of staff development needs at UCC. This has also been positively received by potential international partners.

This workshop will invite delegates to consider desirable content of such a course, provide feedback on the emerging course design and identify development needs which the course could address. Module content, approaches to teaching, learning and assessment and the use of blended approaches will be explored. The workshop will inform on-going course design and ensure that the course meets the needs of student services staff across Ireland.

3B) Continuing Professional Development | *Room 121*

A study of the help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies of International Students from Non-European backgrounds: implications for individual practice and staff training to enhance transcultural engagement
Ms Sarah Conn, Counsellor.
Formerly University of Ulster.

The aim of this study is to explore the subjective experience of what are the help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies of International Students from Non-European backgrounds. Eighteen students from eleven Non-European countries on three sites were interviewed.

By using a phenomenological approach, the study aims to capture the knowledge of the experiential experts i.e. the students themselves with the hope that it can be used to enhance provision for this client group in university counselling services. The study was prompted by the distinct under-use and under-representation of such students using traditional counselling services. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was employed to address the research questions from a first-person-perspective, helping to shed light on the sense making of International Students of Non-European Backgrounds, when confronted with challenge. Themes such as culture shock, culture, family, spirituality/religion, identity, sense of justice, resistance, perceived barriers and reflections on how to improve transition were categorised, with five super-ordinate themes emerging. The five super-ordinates were: impact of transition; living with challenge-coping; living with challenge-seeking help; shifting identities and enhancing cultural engagement. The findings are discussed with regard to implications for individual practice and staff training in transcultural work to enhance cultural engagement in educational settings.

3C) Student Development | *Room 122*

PAPER 1:
Dublin Institute of Technology Access & Civic Engagement (ACE) Student Leadership Launchpad. A model for student development
Ms Gráinne Burke, Lead Project Officer,
Mr John Delap, Project Officer,
Dublin Institute of Technology.

According to HEA statistics collected in 2012, less than 12% of school leavers attending DEIS secondary schools in Ireland attend higher education immediately following secondary school. This compares to a rate of 99% of school leavers in Dublin 6 participating in higher education immediately following school. This indicates a multi-layered experience of disadvantage that young people in Ireland face in both accessing and completing higher degrees. It also suggests that third-level institutions have a responsibility to equip students with networking and leadership skills to ensure a level playing field post-graduation. The DIT ACE STUDENT LEADERSHIP LAUNCHPAD Programme builds on the success the DIT Access & Civic Engagement Office has already had in supporting socio-economically disadvantaged students.

The ACE LEADERSHIP LAUNCHPAD Programme can serve as a model other third-level Access Offices can adopt. The model is targeted at fifty 2nd, 3rd, and 4th year students from backgrounds of socio-economic disadvantage. This model will deliver a suite of tailored supports which will:
• Identify life experience and skills which students already possess and empower students to communicate those skills

Sarah Conn, Coleraine
(Formerly University of Ulster)

Help-Seeking Behaviours and Coping
Strategies of International Students of Non-
European Backgrounds: Implications for
Practice and Staff Training in Transcultural
Engagement.

Overview

- Introduction

- Participants & Study

- Analysis & Findings

- Discussion & Implications

Introduction

Background & Motivation

- About 18 years experience as a counsellor in student support at Ulster University
- Underutilisation of traditional counselling by international students of Non-European background
- International Students from Non-European backgrounds come
  - o via Medical Referral
  - o via Academic Referral
  - o in Crisis
  - o rarely by self Referral

Research Question

- What are the Help-Seeking Behaviours and Coping Strategies of International Students from Non-European Backgrounds?

- What can university counselling services learn to enhance services offered to these students?

Coping
What the Literature says

"The way a person acts in order to preserve mental health and well being and relieve stress. It is shaped by social and cultural norms" (Oxford English Dictionary)

"Constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person" (Lazurus and Folkman, 1984).

Seeking Help
What the Literature Says

Help-Seeking Behaviour is a complex decision making process, instigated by a problem that challenges personal resources. The process is characterised by the following attributes: problem-focus, intentional action and interpersonal action. It is a useful concept for understanding client delay and prompt action, across health (or psychological) conditions (Cornally and McCarthy, 2011).

Transcultural Engagement
What the Literature Says

Transcultural denotes an "active, reciprocal process" that requires the counsellor to work across, through and beyond the cultural differences.

This means going beyond one's own reference system to understand client's experiences. Transcultural engagement takes into account that both parties may hold different world views or life philosophies in the encounter and that the counsellor (or helper) should try to meet the client more than half way (Eleftheriadou,1994).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Appeared in mid-1990's as a qualitative research method within Health Psychology.

Theoretical underpinnings: Phenomenology, Hermeneutics, Idiography.

Participants are the experts on their own experience.

Method focuses on process of reflection and getting as close as possible to the participant's everyday experience.

Researcher is engaged in **double hermeneutic** of trying to make sense of participants, trying to make sense of their experience.

Ethical Considerations

- BACP guidelines for Professional and Ethical standards applied

- No current clients of counselling recruited.

- Pre-interview, participants received information sheets covering:
  - 1.Purpose
  - 2.Confidentiality
  - 3.Right to withdraw at any time, without a reason, up to point of analysis.

- Participants completed consent forms.

- Participants de-briefed at end of interview. Referral to counselling services offered and arranged, if needed.

- Participants could view transcripts of their interview for comment and/or amendment.

- Tapes stored securely. Destroyed at end of project.

Overview of the Study
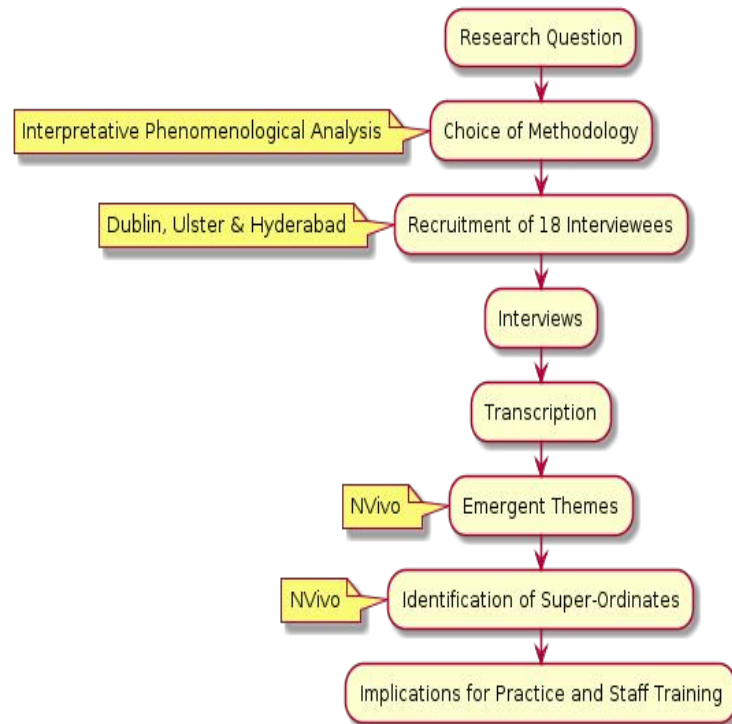
Participants & Study

Recruitment of 18 Students for Interviews

Semi-structured audio-taped interviews of
45 mins with 18 international students on
three sites

- Ulster University, N.Ireland
- National College of Ireland, Dublin
- University of Hyderabad, India.

The recordings of the Interviews have been
transcribed

Interview Questions (Examples)

1. On arrival at University, did you experience any culture shock
   and if so, is there any experience you would be willing to
   share?

2. How have you coped with the challenges of living and
   studying here? What has helped?

3. If you had a personal problem that was causing you distress
   and affecting your ability to study, who would you talk to?

