Article

Cultural Identity in Bicultural Young Adults in Ireland: A Social Representation Theory Approach

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Abstract: This research investigates the nature by which first- and second-generation Irish young adults of (1) African descent, (2) Asian descent, and (3) Eastern European descent explore their cultural identity(ies) through communicating and interpreting social representations relating to their ethnic and national cultures. Using Social Representation Theory (SRT) and, more widely, Proculturation Theory as the theoretical underpinning, we examine how grown children of migrants construct their cultural identity(ies) by exploring external social representations. We conducted three separate in-depth focus groups for each continental group in virtual rooms on Zoom, lasting between 60 and 90 mins. A thematic analysis was pursued to understand how the participants discussed the representation of their cultural groups both in social and media-driven situations. The results indicated the overarching themes of Anchoring Irishness and Latent Media Representation, whereby participants communicated and dialogically explored their subjective interpretations of the social representations of their cultural groups which, in turn, may have informed their cultural identity(ies). Highlighting the dynamic nature of the cultural reality of Ireland and how it impacts generations after the initial migration period, this research highlights and exemplifies the importance of external social representations that serve to construct the multiple cultural identities of first- and second-generation migrants.

Keywords: social representation; cultural identity; proculturation; migration

1. Introduction

The multicultural reality of the Republic of Ireland is no new subject. Due to the rapid economic, social and political shift in Ireland between the years of 1997 and 2002, Ireland saw a particular change in the cultural and ethnic composition of the country (Garson and Loizillon 2003). Now, migrant communities represent a significant population of the Irish nation, in which it is estimated that one in ten people come from a migrant background (Irish Census Office 2016). As a result, there are many individuals from migrant backgrounds that have grown into culturally and ethnically rich spaces; as is the case for first- and second-generation migrants in Ireland who form the basis of the current research (Benet-Martínez and Haritatos 2005; Neto 1995; Pyke and Dang 2003; Alba 2005). Census data in 2016 reveals that, since 2011, the fastest-growing ethnic category in Ireland is the "other" category, which indicates the growing population of culturally diverse and ethnically mixed people in Ireland. Many children of migrants employ multiple cultural identities that are modelled by different acculturative pathways (Berry 2005; Berry 2003; Berry et al. 2006). In this research, migrants are defined as any persons who are "moving or have moved across international borders . . . . regardless of the person's legal status; the voluntary or involuntary nature of movement; the causes for movement; or the length of the stay." (United Nations 2020). Likewise, in this research, first-generation migrants

are those who moved to a new country during late childhood and adolescence, while second-generation migrants are referred to as those born into a nation-state by foreign parents or those brought into said state in early childhood, i.e., before the age of 8 (Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Portes and Rumbaut 2005, p. 958).

Current definitions of cultural identity (in the context of migrants) describe it as multi-dimensional, dynamic, and multifaceted (Berry et al. 2006). The social identity approach posits that cultural identity is rooted in group membership and/or self-identification with an ethnic or cultural group who share similar behavioural (e.g., language, traditions, customs), cognitive-developmental (e.g., identity exploration), and affective (e.g., attitudes, beliefs, sense of belonging) characteristics (Jackson 1999; Phinney 1991; Phinney and Ong 2007; Tajfel 1978, 1981; Tajfel and Turner 1986). Thus, cultural identity is "an individual's self-concept which derives from [his/her] knowledge of [his/her] membership of a social group (or groups) (in this case cultural) together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership" (Tajfel 1981, p. 255). Social constructionists add that the cultural identity of migrants is negotiated, (re)constructed and delineated as individuals migrate across varying cultural contexts (Jackson 1999; Jung and Lee 2010; Pyke and Dang 2003). As many first- and second-generation migrants develop their cultural identity(ies) in culturally and ethnically rich spaces, different contextual realities and 'boundaries of social difference' shape, shift and add to their cultural identity(ies) (Berry 2005; Berry et al. 2006; Pyke and Dang 2003). As a result, group membership in both their heritage culture and the mainstream/national culture is central to how many first- and second-generation migrants define themselves (Giguere et al. 2010; Nagel 1994; Pyke and Dang 2003). Thus, they may adopt a dual cultural identity or bicultural identity (Benet-Martínez and Haritatos 2005).

Generally understood through the process of acculturation (Berry 1997; Grant 2007; Kunst and Sam 2014), and in recent years more intrinsically understood by the process of proculturation (Gamsakhurdia 2018, 2019b), cultural identities are constructed and re-enforced by imposed norms set out by a cultural group, which function as a means for defining and negotiating an individual's actions (cognitive, behavioural or emotional) and the appropriateness of their behaviour (Nagel 1994, pp. 154–55; Giguere et al. 2010). Though cultural identity literature has undoubtedly aided in the understanding of the identity formation of migrant communities, little research has focused on how symbolic representations of a given culture and its enforcement through boundaries of difference impact the cultural identity(ies) of migrant communities, particularly first- and second-generation migrants. Likewise, while much research has been conducted in culturally diverse nations such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France, little research has been conducted in the Republic of Ireland, despite its large migrant population. With these concerns in mind, we take the above as a starting point in this investigation, and aim to explore the nature by which first- and second-generation Irish young adults explore their cultural identity(ies) through communicating and interpreting social representations relating to their ethnic and national cultures.

