

No.197

An Ethnographic Study of Anthropologists-in-Training

Tan Si Ying Nicole

Department of Sociology and Anthropology
National University of Singapore
11 Arts Link
Singapore 117573

2026

The ***Working Papers Series*** is edited by **Tenzin Jinba**. This series was established by the Department of Sociology, National University of Singapore in 1973, as a forum for staff members, graduate students and visitors to the department to circulate their work in progress. Please refer to the back for a list of all past working papers.

Foreword

Modern anthropology as a discipline is now around 150 years old. The discipline in its current form is traced to scholars such as Franz Boas and members of the Cambridge Anthropological Expedition to the Torres Straits, who pioneered ethnographic research in the late 19th century. With Boas's founding of the first anthropology department in the United States in 1902 at Columbia University and similar departments at Oxford and elsewhere shortly thereafter, anthropology carved out what later came to be known – and critiqued – as the “savage slot” in modern academia. Whereas all other social science disciplines focused on studies of modern, urban, industrial Western societies, anthropology claimed as its area of interest the rest of the world – particularly everything that was seen as the antithesis of the West: pre- or non-modern, small-scale, rural, pre- or non-industrial societies.

This colonial division of labor and the relationship between anthropology and colonialism have been heavily critiqued since at least the 1960s. By the 1990s, this critique became a mainstay and central to the discipline itself. What began as critique has in many places become an active program to reshape and reimagine the discipline. This project of reimagining and reshaping the discipline has many dimensions, from reconfiguring the relationship between anthropologists and the people they study, to reworking the methods that anthropologists employ, to rethinking ethnography as a holistic enterprise, and training increasingly diverse cohorts of anthropologists. Since the mid-20th century, many efforts have been made to develop anthropology beyond its European and American origins and make it a relevant discipline for other people in other places. The working paper published here is a record of one step, of one such project in Singapore.

Singapore and the National University of Singapore (NUS) has had its own, particular history and relationship to anthropology. Since its founding in 1965, the Department of Sociology at NUS has been *de facto* a joint department of sociology and anthropology. The first head of department, Murray Groves, was a British Social anthropologist. A significant number of faculty members – usually a quarter to a third – have been PhD's in anthropology working alongside their sociology-trained colleagues. But until very recently, anthropology was not widely recognized. According to the oral history of the department, recounted by various colleagues into the 21st century, the decision to name the department Sociology and not include Anthropology was because the former was seen as relevant to the study of Singapore as a modern society, whereas the latter was seen as the study of “primitive people” for which rapidly modernizing Singapore had no need.

Only in the past 15 years has this begun to change. In 2012, the Department began to officially recognize an Anthropology track in its PhD program. From 2022, the name of the Department was officially changed to Sociology and Anthropology, along with the creation of an undergraduate major in anthropology. The first cohort of undergraduate anthropology majors graduated from the university in 2026. The working paper presented here is an account of that first cohort, based on ethnographic methods of interviewing and participant observation. Its author, Nicole Tan, was herself a sociology major in the same cohort as the students whose stories are told in the following pages.

This working paper began as an undergraduate Independent Study Course, during which Ms. Tan carried out research among her anthropology counterparts. The Department is publishing the work in its working papers series in order that it can be available as a document that reflects the experiences and aspirations of this first cohort. As anthropology moves further away from its roots in a colonial world, what it will become in the future will depend on how it is taught, how it is received, and how it will be reimagined by this and other cohorts as a global discipline.

Eric C. Thompson
Associate Professor
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
National University of Singapore

1. Introduction

Anthropology is a discipline concerned with the study of humanity, seeking to understand the diversity of human cultures, societies, and biological development across time and space. In its early development, particularly during the colonial period, the discipline was often shaped by assumptions of economic, political, and psychological superiority held by Western scholars studying non-Western societies (Lewis, 1973, p. 582). Such assumptions were grounded in a perspective that positioned Western societies as more developed, while non-Western societies were often described as underdeveloped, or “primitive” (Lewis, 1973, p. 582). This created unequal relationships between Western researchers and the communities they studied, which were frequently treated as the primary subjects of anthropological inquiry. Over time, however, anthropology moved away from these earlier assumptions and increasingly came to emphasize cultural relativism, reflexivity, and ethical engagement with the communities being studied (Lewis, 1973, p. 590).