4. What kinds of issues would prompt you to seek the
   professional help of a nurse or counsellor?

5. Are there any issues that would make you reluctant to seek
   support, and if so are there any examples you wish to share?

Student Voices

I will be suffering for a while until I find the right resolution. Here when you talk about sexuality, its an unspeakable truth. Of course I can try to ignore it but I know this aspect will hurt me, it is a very sensitive issue in my country and I have grown up with that so I know it is there.

From the time when I was small, I was brought up "to be a man". You have to be strong to carry this responsibility and no one has to know your weaknesses. It's very tough. People commit suicide or become mad because of this ….

When I am reading something, I'm always understanding but after a while I'm not remembering. Because you know its in English and my mind is Arabic.

I have been told Americans are proud, they don't care about others, they are selfish, they are stupid, they use women like toys, they have no values. I have been there. I was surprised when I met people who guided me. We need to meet people to talk to them to understand them. One day we will bridge that gap.

Its not considered very normal to be on your own in my country because of the cultural bindings .People think "Are you OK". This is one advantage I've got out of living away from home.

My support system was my husband, back home, because I tell him everything.

I didn't know which doctors I could approach, whether it had to be study related and then only could I go. Or could it be any problem.

Without God's help, you cannot do much and I do have trust in God. I believe he makes things easy for you but you need to put your own efforts somewhere too.

By going to pray, we ask God's help. It's a kind of relief. I do it. I go to pray and sit and revise my problems, my sins. We believe that these sins lead to stress and anxiety.

You're starting all over again. You are carving out your identity in the new place.

I have a habit of writing a diary. I sometimes put it in my blogs. I personally feel it is good to write a diary to get rid of stress. Its like I'm telling this to someone. I'm just letting my feelings out.