We situate the current study within the theoretical underpinnings set out by Social Representation Theory (SRT) and, more generally, Proculturation Theory. These theories provide us with an opportunity to bridge social reality with the psychological (subjective) representation of this reality, allowing us to investigate the extent to which peoples' processes of group identity are related, conditioned, and developed by their societal understanding (i.e., representation) of particular groups. In the following sections, we outline how the terms SRT and Proculturation are to be understood in the context of this research.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Social Representation Theory (SRT)

To understand the world and gauge the unfamiliar, humans form shared understandings of phenomena that serve to function as common sense "truths" (Moscovici 1981; Van Dijk 1998; Wagner et al. 1999). These shared understandings are known as social representations. Social representations are socio-cognitive systems of beliefs, ideas, practices,

and values that serve to establish a framework in which individuals orient both themselves and the world around them (Moscovici 1981; Wagner et al. 1999). Dynamic in nature, they also function as levers for communication and dialog, which are fundamental for social exchange (Van Dijk 1998). Social Representation Theory (SRT), brought forward by Serge Moscovici, is one of the leading theories allowing us to understand social representations and examine how new phenomena are constructed into everyday thinking.

Two psychological processes are fundamental to the formation of social representation. The first process, called "anchoring", is the process in which the unfamiliar new phenomenon is understood by referencing it to a familiar phenomenon. Also in this process, Wagner and Hayes (2005) indicate that individuals go through what is known as "symbolic collective coping" to make sense of new phenomena that "threaten" the social order. This is particularly relevant in representations formed by the mass media (Philipp et al. 2019; Wagner and Hayes 2005; Wagner and Kronberger 2001; Wagner et al. 2002). The second process, "objectification", is the process in which individuals transform new phenomena into a reality that is palpable, intelligible and communicable via the social creation of beliefs, symbols, norms and values, that form a cognitive framework that is common to a community or population (Billig 1988; Moscovici 1981; Rochira et al. 2015). In communication, imagery, metaphors and symbolism are essential in constructing these phenomena (Moscovici 1981). Consequently, through the social interactions of both individuals, communities, and wider dominant structures, e.g., the media, social representations are essentially socially constructed.

Relevant to the current study, understanding how people use and interpret social representations around migrants in Ireland is a window into the social positioning and mental mapping around migration, inclusion, and diversity in Irish society. It allows us to have a bottom-up understanding of how people make sense of how migrants are seen, which "anchoring" processes are used, and how these new understandings are "objectified" to be communicated and commonly accepted in everyday life in Ireland.

2.2. From Acculturation to Proculturation

For many first- and second-generation migrants, cultural identity plays a huge role in who they are as individuals and how they see the world around them. Often guided by the symbolic positioning of their respective heritage culture and the mainstream culture, many first- and second-generation migrants construct their cultural identity through examining and relating their membership in both their heritage cultural group (migrants' group based on their country of origin) and mainstream/national cultural group (the group based on the "host" country's society). The theoretical basis that has historically described varying levels of engagement with two cultures can be seen through the framework of "acculturation" (Berry 2005; Berry 1997, 2003; Giguere et al. 2010). Acculturation is described as an individual's change in attitudes, customs, behaviours and values due to the prolonged contact of two or more cultures (Berry 1997, 2003). Berry (1997) notes that acculturating groups employ the distinct strategies of assimilation, the desire for contact with the national culture and a rejection of their ethnic culture; integration, high desire for contact with one's national culture while keeping their ethnic culture alive; separation, little desire for contact with the national culture and a wish to maintain their ethnic culture; and marginalisation, when one denounces both their ethnic and national culture. Berry posits that these strategies are mainly employed by migrants when they encounter a new culture; they might adopt/reject the national culture, retain/discard their ethnic culture, or balance the two cultures.

While Berry's theory of acculturation offers a clear initial framework for understanding the psychological processes that occur when one moves into another culture, this theory is a static and one-dimensional understanding of an evolving, subjective and personal human experience that is not solely tied to new migrants (Gamsakhurdia 2019a, 2019b; Bhatia 2007, 2013; Bhatia and Ram 2009). Researchers such as Sunil Bhatia have long critiqued the unilateral nature of acculturation, and argue that an understanding of diasporic cultures and