Despite its importance in examining individuals’ lived experiences as a way of understanding broader social structures across time and space, anthropology remains relatively under-recognised in Singaporean society. According to the QS Top Universities website, as of April 2026, when this paper was written, the National University of Singapore (NUS) is the only university in Singapore to offer anthropology as a field of study. Yet, despite anthropology’s limited institutional presence in Singapore, particularly at NUS, the university’s continued commitment to developing the discipline has resulted in notable achievements, with NUS currently ranked 14th globally and first in Asia for anthropology. Importantly, the establishment of Singapore’s only anthropology major, along with its present achievements, did not emerge without a rich, contested, and decades-long history of struggle over anthropology’s recognition in the Department’s name and its establishment as a major for prospective students, as will be illustrated in Section 2. In light of this prolonged struggle, it is vital to document the experiences of the first cohort of anthropology students, who were the first to directly experience the outcome of these sustained efforts. Doing so not only highlights the significance of the struggle to secure recognition for the discipline in both name and programme, but also marks a new era for anthropology at NUS and extends the broader story of the discipline as it takes root in Singapore.

To better understand the experiences of the first cohort of anthropology undergraduates, several students currently in their final year of the programme were interviewed. This paper presents findings on how the meaning of anthropology evolved for this group of students (Sections 5 and 6), the challenges they faced both as undergraduates taking anthropology modules and as anthropology students more broadly (Section 7), and an interpretation of the data collected (Section 8). It also examines observational data, clarified through interviews, with particular attention to the relationships formed within the cohort (Section 9) and the efforts made to improve the major for subsequent cohorts (Section 10). The paper concludes by exploring the shared commitment of the first cohort and the anthropology professors to the development of the major, and why this commitment is significant for understanding the programme’s early development through the lens of disciplinary identity formation, a process that mirrors anthropology’s

historical struggle for recognition and legitimacy (Section 11). In doing so, the paper aims to (1) capture the personal and intellectual growth experienced by these students, (2) recognise the experiences of the first cohort who undertook this newly introduced major, and (3) document how the programme was experienced in its early stages, thereby creating a historical record of its formative years.

2. The Institutional History of Anthropology at NUS

Anthropology had long been taught in universities in Singapore across a range of departments (Sinha, 2019). At NUS in particular, before anthropology was formally established as a field of study, it had already developed a firm institutional presence within the Department of Sociology from 1965 onward in the form of social anthropology. This arrangement arose from the recognition that the social sciences needed to be developed, while at the same time a committee resisted separating sociology and anthropology into different departments out of concern that such a division would weaken both disciplines. As a result, anthropology entered NUS through a joint arrangement within the Department of Sociology in 1965, and teaching began in 1966 (Sinha, 2019).

Despite this institutional pairing, the intellectual approaches and methods of anthropology and sociology never fully converged (Sinha, 2019). Sociology was more strongly associated with quantitative methods, whereas anthropology was identified with qualitative and ethnographic approaches. This distinction was reflected in the curriculum from the outset: students majoring in sociology were required to take both Introduction to Sociology (SC101) and Introduction to Anthropology (SC102) (Sinha, 2019).

By the 1980s, however, sociology had come to outweigh anthropology within the department (Sinha, 2019). This shift was reflected in the curriculum structure, which remained in place until 1998, when SC101 continued to be compulsory while SC102 became optional. The growing institutional dominance of sociology was also evident in a faculty ratio of roughly 3:1 and in the smaller number of anthropology courses offered. This imbalance may also have contributed to the departure, in the mid-1990s, of several key anthropologists who had played a crucial role in shaping and institutionalising anthropology within the department (Sinha, 2019).