Analysis & Findings

Analysis & Theme Development

NVivo was used a software tool to carry out a qualitative analysis of the transcripts in line with IPA

```
Student Voices
        |
        v
Interview Transcripts  ->  Emergent Themes  ->  Superordinate Themes
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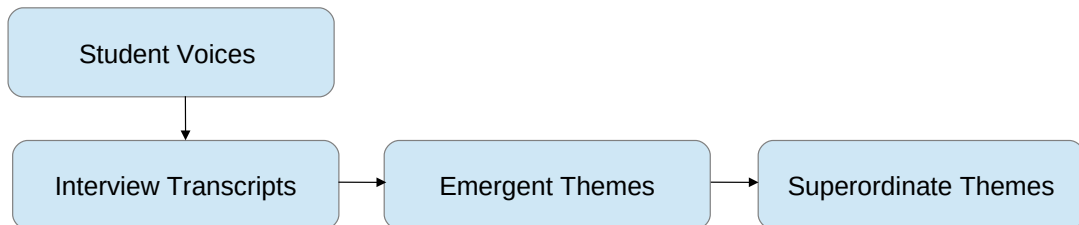
Findings

Findings and results are on 3 levels

- Emergent Themes
- Superordinate Themes
- Patterns of emergent/superordinate themes

Results: Superordinate Themes

- Impact of Transition

- Living with Challenge: Coping

- Living with Challenge: Help Seeking

- Shifting Identities

- Enhancing Cultural Engagement

Living with Challenge - Coping

Interview Transcript	Emergent Sub/Themes	Superordinate Themes
From the time I was small, I was brought up to be a man. You have to be strong and carry this responsibility and no one has to know your weaknesses.	Coping by being strong	
We ask God's help. It's a kind of relief. I go to pray and sit and revise my problems, my sins. We believe that these sins lead to stress and anxiety. So we go for forgiveness ... this is also a relaxation.	Coping by faith/spirituality	Living with Challenge – Coping
I personally feel it is good to write a diary to get rid of stress. If I put it down on paper and read it later, then I think "Why did I feel sad for this?"	Coping by personal resources	

Living with Challenge - Help Seeking

Interview Transcript	Emergent Sub/Themes	Superordinate Themes
I go to my mother and my father in case I need any help. I ask them their advice I tell them I have done this wrong	Family	
Amongst Yemenis, I think no one has no friend. I don't think any Yemenis student in Hyderabad can live alone out of the group.	Friends	Living with Challenge – Help Seeking
I was in touch with them beforehand even before I arrived here in Northern Ireland. They kind of took care of us in the initial days. They very much supported us.	Cultural Community	

Cultural Engagement

Interview Transcript	Emergent Sub/Themes	Superordinate Themes
People in the decision making panel should understand what are the psychological problems for a students? "What is the right atmosphere? How can we make a good environment for the students to be more productive?"	Reflections on how to improve transition	
The services that are there are just the general ones for all the problems for any student. As far as I am concerned there is no really specific forum for foreign students.	Perceived barriers	Enhancing Cultural Engagement
So what we need to do is we should meet people and and talk to them to understand them. And one day we will bridge the gap.	Process of integration	

LIVING with CHALLENGE: COPING

Emergent Themes:

- By Being Strong

- By Faith/Spirituality

- By Personal Resources.

- Last Resort: Seeking Help

- Experience of challenge determined by combination of resilience and situational factors.

- Possibility of crisis can be reduced through better cultural engagement.

Experience of Coping relies on Combination of Resilience and Situational Factors

Positive

Coping by Being Strong, Personal Resources, Faith/ spirituality
↓
Coping strategies fail. Not coping/Reduced Coping
↓
Seeking Help
↓
Improved Coping And Stabilisation

Negative

Coping by Being Strong, Personal Resources, Faith/ spirituality
↓
Coping strategies fail Not Coping/Reduced Coping
↓
Not Seeking Help
↓
Crisis
↓
Mandated Help/ Crisis Intervention
↓
Improved Coping And Stabilisation
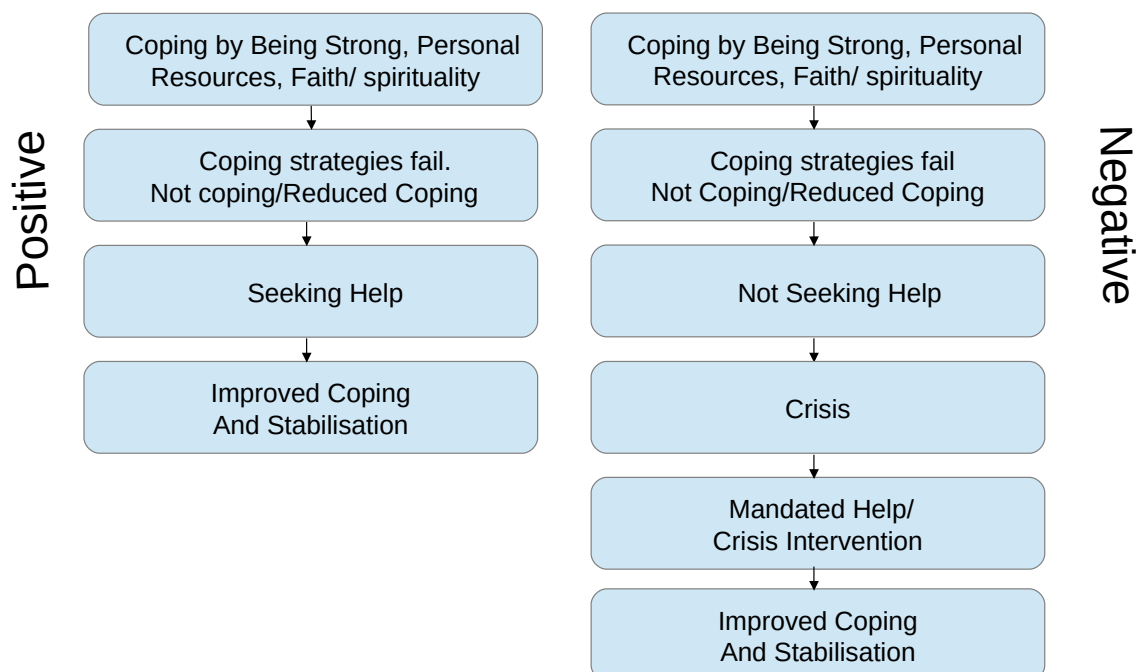
Link between Coping & Help-Seeking

- Seeking Help involves a social component. Usually pursued when personal/individual coping strategies fail and/or challenges increase.

- Seeking Help is integrated with coping for well-adjusted individuals in tolerable circumstances.

- Often, Seeking Help is a last resort. Implies weakness. Risk of archaic/ shame based feelings being triggered.

Hierarchy of Help-Seeking

" My support system was my husband, back home, because I tell him everything.

"If it is some personal issue, which I cannot tell my parents, I go to my friends.

" I met them here, but they were all from Nigeria. So they kind of helped me through it because they were already here

"I think because we don't have this in China. We just contact the teachers, course directors. So if we have a little problem, our people will think that it is a serious problem, if I say I'm going to counselling.

" I didn't know which doctors I could approach, whether it had to be study related and then only could I go. Or could it be any problem.

" The course director told me there is a counselling service in the school and I can have an interview with them. I didnt really know about counselling, so I called ... He told me its for any concerns you have, you can tell them whats happening to you.

Family
Friends
Cultural / Faith Community
Academic Staff
Medical Services
Counselling Services
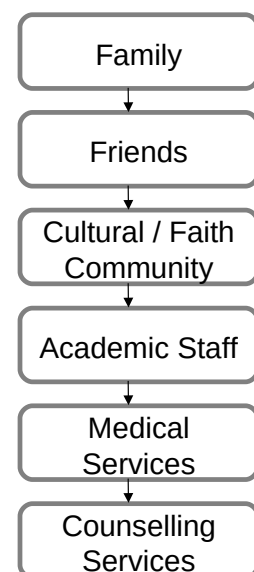
Discussion & Implications

Implications for Counselling Practice

Counsellor knowledge/awareness of other cultures, esp collectivist societies.   Openness to learn from client.

Counsellor familiarity with own culture including prejudices/stereotypes.

Proactive to overcome barriers of resistance e.g. offer psycho-social educational groups.

Personal Choice unfamiliar concept for clients of collectivist backgrounds. Mandated help expected e.g medical/academic referrals.

Stronger collaborative networks, informed by cultural awareness. Reduces
risk of crisis. Promotes a safe nurturing environment.

Implications for Counselling Training

• Counsellor training should include Cultural/Race issues embedded within professional courses such as BACP accredited diploma and degree courses.

• Transcultural competencies including Cultural Empathy essential for therapeutic work with clients of colour and/or from diverse backgrounds.

•Eurocentric training does not adequately prepare counsellors to work with all clients. Much needed action to address "silence" within the profession on the training deficits.

Implications for Institution

• Cultural Awareness Training for university academic staff and all staff coming into contact with International Students.

• Institutional Responsibility to support, endorse or mandate training to maximise the academic and personal experience of international students from Non-European backgrounds.

• Staff and institutional ethos, sympathetic and committed to practicing good cultural engagement, produces a safer, supportive experience for students.

Thank you!

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Living Abroad
Post-Placement Reflection

Sarah Conn

Counsellor

University of Ulster

1

Post-Placement Reflection

10.15am-10.20am	Welcome and Introduction
10.20am-10.30am	Relaxation
10.30am-10.35am	Clearing the Head (individual Writing task 1)
10.35am-10.45am	Reading an example of a cultural experience memory to group
10.45 am– 11.05am	Writing a memory of a significant cultural experience –(Individual Writing task 2)
11.05am-11.25am	Sharing the memories in Small Groups of 4
11.25am-11.45am	Report from each Group for Critical Reflection and Discussion
11.45am-12pm	Evaluation and Close

2

Relaxation

Clearing the Head – Individual Writing Task 1

Often, it needs a clear mind to write. This is the motivation of this little exercise. The idea is that you clear your mind by writing down anything that comes into your mind, just now as you sit. There is no particular format required. Feel free to use the language you are most comfortable with. There is no right or wrong. What you write down is not for sharing.

There are 5 minutes for you to write. Use paper in your pack.

If you don't have any questions please start now.

Memory Work – Individual Writing Task 2

.Write a memory of a significant Cultural Experience in Hungary.

It should represent the meeting of two cultures. It could be a conversation, a teaching experience, accommodation issue where you are coming into contact with people or circumstances different to what you are accustomed.

It can be both positive and negative. It could involve a misunderstanding or clash. It could reveal new insights about how others behave differently according to a different set of customs.
It should be something that has had an impact at a personal or professional level.

5

Sharing the written memories in Small Groups

After the writing exercise, please get into groups of about 4.

If group members feel comfortable they can read their piece aloud and receive comments. Group members are encouraged to respond swiftly and without judgement to each reader.

If you don't feel comfortable to share in full, please select 3 key words that sum up your experience and share with the group.

Think about the differences between writing the memory, reading the memory and talking about the memory.

6

Small Groups report back.
Discussion and Reflection

The large group reconvenes

Sharing cultural experiences is again a cultural experience!

One spokesperson from each group reports back to the large group what the experience of sharing cultural experience in the small group was like.

Pay attention to similarities and differences in your own group in reaction to experiences. You are a culturally diverse group which makes for a richer sharing.

Also think about any differences between what its like to write the memories, read the memories and talk about the memories.

7

Evaluation and Close