postcolonial identities underlie the acquisition of a new culture (Bhatia 2007, 2013; Bhatia and Ram 2009). Through his analysis of acculturation processes in the Indian diaspora of the US (Bhatia 2007), Bhatia identified the dialogical nature of acculturation in relation to the introspective negotiation of different (cultural) identities and the self. As opposed to Berry's fixed acculturative models, Bhatia (2007) argues that one can simultaneously negotiate assimilation, integration, separation, and marginalisation given specific cultural and political conditions through introspective dialogue. Furthermore, Gamsakhurdia (2018) goes onto argue that while culture is constructed and co-developed by the overlapping experiences, intersections and interactions of people, previous acculturation theories do not account for how culture continuously develops through the dialogical nature of human interaction and how it integrates with social representation, i.e., how systems of beliefs are created through shared knowledge and meaning making. Hence, Gamsakhurdi proposed the broader, more dynamic theory of *Proculturation*, which posits that individual development should be understood through evolving encounters with new cultural phenomena (e.g., social representations) and the continuous reconstruction of the self. The never-ending process of proculturation positions the individual as part of an interconnected dialogical network through which the individual forms their self-identity through the negotiation/consideration of new external phenomena, e.g., social representations in artefacts, systems and media, and also internal personal development. Proculturation is upheld through the subjective interpretive experiences and meaning making of the individual, and how they understand new cultures, and is not solely from the migrant perspective, but can be seen from different human perspectives depending on the context (Gamsakhurdia 2018).

Considering the nature by which social representations inform the development of external phenomena and the self through communication and dialog (Gamsakhurdia 2018, 2019a) this research offers a deeper look into how social representation aids in the construction of cultural identity in first- and second-generation migrants in Ireland through subjective dialogical exchange. Previous research has highlighted the reciprocal relationship between social representations and social identity and, specifically, the role that social representations have in the construction and co-creation of a given social identity (Andreouli and Chryssochoou 2015; Breakwell 1993; Duveen 2001; Howarth 2002; Moscovici 1976; Rotaru 2016; Wagner et al. 1999; Zouhri and Rateau 2015). Moreover, Gamsakhurdia (2018) notes that, while humans generally attain ethno-cultural knowledge by age 13–14 (Piaget 1951), this can be the beginning of the lifelong precultural learning that is necessary to make sense of an ever-evolving and changing world. Moscovici (1976) notes that, by nature, social representations are "image reservoirs" from which individuals construct their social identities. These constructions are guided by inter/intra-group dynamics that serve to form a social identity and, in turn, create new social representations in their social reality (Breakwell 1993; Duveen 2001; Zouhri and Rateau 2015). However, rather than focusing on fixed causal relationships, it is more relevant to understand the dynamic and dialogical interactions between people who construct their cultural identities considering the perceived social representations of their cultural groups in a given society. Thus, this study takes the context of Ireland and aims to expose these social representations of ethnic groups from the perspective of multiple cultural groups and an intergenerational lens.

Hence, the research question for this study is as follows:

"How do first- and second-generations Irish young adults from migrant backgrounds explore their cultural identity(ies) through social representations relating to their ethnic and national cultures."

3. Methods

The present study draws its results from three qualitative focus group (FG) discussions involving 11 participants, conducted in January 2021. Given the phenomenon being studied in this research, and it being a part of a wider research project on the representation of culturally diverse communities in Ireland, focus groups were chosen as an appropriate research method. Focus groups allow the researcher to obtain a large amount of data on a

specific topic in a relatively short time (Kitzinger 1994). Crucially for our research question, where interactions and shared understanding were investigated, focus groups allowed data that captured the participants' expressions and negotiations of their interpretations of the phenomenon, which is important in social representation research (Wibeck 2012; Wagner et al. 1999).

3.1. Participants and Recruitment

Eleven participants (four men, six women, one non-binary) took part in this study. Participants were aged from 21 to 35, with the mean age being 25.81 (SD = 4.29). Four participants were of African heritage, five participants were of Asian heritage and two participants were of Eastern European heritage. Four participants were born in Ireland, one participant was adopted as a baby, five participants migrated as children, and one participant migrated in their adolescence with their families.

To achieve a broad depth in the data, the recruitment process for this research was specific to (1) first- and second-generation migrants in Ireland, (2) those aged 18–35. With this eligibility criteria, participants were then selected irrespective of gender, race, and other factors such as educational background and employment. Participants were recruited primarily using a snowball effect where recruitment posters were disseminated online through both university and the researcher's online channels. Recruitment was from October 2020 to January 2021. To obtain a more open dialogue and draw out possible commonalities within the focus groups, participants were divided into different focus groups pertaining to their continental heritage. These were: FG1—African Heritage; FG2—Asian Heritage; FG3—Eastern European Heritage. All focus groups took place in January 2021 (FG1—26 January 2021; FG2—25 January 2021; FG3—29 January 2021). To ensure confidentiality, all participants will be referred to as Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, etc. Table 1 gives the description of each participant and their focus group.

Table 1. Participant descriptive.