A major turning point came in 2012, when the PhD programme in anthropology was formally named and recognised, with its first intake admitted in 2012/13, alongside a corresponding expansion of anthropology methods and theory courses (Sinha, 2019). In August 2017, the NUS Sociology Department voted to introduce a new undergraduate major in anthropology. This proposal was accompanied by another to incorporate “Anthropology” in the department’s name, rebranding it as the “Department of Sociology and Anthropology.” In August 2022, anthropology was finally granted official recognition through the department’s renaming and the introduction of a full undergraduate major for the 2022/23 cohort (Department of Sociology and Anthropology, n.d.).

3. Methodology

The target interviewees for the observations and interviews in this study were students who (1) were admitted to NUS in the 2022/23 academic year, thereby constituting the first cohort of anthropology students, and (2) were pursuing anthropology as either their first or second major. Students pursuing anthropology as a minor were excluded. Interviewees were considered part of the cohort regardless of when they declared or switched into the anthropology major, provided that they had been admitted to NUS in the 2022/23 academic year. This is because students within the same admission cohort generally share the same seniority and complete a similar number of credits by the end of each semester, resulting in broadly comparable academic experiences.

The study began with an observation of the first cohort of anthropology students during the 60th Sociology and Anthropology Department Anniversary Gala Dinner held at NUS. My attendance at the event provided an initial opportunity to become acquainted with potential interviewees and to introduce the study to them. The observation was later extended to another event, a potluck hosted by the first cohort of anthropology students, which offered a further opportunity to engage with and become familiar with potential interviewees.

Through this observation, several interesting interactions emerged, while other anticipated dynamics were absent. As a result, the study subsequently employed semi-structured interviews, conducted primarily face-to-face, to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences and challenges of the first cohort of anthropology students majoring in anthropology. The only exception was one interviewee, identified by the pseudonym “Joyce,” who was interviewed via Zoom.

Interviewees were formally invited to the interviews through Telegram messages. Their contact information was obtained during the gala dinner, where I was invited to join a Telegram group chat comprising anthropology students from the 2022/23 academic year.

All interviewees were interviewed individually, except for three—identified by the pseudonyms “Sophie,” “Hana,” and “Nathan”—who participated together in a group interview. This format was chosen to facilitate a more interactive discussion, allowing one interviewee’s contribution to prompt others to recall related experiences and share their perspectives.

In total, the study included 11 interviewees majoring in anthropology. This sample was drawn from 20 members listed in the Telegram group chat, although this figure may also have included students minoring in anthropology. Among the 11 interviewees, two—identified by the pseudonyms “Charlotte” and “Ava”—were pursuing anthropology as a second major, though both expressed a strong sense of identification with the discipline. Six others were also undertaking either a double major or a minor in another social science discipline. As their concurrent course of study did not significantly influence the substance of their responses, the pseudonyms of these six interviewees will not be disclosed here.

It should be noted that the interviews were conducted between 27 January 2026 and 12 February 2026. Therefore, all of the interviewees' accounts were provided during their fourth year of studying anthropology. To ensure full anonymity, all interviewees are represented using pseudonyms.

4. A Brief Idea of Anthropology

Throughout the interviews, the interviewees referred to a range of terms and subfields within anthropology, as well as to a reading that shaped two interviewees' understanding of their areas of interest within the discipline. This section briefly introduces these three items to provide a foundation for understanding them later in the paper. Where appropriate, these concepts are presented in the interviewees' own terms or inferred from the ways in which they were used. This approach preserves the language most familiar to the interviewees and helps readers to more clearly follow their intended meanings.

4.1 Terms and Subfields of Anthropology

Ethnography, as understood across the interviews, refers to a way of studying people or social phenomena through observation and participation in everyday life. It may also involve formal and informal interviews, as well as the production of field notes. Although this methodology is commonly used in qualitative research, it is especially central to anthropology.