8

Writing Task 2. (To be returned at the end of workshop) 15mins

A memory of a significant cultural experience in Hungary.

Choose one memory from your placement that you remember particularly well which represents the meeting of two different cultures. It could be a conversation, a teaching experience, accommodation issue where you are coming into contact with people and/or circumstances that are different to what you are used to. This could be both positive and negative. It could involve a misunderstanding or clash. It could be a situation that reveals new insights about how people behave, act differently according to a different set of customs.

It must be an experience that holds particular meaning for you and has had some kind of emotional influence or impact on you as a person or as a professional.

Please note that you should choose something that is not too sensitive to share with other group members.

Please follow the steps below when you write your memory.

1. Write a memory: an episode, event, a moment, a scene, an action. Strive for richness of detail.

   Or

   a) Write in the first person perspective i.e. "I" as yourself.

   b) Write in the third person – he, she or fictional name

2. Write as detailed as possible, trying to note everything that exists in the memory, including trivial details, describe emotions.

3. Limit the length of the written memory to one page of written text at most. It doesn't have to be complete.

4. Avoid analysing or interpreting your experiences. Just describe.

Memory Work for PK Seminar at Metanoia

A Memory from Research Studies

The pressure was on. There was a lot to accomplish in this first week in India. It had seemed like a good idea at the time for Sarah to combine her holiday with a research opportunity. Her partner was contracted to do some teaching at the University of Hyderabad. She was researching the help-seeking behaviours and coping strategies of non-European students. Here was a goldmine of International students from countries such as Yemen and Iraq who did not come as far as her University in Northern Ireland to study and even when they did, they rarely used the support of a counselling service except in situations of crisis. This reticence and avoidance had been the motivation for her study, in an attempt to find out how do non-European students cope; could a university counselling service that relies mostly on Eurocentric therapeutic models of therapy offer them anything? Why do they mostly opt for the medical service of a nurse and are reluctant to accept a referral onto counselling? Could contact through personal interviews reveal some truths about how a counselling service could adapt or develop itself to become a more attractive or accessible option for non-European students?

Gaining contact with these students was remarkably easy but helped in no small measure by the contacts Sarah's partner had made in advance. Together they had enlisted the help of a very friendly Yemeni student who was president of the International students Union. Almost at the end of his own PhD on Comparative literature on Arabic and American texts and having lived a year in America he was delighted to help recruit interviewees for the western woman and to enjoy social time with the couple in the evenings. It was an exceptionally mutually agreeable liaison!

Getting around the University campus, set in a 2000-acre wildlife park was one of the greatest challenges. But not for long as the friendly student whose name was Omar and his friend Tarif offered to take Sarah and her partner anywhere they wished to go, as pillion passengers on their motorbikes. Sarah had travelled this way before when she was a student in Nottingham but that was nearly 20 years ago. However she didn't want to turn down such a generous offer which happened to be also an extremely practical solution for navigating this vast land mass. She felt a bit self-conscious hitching her leg over the seat of the motorbike whilst a group of interested and slightly bemused students watched on. This was no place for vanity. She'd seen how some of the Indian girls perched decoratively and elegantly riding side pillion. Her amazement and incredulity at their effortless composure had reached new levels. She was very conscious of trying to be nonchalant, to appear as if this was an everyday event but couldn't help thinking in Omar's country, women didn't even speak to men outside their family except when accompanied by another male. Most women wore either the hijab or were fully covered by the burka, including their face, only their eyes visible. Touching, hugging, holding someone of the opposite sex outside the family carried prohibitions that were too terrible to contemplate for an Arabic woman. And here Sarah, a white European woman, not subject to these conventions was on the back of Ali's bike holding on to the thin waist of his frail body, for fear of falling off, yet seemingly unperturbed by the gaze of quite a few, not disinterested bystanders!

Sarah had made the compromise that she would travel pillion around the campus but would draw a line at going on the road. Indian traffic terrified her. Everything was madness away from the containment of the campus. There seemed to be no rules of the road. Lorries, autos, bikes, mopeds and animals such as cows and elephants all had their right to vie for position. She was not going to put herself in danger; she didn't want to die in India. So they agreed to ride within the safety of the campus. If the students thought she was a woos, she'd have to live with that! After a few trips she

grew in confidence and even began to enjoy it. What could possibly go wrong on these small roads?

Sarah was due to do some interviews that morning with a few students Ali had recruited. Her partner had gone on ahead on the other motorbike. They were travelling along the dusty road, a few sparse trees either side. Another motorbike was coming in the opposite direction. As is the custom in India where everyone seems so laid back and nothing really seems to matter, several people were travelling pillion on the same bike. The driver was on his mobile phone not looking where he was going, calling back to people behind him and veering into the middle of the road. It looked like they were going to collide unless one made room. Ali swerved to avoid the other bike, mounted the rough ground, heading for a tree but just managed to miss it before the bike lost balance tossing him and Sarah onto the ground.

Sarah's first thought after hitting the ground was that it could have been much worse. She was dizzy and dazed, the fierce heat of the sun and the dryness of the dust in her mouth didn't help and the pain in her leg told her there had been some damage but not so bad that she wasn't able to get up. Her driver Ali was stunned, angry at the other driver who didn't stop and feeling responsible that the western woman that he'd been helping was now bleeding by the side of the road. He repeatedly said he'd never been in a bike accident before, that he was a safe driver. Sarah did her best to re-assure him that she was really ok, putting her arm round him at one point, realizing instantly how inappropriate this probably was. She wanted to comfort him; he wanted to comfort her yet both felt awkward because of the situation. There were cultural conventions that clearly were constraining both of them in their efforts to be humane with one another. She felt as if she was in her own version of " A passage to India". They hadn't even got to the health centre yet. A small crowd had gathered to witness this spectacle.

Fact Sheet

<u>Expressive Writing</u>

"If you keep your emotions bottled up, it's going to make you sick". James Pennebaker, speaking recently on BBC radio 4 "Mind Changers". (April 2013).

Up until the 1970's, there was a general feeling that probably a person's emotions had a bearing on their physical health. But amazingly there was no scientific evidence to make the case before the American Social psychologist Pennebaker carried out his large and small-scale research projects on groups as diverse as those recently made redundant to those suffering from Aids.
Over 3 decades of research, Pennebaker, a highly eminent, prolific social psychologist, has demonstrated the benefits expressive writing for health, cognitive ability and working memory. For student researched groups this has also included increased grade performance at exams!

His reach extends across many disciplines including clinical psychology, health psychology, linguistics and computer science.

First published research in 1980's in journal "Abnormal Psychology". The first group researched were bulimic sufferers. Later research participants included asthma sufferers, patients undergoing cancer treatment, even patients with Aids. Compared to the control groups who wrote about superficial memories, the expressive writing groups showed significant improvement in health symptoms like immune function, blood pressure. With the participants' permission, visits to health clinics were monitored in successive months.

<u>How do the experts think writing helps?</u>

The act of committing words to paper has the effect of labelling feelings, it identifies what happens in an experience and encourages the writer to put it into a coherent story. When a person is constructing a story around a complex event or memory, the activity requires them to simplify it so that they can "walk through" the story more easily. The real action that potentially creates change is translating the experience into words as the writer attempts to make meaning and sense out of their experience.