Participant	Group No.	Gender	Age	Ethnic Background	Born/Migrated/Adopted
1	FG1	Man	26	West Africa	Migrated (age 7)
2	FG1	Woman	26	West Africa	Migrated (age 7)
3	FG1	Woman	24	West Africa	Migrated (age 2)
4	FG1	Woman	22	West Africa	Born
5	FG2	Woman	22	East Asia	Adopted (10 months)
6	FG2	Woman	24	South-East Asia/Irish	Born
7	FG2	Man	35	South-East Asia/Irish	Born
8	FG2	Man	25	South-East Asia/Irish	Born
9	FG2	Man	27	South Asian	Migrated (age 7)
10	FG3	Woman	32	Eastern Europe	Migrated (age 16)
11	FG3	Non-Binary	21	Eastern Europe	Migrated (age 6)

3.2. Reflexivity

The coordinator of the focus groups and first author of this study (Mamobo Ogoro) is a racialised black, 25-year-old, second-generation Nigerian–Irish woman, who has been researching in the area of social psychology (in particular, bicultural identity, prejudice, and experiences of racism) for approximately 5 years. Ogoro is a Psychology and Applied Linguistics PhD candidate at the University of Limerick, Ireland. Her research is conducted at the university with participants recruited from her local area and online. Ogoro is the co-chair for the Ethnic Diversity Forum at the university. She is also the Founder and

CEO of Gorm Media, an impact-focused digital media company with a mission to unify communities across social, political, and cultural divides. Ogoro has volunteered in migrant and refugee integration organisations for over 8 years and currently works closely with undergraduate students in refugee-like situations as a part of her PhD. She is a native English speaker and can communicate in Spanish. Her research is informed by a passion and commitment to recognising cultural diversity, intercultural dialogue, representation in the media, and the subjective expertise that many people of culturally diverse backgrounds come with. She studies in the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences at the University of Limerick under the Sanctuary PhD Fellowship.

3.3. Procedure

Before conducting the focus groups, participants were given online information sheets disclosing the purpose of the research and their informed consent was obtained. This information sheet was devised using Google Forms. Here, participants also detailed their demographic information such as age, gender, ethnic background, racial identity, and nationality. Focus groups were then held online via Zoom (Zoom Video Communications Inc. 2016). Online focus groups were utilised as they allowed the research to reach a wider prospect of participants on the island of Ireland. Each focus group met once, and the discussions lasted 40–90 min.

During each focus group session, a semi-structured interview guideline was used by the researcher. Firstly, the researcher re-iterated the aim of the study and assured the participants of their anonymity in the research and their right to withdraw at any moment of the research without any justification. A short ice-breaker piece was performed where every participant introduced themselves and their desired outcome in their participation in this study. Then, questions on the interview guide were asked by the researcher. Follow-up questions were asked according to the reflections of the participants and the direction of the conversation. Focus groups were conducted in English and the same semi-structured interview guide was used for each focus group to capture both the commonalities and differences between groups. After each focus group, participants were presented with a debriefing sheet and further information on the project.

The focus group data were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analysed using the qualitative data analysis software NVIVO (McNiff 2016). NVIVO was chosen as a means for data analysis because it allows the qualitative researchers to organise and systematically code non-numerical data, to which themes and patterns emerge from the data (McNiff 2016). A deductive thematic analysis approach was adopted for this research. A deductive thematic analysis involves a theory-driven process of analysing, coding and reflecting on data (Braun and Clarke 2006). The data analysis was completed as such, and the transcribed focus group interviews were imported to the NVIVO software. General observations and initial notes were made using annotations. With such observations in mind, codes were then extracted from the data using the coding device, which brought about more questions, further reflection, and more coding of the data (iterative process). From this, patterns and themes emerged from the data, and memos were made to record such insights. These themes were then made visual using a word map. Finally, records and diagrams were then re-produced in this written research.

4. Results

By examining the subjective experiences of the participants in this research, we explored how first- and second-generation Irish young adults from migrant backgrounds explore their cultural identity(ies) through social representations relating to their ethnic and national cultures. We compared the similarities and differences between continental heritage groups (FG1—African Heritage; FG2—Asian Heritage; FG3—Eastern European Heritage) and, using a deductive thematic analysis, several findings were uncovered. Upon reviewing and coding the data, the anchoring, objectification, and identity construction properties of social representation, and the introspective dialogical exchange necessary for

Proculturation to occur were apparent in the themes we call (1) Anchoring Irishness, and (2) Latent Media Representations.

4.1. Anchoring Irishness

In the present study, we examined the identity of "Irishness" and the social representations linked to its meaning as described by our participants. Although we display several meanings of "Irishness" in explaining how the term was used by participants, it is important to mention again that social representations are fluid and socially constructed by nature; hence, these meanings are ideologically driven rather than real objects. Despite the dynamic and subjective nature of identity and social representation, the below details specify the identifiers of "Irishness" that were displayed by participants. In every focus group, the moderator's first question was: "How did you manage your cultural spaces growing up in Ireland?" This question aimed to gain insight into participants' experiences growing up in culturally diverse heritages and how they conceptualised "Irishness". Upon discussion, "Anchoring Irishness" displayed itself to be a prominent theme for the representation of first- and second-generation migrants in Ireland. In this research, Anchoring Irishness is defined as how participants anchored their perceptions of their cultural realities around the familiar prototypical representation of Irishness/being Irish. Here, the prototypical representation of "Irishness" can be construed with such examples as, speaking English (without a foreign accent), being racialised as "white", having a traditional Irish or Anglo-Saxon name, and adopting traditional cultural signifiers of "Irishness", e.g., being catholic.