<u>Pennebakers' Advice!</u>

1. Who should write? If you are thinking too much about something, obsessing, constantly pre-occupied with something…then yes, you should write it.
2. Write for yourself (not others).
3. Write for a minimum of 15mins a day for 3 or 4 days at a time.
4. Plan to destroy what you have written.

Expressive Writing Workshop

Sarah Conn

Counsellor

University of Ulster

Expressive Writing

6.30 – 6.40 pm   Welcome and Introduction

6.40 – 6.50 pm   Relaxation

6.50 – 7.00 pm   Individual Writing (Clearing the Head)

7.00 – 7.10 pm   Individual Writing-Task I (A Memorable Experience)

7.10 – 7.25 pm   Individual Writing-Task II (Letter to yourself in the future)

7.25 – 8.00 pm   Audio-taped Group Discussion on Writing Task II

8.00 pm   Evaluation Sheets & Close

You will be given paper for the writing exercise which will be collected at the end of the session.
All recordings ,written or audio-taped will be anonymised and kept strictly confidential.

Relaxation

3

Individual Writing – Clearing the Head

Often, it needs a clear mind to write. This is the motivation of this exercise. The idea is that you clear your mind by writing down anything that comes into your head, just now as you sit. There is no particular format required. Feel free to use the language you are most comfortable with. There is no right or wrong. What you write down is not for sharing.

By now you should all have pencil and paper available. There are 6 minutes for you to write.

If you don't have any questions please start now.

4

Individual Writing-Task I

I assume that all of you come to Ireland for study. If this is true, then all of you share the experience of studying in a different culture. Your mind may be filled with impressions, memories, thoughts or reflections on this experience in a different culture. Comparing and contrasting experiences made in a different culture with your own culture can be very insightful.

This exercise is about writing about one of these experiences. Again – there is no right or wrong. Pick something that stands out for you as a *memorable experience* in a different culture. Consider the emotions it generated at the time and how you feel about it now.

Please try to capture this experience by writing it down. There are 10 minutes for this individual exercise.

5

Individual Writing–Task II

Imagine the following:

You have just completed your study and graduated.

Now, you are looking back at all the time, work, experiences, fears, struggles etc. that paved the way to this moment. I'd like you to express these thoughts and feelings by writing a letter to yourself , something you probably would never do in the ordinary. This letter is not meant to be sent to anyone. It's a device to help you reflect on your academic and personal journey over the last years. The letter is meant to be from a caring, supportive perspective. It should not be judgmental.

There are 10 minutes for this individual writing exercise. Later, you are encouraged to share this piece in the group.

6

Sharing the Letter in the Group

If you feel comfortable, you can read your letter aloud to each other and receive comments from each other. You are encouraged to respond swiftly and without judgement .

If you don't feel comfortable to share in full, please select 3 key words that sum up your experience and share this within the group.

The group discussion will be audio taped.

There are up to 30 minutes available for this. I will stay in the background but be available if there are any questions.

Evaluation Sheet

Please fill in the evaluation sheets.

Thank you!

9

inside

ENHANCING THE COLERAINE EXPERIENCE (P7)

REFOCUSING OUR ALUMNI RELATIONS (P9)

DOES EVERY CLOUD HAVE AN INTERNET LINING? (P13)

University of ULSTER

BELFAST ◼ COLERAINE ◼ JORDANSTOWN ◼ MAGEE

RAISING THE PROFILE OF CULTURAL AWARENESS

AS PART OF ITS SERVICES TO THE ACADEMIC COMMUNITY, THE COUNSELLING SERVICE WITHIN STUDENT SUPPORT DEVELOPS BESPOKE WORKSHOPS TO ADDRESS SPECIFIC ISSUES.

This joint approach has the benefit of locating training within the academic curriculum and has the added value of reaching students who may be reluctant to use counselling services otherwise.

Specialist interests

The Service has specialist areas of interest. Counsellor Sarah Conn has a research interest in transcultural work and has developed a programme to support and prepare postgraduate students for teaching placement abroad. This programme has formed part of a study on the help-seeking and coping strategies of non-European students who may be reluctant to access traditional counselling services.

The opportunity for this particular collaboration was enabled by the support and interest of Barbara Skinner, Course Director for the Masters in Teaching English to Speakers of other languages (TESOL). For a significant number of TESOL students, English is not their first language. The additional challenge of teaching English to yet another culturally diverse group is an expectation that requires insight, self-awareness and cultural sensitivity. These are areas of expertise familiar to counsellors but not always shared by academics. This disparity makes for ideal collaboration opportunities, where the pairing up of skills and knowledge can provide real benefit.

Many possibilities

There is an intention to extend the collaborative model to other departments where support can be presented within an educational context. Students have indicated that they see this approach as beneficial for life and future employment whilst naturally circumventing barriers of stigma that still remain for some students when thinking about traditional counselling.

INSIDE LINKS: For more information on collaborative working, contact Sarah at s.conn @ulster.ac.uk or supportinfo-c@ ulster.ac.uk.

IMAGE: 01: Sarah Conn helps prepare students for teaching placement

URBAN PLANNING TEAM COMMENDED

The high calibre of the University of Ulster's urban planning students has been recognised by the granting of Partnership Board status by the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI).

Dr Neale Blair, Course Director and Senior Lecturer in Spatial Planning, said the new status affirmed the importance of Ulster graduates to the planning profession in Northern Ireland. He says:

"Our graduates have gone on to successfully find employment in the planning and development sector right across Northern Ireland and further afield, with several returning to Ulster for further research study.

"The RTPI has commended our planning team on the relevance of teaching content to contemporary practice and the high level of support given to students.

"The skills and knowledge taught at Ulster are unique on the island of Ireland as no other planning school offers a specialism in urban development finance and town centre regeneration, which we have been teaching since 2005."

Programme & timetable – Friday 20 May 2016

Invitation to the pre-conference workshop – Thursday evening 19 May 2016

Thursday evening (19 May), between 18.00 and 19.30, there will be a pre-conference workshop entitled *'Client helpfulness interview (CHI) studies: conducting qualitative research that can make an impact'*. All delegates are invited to this workshop which will be facilitated by Professors Mick Cooper and John McLeod, held in the Ashdown Suite

Time	Session	Detail
08.30–09.00	**Registration and refreshments in the Arundel Foyer**	
09.00–09.15	Introductions by Fiona Ballantine-Dykes, Deputy Chair of BACP, Conference opening and welcome with Dr Andrew Reeves, Chair of BACP and Susan Hajkowski, President of SPR (UK Chapter) in the Arundel Suite	
09.15–10.00	Keynote presentation by Professor Mick Cooper, University of Roehampton entitled 'From local evaluation to national impact: developing a programme of research on school-based counselling'.	
10.00–10.15	PCCS Prize presented by Catherine Jackson, Commissioning Editor, PCCS Books and the CPCAB Awards with Anthony Crouch, Chief Executive of CPCAB	
10.15–10.40	Poster presentations introduced by Dr Clare Symons, Editor of CPR (Counselling & Psychotherapy Research Journal). Please see back of programme for poster details.	
10.40–11.00	**Refreshments, poster and exhibition viewing**	
11.05–11.35	Paper sessions (30 minutes)	
11.05–12.05	Workshops (60 minutes)	
11.05–12.35	Symposium A (90 minutes)	
11.40–12.10	Paper sessions (30 minutes)	
12.15–12.45	Paper sessions (30 minutes)	
12.45–13.45	**Lunch in the restaurant**	
13.50–14.20	Paper sessions (30 minutes)	
13.50–14.50	Workshop (60 minutes)	
13.50–15.20	Symposium B (90 minutes)	
14.25–14.55	Paper sessions (30 minutes)	
15.00–15.30	Paper sessions (30 minutes)	
15.30–15.50	**Refreshments, poster and exhibition viewing**	
15.55–16.25	Paper sessions (30 minutes)	
15.55–16.55	Workshop (60 minutes)	
16.30–17.00	Paper sessions (30 minutes)	
17.00–18.00	Conference delegate discussion around 'How we manage international research in the face of political challenge' in the Arundel Suite – all delegates welcome.	
19.00–19.45	The Chair of BACP, Dr Andrew Reeves, and BACP Chief Executive, Dr Hadyn Williams, invite you to pre-dinner drinks, presentations and 'Meet the Editor of CPR', Dr Clare Symons	