In all groups, participants anchored their image of "Irishness" in childhood by citing examples that served to represent an assimilative pathway. Similar examples were present in each group, the most notable examples included not speaking/losing one's ethnic language to speak English, changing one's name/accent, and asserting one's Irishness before their ethnic culture in social situations. When asked where these behaviours stemmed from, participants cited that they felt the need as children/adolescents to "fit in" to be truly considered as "Irish", with some actions being reinforced by parents. Some participants said:

FG1-P4: "I guess in school and growing up I would not talk about race, as in being Nigerian. Like I just wanted to be known as "I'm (Participant 4) and I'm Irish". I never talked about being Nigerian, and that whole aspect of me was something I was never really open about until maybe like the end of secondary school/college or whatever."

FG2-P6: "She (participant's mother) didn't teach me Malaysian. But my cousin who is also a quarter Malaysian and $\frac{3}{4}$ Irish was taught Malaysian growing up. But I think she did stuff like that like a reaction to her being 'mothered' in Ireland. She gave me a very Irish name because she didn't want me to ... she wanted people to be like "oh no she is, in fact, Irish", if that makes sense even though lots of people don't think I look very Irish."

FG2-P7: "We didn't you know how to speak Filipino or her language around the house, you know. We were raised in English .... She did that on purpose because she wanted to make sure that we fit in as much as possible."

Likewise, inclinations of shame or fear of being seen as an "other" were evident in the focus groups as participants detailed a reluctance to be open with their ethnic culture and assimilate to prototypical representations of "Irishness".

FG3-P11: "I used to be quite afraid of being visibly Polish. Like as a kid, I was never told to introduce myself as my Polish name I was immediately told to introduce myself as (English sounding name). It's something that I like always found quite confusing, I couldn't put it into words until I was older. For instance, my parents and I would go grocery shopping and if they spoke to each other or me in Polish they would immediately speak quieter or whisper, so no one else could hear that we're not Irish.

The above examples illustrate how, using assimilative measures, participants developed their Irish identities by anchoring their diverse cultural backgrounds in line with prototypical representations of what it means to be "Irish". However, it is noteworthy that participants' use of prototypical examples was not fixed between and within each

focus group. Differences were evident between groups based on factors such as perceived racialised identity and being a visible minority, and within groups based on how participants negotiated their identity with each other. As described by FG2-P6, while there was a desire to assimilate (by her mother) to prototypical representations of Irishness through use of a common Irish name, the nature of the participant's visible difference obstructed their assimilation. This suggests that prototypical constructions/images of "Irishness" serve to represent specific phenotypical characteristics. Similarly, for participants in focus group one (African descent) who were all racialised as "black", they suggested that physical qualities such as skin colour hindered them from "fitting in". Conversely, while participants in focus group three (Eastern European descent) also highlighted measures to assimilate into the prototypical construction of Irishness (e.g., changing name), one keynote was that these participants (who were racialised as "white") did not give the inclination that "visible difference" was a factor that obstructs assimilation. This inadvertently suggests that anchoring Irishness in its prototypical representations is conducive to being racialised as "white". Furthermore, one similarity that participants had across each focus group was the extent to which parents had a role in "Anchoring Irishness". While analysing the data, across the theme of "Anchoring Irishness" the sub-theme of "Parental Influence" arose. It is widely known that parents play a huge role in the formative years of their children, and migrant parents play a huge role in constructing the cultural identities of their children, particularly their ethnic culture (Berry et al. 2006). However, in this study, as highlighted in the above quotes, it appeared that some participants' parents sought to downplay their ethnic identities in public spaces to assimilate to Irish culture (see above quotes). This, in turn, may have led participants to foster prototypical representations for what it means to be "Irish" in their childhood.

Though prototypical social representations of "Irishness" indicated a desire to assimilate in participants (by anchoring representations of their self-concept in line with familiar representations of "Irishness"), the wider context of Proculturation permits the exploration and negotiation of the self (in the case of this study, one's cultural identity). As participants further discussed their cultural identities, particularly as they developed in adolescence, evidence from each focus group indicated that participants tended to construct a blended identity with the sub-theme we call, "Bicultural Identity". In this study, Bicultural Identity was constructed using the concept of cultural integration (Berry 1997), which materialised through the language they used to position themselves as young adults in Ireland.