19.45–23.30	Dinner and entertainment with The Bossard Quartet in the Arundel Suite	

22nd Annual BACP Research Conference

'Research matters: evidence for an evolving profession'

20 & 21 May 2016 – Holiday Inn Brighton Seafront

Poster presentations Friday 20 May 2016

F1. Louise Boardman
Counselling for patients and families after intensive care: a feasibility study.

F2. Pamela Campbell
University students' preferences for location, format, and gender of counsellor.

F3. Tracey Clare
The impact of personal development in processing perceived parental rejection in childhood.

F4. Anna Constantine
An exploration of the experiences of working with issues of sex and sexuality within training and practice.

F5. Dominic Cookson
Counsellors' experience of the helpfulness for clients, of the borderline personality disorder diagnosis, and if there are any implications for practice.

F6. Elizabeth Crunk, Edward H Robinson, Sandra L Robinson, Naomi J Wheeler, Hannah E Acquaye
Complicated grief prevention and treatment: a best evidence synthesis.

F7. Mehboob Dada
A minority within a minority: a process of self-reflection.

F8. Kelly Dickson
Clients' experience of ending psychotherapy prematurely.

F9. Stephen Ferris
A lonely separation in childhood and the pain of loneliness.

F10. Josie Flight
Meditation, mindfulness and working memory: the effects of general meditation practice and a comparison of meditation techniques.

22nd Annual BACP Research Conference

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20 & 21 May 2016 – Holiday Inn Brighton Seafront

08.30 - 09.00 Registration and refreshments in the Arundel Foyer. Following registration, make your way to the Arundel Suite where Fiona Ballantine-Dykes, Deputy Chair of BACP will introduce conference guests

09.00 - 09.15 Conference opening and welcome with Dr Andrew Reeves, Chair of BACP and Susan Hajkowski, President of SPR (UK Chapter) in the Arundel Suite

09.15 - 10.00 2. Keynote presentation with Mick Cooper, Professor of Counselling Psychology, University of Roehampton, London UK, entitled 'From local evaluation to national impact: Developing a programme of research on school-based counselling'

10.00 - 10.15 Presentation of the PCCS Prize, by Catherine Jackson Commissioning Editor of PCCS Books and the CPCAB Awards, with Anthony Crouch, Chief Executive CPCAB

10.15 - 10.40 Poster presentations, introduced by Dr Clare Symons, Editor of CPR - please see overleaf for poster details

10.40 - 11.00 Refreshments, poster and exhibition viewing

Arundel Suite	Ashdown 1	Ashdown 2	Lancing 1	Glyndebourne 1	Glyndebourne 2
	Chair: Catherine Jackson	Chair: Catherine Jackson	Chair: Stephen Buller	Chair: Helen Coles	Chair: Julie Waumsley
11.05 - 12.05 Workshop 60 minutes 'The space between': an exploration of the complex relational dynamics existing between researcher, academic supervisor and participant within the context of a qualitative PhD study. **3. Rita Mintz, Jeanne Broadbent**	**11.05 - 11.35 Paper 30 minutes** Tutor experience of making difficult decisions about counselling trainees' fitness-to-practice in the UK. **20. Fiona Ballantine-Dykes** *Tutor experience, training*	**11.05 - 12.35 Symposium A 90 minutes** Overview: Would you trust individualized outcome measures? Evidence on the psychometric properties and clinical utility of the PQ and PSYCHLOPS. **9. Célia M D Sales** Paper 1: The Personal Questionnaire: an international study of its psychometric properties. **10. Robert Elliott**	**11.05 - 11.35 Paper 30 minutes** An initial evaluation of the counseling center assessment of psychological symptoms (CCAPS): comparisons with CORE. **36. Emma Broglia** *University counselling, outcome measures*	**11.05 - 12.05 Workshop 60 minutes** Action research - encouraging the counsellor in education to take reflection into research. **43. Leigh Gardner**	**11.05 - 11.35 Paper 30 minutes** Developing emotion-focused therapy for generalised anxiety disorder. **28. Ladislav Timulak** *Process issues, anxiety*
	11.40 - 12.10 Paper 30 minutes A co-operative inquiry: circumnavigating complex undercurrents within the training 'alliance'. **21. Liddy Carver** *Training issues*	Paper 2: The clinical utility of the PQ from the psychotherapist perspective. **11. Célia M D Sales** Paper 3: The psychometric properties of PSYCHLOPS. **12. Célia M D Sales**	**11.40 - 12.10 Paper 30 minutes** The development of a measure of expectations of therapy for depression. **37. Phillippa Harrison** *Process issues, new assessment measure*		**11.40 - 12.10 Paper 30 minutes** UK secondary school therapists' on-line communication with their clients and potential development in this area. **29 Jeanette Hennigan** *Online, children, young people*
Chair: Susan Dale	Chair: Catherine Jackson	Chair: Catherine Jackson	Chair: Susan Hajkowski	Professional development	Chair: Julie Waumsley
12.15 - 12.45 MI Paper 30 minutes Multicultural competence in cross - national research. **4. Circcie West-Olatunji** *Cultural competency*	**12.15 - 12.45 Paper 30 minutes** Navigating new relationships during recovery from intimate partner violence (IPV): a phenomenological investigation of female survivors' experiences. **22. Elizabeth Crunk, Naomi Wheeler, Edward Robinson** *Client groups, domestic violence*	Paper 4: Is it worth listening to the patient? What we gain with the personalized assessment of talking therapy. **13. Inês Neves** *Individualised outcome measures*	**12.15 - 12.45 Paper 30 minutes** Acknowledging clinical heterogeneity in outcome research: the value of studying the first-person perspective. **38. Melissa DeSmet** *Practice issues, depression*	**12.15 - 12.45 Paper 30 minutes** 'I was just like wow!': university students' perceptions of how counselling benefitted their academic ability. **44. Anne Bentley** *University counselling*	**12.15 - 12.45 Paper 30 minutes** Exploration of trainees' experiences of the Counselling for Depression model, implications for practice and working in IAPT. **30. Leah Drewitt** *Training, CPd*
Chair: Susan Dale	Chair: Catherine Jackson	Chair: Catherine Jackson	Chair: Julie Waumsley	Chair: Jo-Ann Pereira	Chair: Charlie Jackson
12.45 - 13.45			Chair: Kevin Wright		

12.45 - 13.45 Lunch in the restaurant

Arundel Suite	Ashdown 1	Ashdown 2	Lancing 1	Glyndebourne 1	Glyndebourne 2
13.50 - 14.50 Workshop 60 minutes Using research to inform practice: multiple points of contact. **5. John McLeod**	**13.50 - 14.20 Paper 30 minutes** Therapists' accounts on the role of forgiveness with adult survivors of childhood sexual abuse (CSA). **23. Nicolena Theodorou** *Process issues, sexual abuse*	**13.50 - 15.20 Symposium B 90 minutes** Overview: Effectiveness and process research in short-term psychodynamic psychotherapy (STPP). **14. Stephen Buller** Paper 1: A clinical trial of short-term psychodynamic psychotherapy (STPP) as a frontline treatment for severe and complex disorders. **15. Stephen Buller**	**13.50 - 14.20 Paper 30 minutes** It's like I'm sitting in front of myself an exploration of therapists' experiences of countertransference when working with parallel client issues. **39. Marta Shepherd** *Practice issues*	**13.50 - 14.20 Paper 30 minutes** Engaging socially anxious clients in trauma focused work: a case comparison study of good and poor outcomes in person-centred and emotion-focused therapies. **45. David Murphy** *Process issues, trauma*	**13.50 - 14.20 Paper 30 minutes** The silent goodbye: therapists' responses to client communications about wanting to terminate therapy unilaterally and prematurely. **31. Michelle Wynn** *Practice issues, endings*
15.00 - 15.30 MI Paper 30 minutes Social capital and psychotherapy: a review of data collection methods for investigating social and cultural resources used by clients. **6. Julia McLeod** *Data collection methods*	**14.25 - 14.55 Paper 30 minutes** Same-sex couples seeking therapeutic help. **24. Jan Grove** *Client group, LGBTQ*	Paper 2: A cognitive-behavioural perspective on intensive short-term psychodynamic psychotherapy: a single case illustration. **16. Barnie Proctor**	**14.25 - 14.55 Paper 30 minutes** Investigation of counsellor experiences of moments of disconnection with clients. **40. Bettina Gross** *Practice issues*	**14.25 - 14.55 Paper 30 minutes** The role of trauma and complicated grief in psychological growth. **46. Hannah E Acquaye** *Trauma, refugees*	**14.25 - 14.55 Paper 30 minutes** Quality of life in adolescents with personality disorders. **32. Hans Ole Korsgaard** *Children, young people*
Chair: Sarah Browne	Chair: Alex Vostanis	Chair: You Zhou	Chair: Rahul Jalil	Chair: Catherine Jackson	Chair: Julie Waumsley
Practice issues, professional development					
Chair: Sheila Butler				Chair: Alex Vostanis	Chair: Felicitas Rost
15.00 - 15.30 MI Paper 30 minutes	**15.00 - 15.30 Paper 30 minutes** Counselling for carers: a qualitative study of carers' beliefs and expectations. **25. Sheila Spong** *Client group, carers*	**15.00 - 15.30 Paper 30 minutes** Paper 3: Developing process rating for the evaluation of ego capacity in short-term psychodynamic psychotherapy. **17. Susan Hajkowski** *Process/practice issues*	**15.00 - 15.30 Repeated Paper 30 minutes** An analysis of routine outcome measures collected as part of a practice research network (PRN) for counsellors working with children and young people (CYP). **41. Charlie Jackson** *Practice issues, children, young people*	**15.00 - 15.30 Paper 30 minutes** Life after suicide: practitioners speak about their experiences of working with suicidal clients and the impact it has on them if their client dies. **47. Susan Scupham** *Practice issues, suicide*	**15.00 - 15.30 Paper 30 minutes** Process in psychotherapy for adolescents: a 'motion portrait' of therapy of a young boy with depression. **33. Hanne-Sofie Johnsen Dahl** *Children, young people*