Bicultural identity is defined as the level of comfort and proficiency one has with both their heritage and national culture (Benet-Martínez and Haritatos 2005; Meca et al. 2019). Previous understandings of bicultural identity were rooted in acculturation research, leaving its conceptualisation as fixed and unidimensional (Meca et al. 2019). However, as research has developed to incorporate how migrants negotiate and explore their cultural identities, a more nuanced analysis of the construction of cultural identity has been offered, particularly in first- and second-generation migrants (Meca et al. 2019; West et al. 2017). As a result, current understandings of bicultural identity show that it is multidimensional, interrelated, and versatile (Nguyen and Benet-Martínez 2012; West et al. 2017) which, in line, with the theory of Proculturation, applies a more hazy subjective lens to the individual cultural experiences through which social representation and individual meaning making of cultural experiences are pivotal to identity construction (Gamsakhurdia 2018, 2019a, 2019b). In this research, examples of bicultural identity exploration included engagements with their ethnic group and discursive explorations of their ethnic and national cultures, e.g., learning and speaking their ethnic language, sharing customs of both cultures, and expressing comfort in blended cultural spaces. Below is an example:

FG1-P4: "I believe that navigating the dual culture/the dual identity is something that in my experience < I didn't talk about that > at home, I was very self-aware that I was Igbo Nigerian. It wasn't something that I was ashamed of, growing up at home we would have learned songs in Igbo . . . my parents are very proud Nigerians and it wasn't something that I was ashamed of but I think when you are younger you want to fit in. "

However, it is noteworthy that, given the ambiguity and subjective nature of the bicultural middle, identities described as bicultural were described differently by different participants, for example, participant 5's (who was adopted into a native Irish family) connection to their heritage can also be understood as bicultural.

FG2-P5: "I guess I had the sense of growing up not exactly an Irish person because I knew the things that were different about me and my family . . . nobody talked about them, so I had to figure them out for myself and I'm kind of obsessive about getting it in my head . . . . talking about it happened much later. You know in my late teens or 20s you know things like that."

4.2. Latent Media Representation

Latent Media Representations served as another major theme in this research. During each focus group, participants were asked to outline how their respective cultural groups were represented in Irish media. Upon analysis, the use of metaphorical dialogue and imagery was used by participants to detail how they felt their respective cultural groups were perceived by the wider public through the media. These representations were objectified using metaphors and imagery that they had previously seen/not seen in mainstream (Irish) media. This was utilised by the participants to give meaning to different phenomena. Most commonly, participants noted that images in the media served to represent a stereotypical model of their perceived ethnic/racialised group and lacked the nuance that captured more multidimensional aspects of their humanity, indicating a sense of "othering" by society, which was emphasised by the media. All three groups highlighted this, using metaphors and imagery that perpetuated negative stereotypes of their ethnic/racialised group. It is noteworthy to highlight that here, again, references were made to perceived race (in FG1), religion (FG2), and ethnicity (in FG3). While participants did not claim that these representations are all true, they recognised and described how these representations are perpetuated by mainstream media based on their subjective experiences and interpretations. Further analysis in this research area indicates that these representations may inform the perceived realities and cultural identities of developing first- and second-generation migrant participants, which is discussed as they negotiate their identities. This highlights the proculturation process, as participants conceptualised varying social representations while performing the internal work of constructing their cultural identity(ies).

Participants in focus group one (who were all racialised as black) highlighted how "Americanised" imagery and (negative) media representations of "blackness" have permeated into Irish consciousness. In turn, they noted that many young people of African descent in Ireland may internalise these representations in their social/cultural identities. For example, in discussing media representations of Afro-Irish people, participant one highlighted that black males do not have nuanced representations of their social realities, and representation in mainstream TV/film characters often lean on American and British depictions of black men (and women) as being aggressive, criminals, and tough.

FG1-P1: "I do think that there is a big issue with like the representation of black men in the media. Like overall, it's really really dangerous because we don't see anything good in Ireland./The prevailing image comes from like the US and the UK which already has like a negative kind of, like a negative image behind it' . . . 'I would like to see like a lot more of, like I suppose this "embracing the culture"."

Likewise, certain participants also highlighted how media representations of their ethnic/racial group may have guided their cultural identity. For example, participant two notes that many Afro-Irish young people capture a sense of identity through American/British media/imagery of "blackness", because there is a lack of such imagery in Ireland, they say:

FG1-P2: "Like if you see the black Irish on TV or radio it's always someone that is mixed race, it's never like, I never looked at anything in Irish media or in their Irish Radio where I'm like "oh yeah that captures my like lifestyle and my upbringings" and I think that's the reason why so many black Irish people don't engage in Irish media because they

don't see anything that represents them. I think that's why black people look towards England or America for inspiration up until today".