Chair: Sarah Browne			Chair: Rahul Jalil	Chair: Julie Waumsley	Chair: Sheila Butler

15.30 - 15.50 Refreshments, poster and exhibition viewing

Arundel Suite	Ashdown 1	Ashdown 2	Lancing 1	Glyndebourne 1	Glyndebourne 2
Chair: Mark Widdowson	Chair: Mark Widdowson	Chair: Alex Vostanis	Chair: Leah Drewitt	Chair: Helen Coles	Chair: Charlie Jackson
15.55 - 16.25 MI Paper 30 minutes Existentially-focused enquiry: what matters in psychotherapy research? **7. Mo Mandic** *Process issues*	**15.55 - 16.25 Paper 30 minutes** To whom do international students of non-European backgrounds turn when struggling with the challenges of university? **26. Sarah Conn** *University counselling, int'l students*	**15.55 - 16.25 Paper 30 minutes** The development of a practitioner handbook for counselling people with diabetes. **18. Mhairi Thurston** *Practice issues, diabetes*	**15.55 - 16.55 Workshop 60 minutes** Researcher and practitioner collaboration: a successful synthesis of complementary roles. **42. Géraldine Dufour, Julieta Galante**	**15.55 - 16.25 Paper 30 minutes** Meaning-making in bereavement counselling: clients' assimilation of grief experiences. **48. John Wilson** *Bereavement*	**15.55 - 16.25 Paper 30 minutes** A conversation analytic survey of how clients and therapists talk about what might be therapeutically helpful in pluralistic therapy. **34. Sarah Cantwell** *Process issues, pluralistic therapy*
Chair: Charlie Jackson	Chair: Rahul Jalil			Chair: Alex Vostanis	Chair: Julie Waumsley
16.30 - 17.00 Paper 30 minutes Exploring the impact of perceived inappropriate referrals from clinical placement on the trainee counsellor's professional development. **8. Mair Sides** *Training, referrals*	**16.30 - 17.00 Paper 30 minutes** Black African/British parents' perceptions of barriers to seeking counselling for their children in the UK: a qualitative investigation. **27. Lisa Fellin** *Children, young people, BME*	**16.30 - 17.00 Paper 30 minutes** Therapeutic connection: exploring the inner-experience and interaction in the therapeutic relationship for client and therapist. **19. Jamesina Rooney** *Therapeutic process, practice issues*		**16.30 - 17.00 Paper 30 minutes** A phenomenological exploration of the experiences of black women during group process on humanistic psychotherapy training courses. **49. Deanne Gardner** *Training issues, BME*	**16.30 - 17.00 Paper 30 minutes** Intentions to seek counselling among distressed individuals in romantic committed relationships. **35. Hsui-Lan Cheng** *Client group, relationships*
Chair: Vic Heydon-Hatchett	Chair: Rahul Jalil	Chair: Julie Waumsley		Chair: Helen Coles	Chair: Mark Widdowson

17.00 - 18.00 Join us in the Arundel Suite for a conference delegate discussion on 'how we manage international research in the face of political challenge'.

19.00 - 19.45 Drinks reception, presentations and meet the Editor of CPR, Dr Clare Symons.

19.45 - 23.30 Dinner and entertainment with The Bossard Quartet in the Arundel Suite.

Study Announcement and Consent Forms

Consent Form

Name of Researcher   Sarah Conn
University Consellor
University of Ulster
Cromore Road

Title of Project

What are the helping behaviours and coping patterns of non-European international students? What can be learned in order to enhance the the counselling services within a university?

The aim of the study is to investigate the help-seeking behaviours and coping patterns of non-European international students when under stress.

What is required?

International students from Non-European backgrounds are invited to participate in a recorded interview of 45 minutes approximately with the researcher who is a qualified counsellor within the university counselling service.

You will be asked a number of questions about your experience of studying abroad, what kinds of support you have used including the professional help of medical and counselling services (if applicable) and other informal and self-directed help. Questions will be circulated in advance so that the participants can feel prepared.

Participants are free to withdraw at any point of the process, if they so wish, and this will be respected. All information will be treated confidentially. Any material that may be used for publication at a later date will be anonymised, with with any personally identifying aspects removed.

If in the event that anyone is emotionally affected by any of the issues discussed in the interview, they will be offered a de-brief afterwards or a referral for support from the counselling service, as appropriate.

At a later stage of the process you will be sent the transcripts of your interview, and the initial analysis of the themes may be shared with you. You will have the opportunity to comment on the accuracy of the transcripts, the authenticity of the draft and to request amendments, if necessary. Responsibility for the finished analysis rests with the researcher.

The tapes from the recorded interview will be stored safely and securely and only be heard by the researcher and responsible examiners. When the project is completed, the data will be destroyed.

The study is undertaken in partial fulfilment of the Doctorate in Psychotherapy by Professional studies, a joint programme delivered by:

Metanoia Institute	Middlesex University
13 North Common Road	IWBLP
Ealing , London W5 2QB	Trent Park, Bramley Road,
	London N14 4YZ

Your Consent

I confirm that I have read and understood the information above and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, with out giving any reason.

I understand that sections of notes or tape transcripts may be looked at by responsible individuals from Middlesex University/Metanoia Institute. I understand this will be for the purpose of audit and examination only. I give permission for these individuals to access this material, which will be anonymised.

Name of Participant ....

Signature .... Date ....

Research Interview Questions

1. What country are you from, what course are you studying and what level?

2. On arrival at University, did you experience any culture shock and if so is there any significant experience you would wish to share?

3. Are you aware of any professional form of student support on campus- medical and counselling services and if so how did you find out about this?

4. If you had a personal problem that was causing you stress and affecting your ability to study, who would you talk to?

5. How have you coped with the challenges of living and studying here? What has helped?

6. What kinds of issues would prompt you to seek the professional help of a nurse or counsellor?

7. Do you think health problems are just physical, or do you think they are related to emotional issues as well?

8. Are there any issues that would make you reluctant to seek support and what would they be? Are there any examples you would be willing to share?

9. Have there been times when you have delayed in asking for help when you have had problems and just tried to manage yourself? What has that been like?

10. Have there been any crises situations- yours or a crisis of someone you know in the University e.g. emotional breakdown requiring an emergency response? If so how was this handled?

11. Are there any changes that you think could be made to the present system of student support within the University that could provide a better service?

Group Discussion

Group Discussion – Enhanced Cultural Engagement in Action

I am including for analysis a group discussion designed to facilitate an alternative to the individual interview. The inspiration came from a Professional Knowledge seminar given at the Metanoia Institute, entitled 'Reflexive Writing for Academic and Professional Development: The Memory Work Method' led by Mona Livholts, in March 2013.

The discussion involved four interviewees on the Dublin site. It took place in the second half of a workshop I had prepared, originally as a writing group. The interviewees, known to me but not to each other, were asked if they would be willing to take part in a writing group which included exercises of 'memory pieces' in which they would be expected to write a short account of an experience of cross-cultural communication, capturing the remembered feelings at the time, and their reflections on it now. All four agreed to attend and to be recorded

in the discussion part, where they read aloud highlights they wished to share from their written pieces. This in turn generated lively discussion and sharing of their respective experiences, from the time of arrival through to some of the on-going challenges, how they coped with this and their attitudes about seeking help. Their focused and productive exchange of ideas seemed to encapsulate the concept of cultural engagement. Former strangers were engaging with each other and me in a free unstructured conversation, in an effort to understand empathically the struggles of the other and to find common ground that would enable greater understanding and constructive helping.

Elim from Kenya shared his experiences at the time of arrival.

I came in 2007 and at that time the recession in Ireland had just started. I was getting different stories from people I met. There was a lot of negativity going around, like things are going to be very bad for getting jobs. So being a foreigner, the first thing I was asking myself was "Is this really the right decision for me?" I'm new, I've just come and I have to go to school, I have to pay my fees". It was 7000 Euros, if I remember. Sincerely speaking, I would be able to pay my fees the first year, but where would the rest of the fees come from? I was backing my hopes that I could get a job, work and pay my fees. I had some savings, but if I put it all out there today, then the next time, how will I pay? It was a bit scary. Every time you hear so many people have lost their jobs. A lot of desperation. Now being someone who has just come into the country, it's like "Oh my God, if its bad for their own people now, how about me?" (Elim, Kenya)

Other students responded by sharing their experiences, some had details in common and others varied significantly. Isla from Nigeria who had arrived in Ireland about 5 years earlier had a better experience.

I was already here for a while at that time. But I think immigration were actually quite supportive to foreigners then. If there was a situation and you didn't know what next year was going to be like because you had just arrived and you were not sure if you would be able to pay the tuition. I'd say the government were actually quite helpful to a certain extent, in that they gave you time, regardless of your status. It wasn't a case of "You can't pay your tuition next year, you

can't get a job, so off you go". They weren't saying "we'd prefer our citizens to get the jobs before you"; they were very considerate because they gave extra time, maybe six months, a year extra. But I don't know how it was for you in that sense. (Isla, Nigeria)

Another student Sameer from India agrees.

They were very lenient on granting the visas. (Sameer, India)

However he went on to pick up Elim's point about the anxiety of getting a job where he could earn enough money to contribute substantially to the fees. Sameer had managed to maintain some hours in a professional job but had to work at a level lower than his expertise, whilst studying part/time. Many of his friends were not so fortunate.

People who had completed their masters but still they were working in odd jobs in stores, even though they were computer professionals and business analysts. There was this thing haunting me, "why these guys are not trying for something professional? Is it the industry that is not allowing them in or is it the country that is placing restrictions on them?" So this was a worry for me, going into an odd job that is low paid and just sticking there and then the visa. To take account of that, I had to make some compromises, like moving to look for a job so that I can support my living. The visa part was smooth for me but the job was a bit hard at that time. (Sameer, India)

Selma from Uganda identified with the financial anxiety expressed and introduced her perspective on it, which contained her struggle to maintain her pride in self-sufficiency and not to involve parents.

The fact that you are away from home, you've taken on that responsibility. Whatever the case, I was not going to call home and say "Daddy, give me money". That meant once you have packed up your bags and left, if you got in a situation where you're stuck moneywise, for your living or for your studies, you have to find a way. Either that or you pack up your bags and go home. I

*did all the odd jobs that came up, here and there during certain times, to make
ends meet. Yeah, that's not really easy and can be a challenge.* (Selma, Uganda)

Sameer understands how the dynamic changes with family, when one moves
away. He contrasts the amount of support he had back in India as a younger
student, with his situation in Ireland where, like Selma, he seemed to impose a
high self-expectation for coping in the new culture.

*Back home there is your parents supporting you in making the decision (to study
abroad), your brother is there always patting your back, your sister is always
there for some emotional and moral support and suddenly one day your visa
arrives and you are packing your bags to come here. When you arrive, the next
day you are thinking "Oh I'm grown up" and you're a totally responsible per-
son. Now every decision you take is your own; you can take advice but nobody
is physically there to support you. Those are very big challenges, like Selma
mentioned.* (Sameer, India)

The discussion moved on and students started talking about how they felt
changed by the experiences of leaving home to study and live abroad. This
raised issues of identity shifts.

Isla from Nigeria asks the group

*Did anyone actually realise what they were signing up for? Until you actually
arrive and the reality sets in? A couple of years down the line, I thought this
was not going to be a holiday as such, but something you're just going to go
through and then go back to your normal life. The reality is you completely
change, you actually transform yourself to kind of fit in and by the time you go
back, you're a completely different person. You're different to somebody from
your home country altogether because they have different life experiences than
you would, so its not a holiday like you think at the start (laughs).* (Isla, Nigeria)

There was emphatic group agreement about the changes they witnessed in them-
selves which were especially highlighted on returning to their countries of origin.

They eagerly volunteered examples

When I went back home, I think two years after I came here, there was this element of being in a different environment. There are things that you feel are slow and the process is not what you expect. I had to convince myself that these are two different places and completely different situations, which you cannot compare. So I had to put it in my mind that if I want things to happen here like they do in Ireland, I would be asking too much from this society (laughs) (Elim, Kenya)

Sameer followed with comparisons between the Irish and Indian education systems

In India the type of education system is more theoretical than practical. You don't have assignments and projects every couple of weeks. Instead you have a combined project at the end of the year or end of four years. As the days passed and you got more into the course, you realised it's totally different work and you have to develop that very quickly. If you take an Indian project and take an Irish project, from an Indian project you can divide that into twelve Irish projects (everyone laughs). (Sameer, India)

As the workshop had focused on writing in the first part, students referred to the role this had in helping them organise their thoughts for the discussion. Isla describes her process

At the time I was writing, I was thinking how did I get through this, how did I get to this point, what were the key things I did, was it motivation, did I have to be flexible, how did I adapt, did I look to friends, was it me, was it family? Because everyone has their own strategy to get through. (Isla, Nigeria)

The students expressed their enjoyment of the talking part of the workshop and although forty minutes were allowed, they felt this was not enough and the whole workshop should have been a discussion (see also Lago, 2004). The role of writing to facilitate such a productive cultural engagement will be examined

in more depth in a later chapter entitled 'Products' .

The students summed up this experience using their own keen observations.

All these feelings we are talking about, they are not really so different from each other's experience. It's much closer than I expected. Whatever are the experiences I've heard from my colleagues here, its closer than I could possibly imagine. (Elim, Kenya)

Sameer identifies with the sentiment.

I feel the common part of our discussion was what are the obstacles, what are the difficulties you came across and the decisions you took at the time. The emotional feelings played a great role in that one. (Sameer India)

It was moving and uplifting to observe the way in which students picked up each other's points, openly sharing personal experiences and remarking on their commonality and sometimes difference. I felt privileged to have facilitated such a discussion, for which it has only been possible to highlight some chosen aspects that illustrate cultural engagement in action. Not surprisingly, students differed in the degree they emphasised themes. It is of particular note that in the group setting, students still covered the same issues, identified in the individual interviews as superordinate themes: *Impact of Transition, Living with Challenge-Coping, Living with Challenge-Seeking help* and *Shifting Identities.* Although this group of students did not directly raise issues addressing the need for enhanced cultural engagement, it was a powerful statement and testimony to the experience of cultural engagement that they were unselfconsciously doing just this. There was no formal directed input, other than creating an opportunity to meet. By example, they showed through their empathy, respect and curiosity about one another, what it means to engage culturally.

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