Focus group two also indicated a lack of nuanced representation of their cultural identities in the media. However, some participants noted a change in the media perceptions of facets of their social identity (e.g., religion, which can be tied to cultural identity (Tajfel 1981)) which, in turn, guided the acceptance of their cultural heritage. Participant nine indicated although historical perceptions of the Sikh community were negative, we are seeing newer, more positive representations of the Sikh religion in popular media, thus indicating the non-static, dynamic and formative nature of social representations through time (Wagner et al. 1999).

FG3-P9: "In terms of mainstream representation or media representation, I think Sikhs personally are very recognizable people, we wear our smiles no matter what. But the thing is, the media perception back in let's say 2001 when we first moved over was around the time that 9/11 had happened, so there was absolutely no/zero representation of Sikhs specifically in Ireland/They would show things about Osama bin Laden, and you know and the closest thing that he would have would've been the beard and whenever my dad or anyone who look like me was seen the only perception was they had from the media. Not even Irish but from the general media was terrorist or something. You know, so that sort of thing like Man we didn't even get any representation at all but we were bombarded by this one constant image. Call it fear mongering or whatever it was, there was zero representation but if it was today like if there was any sort of topic about me, I would imagine that I would be labelled as Irish or at least be given the benefit of the doubt, right. But in terms of representation, I think that, like I mentioned it was a very good thing that happened like the first Sikh Garda with a full turban and beard was able to serve on the force, so we are getting a lot of positive Media right now."

The above highlights proculturation in action as participant nine negotiates his Sikh and Irish identity as it relates to media representations in the Sikh community. Likewise, participant nine also notes that, through the use of social media, there is more access to see the real stories and images of individuals from different cultural backgrounds in Ireland.

FG3-P9: "I think social media-, it does help push other cultures into the mainstream or into it at least the awareness of other people/social media has made it a bit easier. But I can't really say that . . . .maybe it has made it a bit more accessible."

Finally, participants in focus group three also highlighted the lack of nuanced representations of people of Eastern European backgrounds, and migrants more generally in media and thus social realities. Moreover, participant ten detailed that, while other aspects of her identity (e.g., queerness) were adequately represented in popular Irish media/culture, representations of her identity as a Polish migrant leaned into outdated stereotypes of what it means to be Polish, particularly that of a "criminal" and/or a "good worker".

FG3-P10: "I see myself represented in the media as a queer person, absolutely. But not as a multi-ethnic person/Whenever I see Polish people mentioned in the newspapers or in the media, it's usually mentioned to do with a crime. It's usually like, you know foreigners murdering each other kind of thing"

Participant eleven goes on to use further imagery to highlight these representations of Eastern Europeans in mainstream media.

FG3-P11: "When it comes to even fictional media or TV shows and such as soon as I think of it, the first thing that I think of is they always show that one man that's meant to be Polish, but he has a Russian name and he speaks Latvian, and he works at the local building site and rings like in the evenings and smoke cigarettes."

FG3-P10: "Yea the tracksuit with the added us stripes".

FG3-P11: "Yes exactly and the white vest. Yeah it's always that, I actually can't think of a different portrayal of Polish people or Eastern European immigrants in general that I would've seen an Irish media or in media in general. Like it's very much feeding into the stereotypes. It's very basic like there's no, we never got a personality, we never get a culture, we don't get a family, we don't-you know they don't show us doing everyday

things, celebrating our holidays speaking Polish to each other because for some reason they don't speak Polish to each other or they speak a different European language, or they speak English at home which no one does."

These depictions of people of Polish origin is not far removed from representations laid in the media of other countries too (Rostek and Uffelmann 2010). While there were some mentions of changing representations of individuals of culturally/religiously diverse backgrounds in Ireland, the vast majority of the participants in this research indicated that current representations lacked adequate depictions of their respective ethnic/cultural groups. Through introspective dialogue and meaning making and interpretations of the media representations of their respective cultural groups, participants were able to explore their own self-concept and cultural identity as it related to media representations, which again indicates proculturation in action.

5. Discussion

As a socio-cognitive system of belief that allows us to understand the world in which we live, and in doing so formulate social realities, social representations enable us to react, reject and reformulate 'a presentation of the world that conflicts with one's stake, position and self-identity' (Howarth 2006, p. 68; Moscovici 1981). The main purpose of this study was to identify how first- and second-generation Irish young adults from migrant backgrounds explore their cultural identity(ies) through social representations relating to their ethnic and national cultures. Thus, the three qualitative focus groups featured two main themes: (1) Anchoring Irishness; (2) Latent Media Representations. These themes highlighted both the similarities and differences in each focus group, and how the representations within them aided in the (co)construction of the cultural identities of first- and second-generations migrant participants, indicating the lifelong process of proculturation.

The construction of "Irishness" was a key indicator as to how participants (particularly earlier in their lives) constructed their cultural identities. Participants anchored their sense of "Irishness" through indicating prototypical representations of what it means to be "Irish", for example, speaking English, having an Irish accent, and being racialised as "white". It was through this reflective practice and the subjective interpretations of representations of "Irishness" that participants were able to subjectively position themselves along the constructed parameters of "Irishness". Akin to the work of O'Malley (2021) who researches the racialised exclusion of mixed-race young people in Ireland, this research suggests that, within the participants (particularly participants in FG1 who were racialised as "black"), connection to "whiteness" served as a central aspect to conceptualising Irishness and Irish identity. Furthermore, participants highlighted that they negotiated these representations of "Irishness" through external practices that indicated assimilative strategies taken to adapt to certain social representations of "Irishness" that were made available to them, e.g., changing their name to an English-sounding version. Similar to SRT that posits that new phenomena are understood by referencing them to familiar phenomena (Moscovici 1981, 2008), informing their sense of Irishness, participants leaned on already existing one-dimensional social representations of what it means to be "Irish". This is well in line with studies on second-generation migrants that have found that during childhood/adolescent development, due to a general increase in contact/interactions with the national culture compared to their parents (via social services such as schools, society and the media), the children of migrants have a greater desire to assimilate to a prototypical model/social representation of the national culture (Pyke and Dang 2003; Alba 2005; Syed and Juan 2012). As participants indicated that "fitting in" was essential in their developmental years (to be socially included), this calls attention to the nature in which migrant youth feel that they must assimilate to be considered "sufficiently Irish". While this may be so, this research indicates that, through the iterative process of proculturation, participants' exploration and construction of their cultural identity(ies) as they developed into their adulthood was not fixed to one practice, but rather through the internal exploration of themselves and social

representations they adopted more blended bicultural identities, which may indicate the importance of representing multiple cultures as children of migrants develop.

Likewise, this study gives evidence to institutional barriers that may hinder this desired assimilation and thus inclusion in the national culture. Participants highlighted the barriers of language, accent, ethnicity and race that had distanced them from the prototypical social representation of the Irish. These barriers, therefore, act as boundaries to belonging which, in effect, may aid in the construction of the cultural identities of the participants. Likewise, as the aforementioned SRT research indicates (that social representation aids in the (co)construction of social realities), Howarth (2002) notes that these constructions legitimise systems of knowledge and beliefs, therefore reinforcing different levels of inclusion and exclusion.

Moreover, as collective symbolic coping is generally maintained by the media (Wagner et al. 1999), this study indicates that the above boundaries may be reinforced by media representations of different cultural groups. With the use of imagery, participants indicated several media representations of their respective cultural group(s). While some addressed how media representations have evolved to include newer depictions of their cultural group, many addressed the stereotypical, unnuanced imagery still used in the media, indicating how migrant populations are objectified in mainstream media. While participants highlighted increased nuanced representation and agency in online and social media representations of their cultural groups (e.g., participants in FG2), the above is in line with previous research on the media representations of migrants in Ireland which present one-dimensional media representations which are lacking in nuance and migrant voices (Burroughs 2015; Kenny 2010; O'Regan and Riordan 2018). Furthermore, it is also noteworthy that, as participants indicated, the representation of prototypical "Irishness" also leaned on generalised stereotypes of what it means to be Irish. This calls to question the homogenous singular nature in which cultural identity is constructed in Ireland. Not only do these representations present a one-dimensional, stereotypical image of people of migrant backgrounds to the larger public, but they may also affect how migrant populations construct their cultural identity, and negative external social representation may be internalised as individuals explore their self-concept through the process of proculturation (Andreouli and Chryssochoou 2015; Breakwell 1993; Gamsakhurdia 2018). This is particularly the case for young first- and second-generations migrants who are in the identity development stages of their lives. As mentioned above, young second-generation migrants may lean into external media representations of what it means to be, e.g., "black".

6. Conclusions

This study demonstrates different social representations that inform the cultural identities of first- and second-generation migrants in Ireland. Through the theoretical frameworks of SRT and, more widely, Proculturation, this research indicates the several ways in which first- and second-generation migrants explore the social representations that inform their cultural identity(ies). While it cannot be concluded that this research stands true for all first- and second-generation migrants in Ireland, given the recent shift in the cultural demographic of Ireland, it gives direction to further quantitative research that looks at the identities of people of migrant backgrounds that go beyond the initial stage of migration. Alba (2005) notes that while adult second-generation migrants are socialised in the national culture, boundaries to inclusion are "bright" (unambiguous/distinctive) or "blurry" (ambiguous) zones of self-presentation and social representation. In particular, she notes that blurred boundaries involve a potential boundary-crossing where the positioning of second- (and first-) generation migrants can be salient and shift from "outsider" to "insider". This boundary crossing can be exemplified by Proculturation Theory, by which the dialogical nature and self-exploration that comes with encounters with different social representations can construct and inform one's self-concept and, in this research, cultural identity. Our research indicates that these boundaries to belonging may be hindered by stereotypical, one-dimensional social representations of "Irishness" and media representations. Therefore,

to truly embody the cultural reality and identities of today's Ireland, a re-evaluation of these representations must be taken at large.

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