Anthropology is an approach to understanding human experience across time, space, and social contexts from an insider's perspective (American Anthropological Association, 2025). Isabelle describes anthropology, in its simplest form, as a training in a particular way of thinking and a framework that encourages critique and the practice of making the familiar unfamiliar. As the interviews also suggest, the discipline encompasses a range of subfields. These subfields, according to Anderson-Fye (2012), include cultural, biological, linguistic, and archaeological anthropology. Rather than addressing entirely separate subjects, these subfields offer distinct approaches to understanding the same human phenomena. For the purposes of this paper, however, only cultural, biological, and linguistic anthropology will be introduced through Anderson-Fye's (2012) work.

Cultural anthropology examines how people make meaning of the world around them within specific social and cultural contexts. It is concerned with how beliefs, practices, and values are shaped through everyday life, and with how the same phenomenon can carry different meanings across societies. As noted by the interviewees, this is the only subfield taught in NUS's anthropology major.

Biological anthropology approaches humans as biological beings situated within society. More specifically, it examines bodily variation, adaptation, development, and evolution in relation to social life, emphasising the concept of human embodiment in society. Through this lens, the subfield shows how social conditions such as inequality, nutrition,

and stress can be physically expressed in the body. In this way, biological anthropology demonstrates that the body is not only natural but also socially shaped.

Linguistic anthropology studies language as a social and cultural practice. It is concerned with how people communicate meanings, values, and identities through speech. In other words, linguistic anthropologists are interested not only in what people say, but also in what language does within social and cultural life.

Another subfield discussed in this paper, medical anthropology, is described by McMahan and Nichter (2011) as a specialised field within anthropology concerned with health, illness, healing, and healthcare as biosocial phenomena. Rather than treating disease as purely biological, medical anthropology understands the body as shaped by the interaction between biological processes and social, cultural, political, and environmental conditions. Medical anthropologists are therefore concerned not only with how illness occurs, but also with how it is experienced, interpreted, represented, and managed in everyday life. This includes attention to embodiment, or the way lived social realities are expressed through the body, as well as to structural factors such as inequality, institutions, and the unequal distribution of health risks and access to care. In this sense, medical anthropology provides a way of understanding health not as an isolated bodily condition, but as something deeply embedded in social life.

4.2 Readings that Expand Anthropological Knowledge

Aligned with the subfield of medical anthropology, *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* by Fadiman (1997) examines the experiences of a Hmong child, Lia Lee, whose epilepsy becomes a site of conflict between her family's cultural beliefs and the U.S. biomedical system. The book illustrates how the Hmong community understands illness through spiritual and cultural frameworks, whereas American doctors approach it through clinical and scientific models. Miscommunication, conflicting assumptions about health and healing, and institutional constraints ultimately lead to tragic consequences for Lia. As Arthur described it, the book reflects "the cultural conflict that arises between indigenous understandings of health and disease versus Western concepts of health and healing." This reading will be mentioned in Section 6.1.2.

5. The Beginning of An Anthropological Journey in NUS

Most interviewees first encountered the major during the undergraduate application process, with many noting that they learned about anthropology through Yale-NUS and university open houses. Despite this common point of encounter, their reasons for pursuing the major varied according to their individual goals. These motivations can be broadly grouped into three categories: personal needs related to future aspiration (Section 5.1), an interest in qualitative methods and the human dimension (Section 5.2), and a desire to try something new (Section 5.3).

5.1 Personal Need for Future Aspiration

Anthropology was perceived as a valuable foundation for future aspirations, influencing interviewees' decisions to pursue it as a major. Several interviewees demonstrated a clear understanding of their future goals and of how anthropology could support them in achieving those aims.

Isabelle, for instance, explained that she chose anthropology by referring to the entry requirements of archaeology programmes in the United States, viewing it as a pathway into the field of archaeology:

"I want to pursue a master's degree in archaeology and work in the field. However, archaeology [as an undergraduate major] is not offered in Singapore. I discovered that archaeology [master's] programmes in America are often linked to anthropology, as it teaches the same fundamental theories and frameworks that archaeology uses. So that's kind of why I ended up here."

Hana likewise regarded anthropology as a precursor to archaeology, noting that "[anthropology] is the closest I could get to archaeology in Singapore, and it could act as a precursor if I wanted to pursue archaeology later on."

Grace viewed anthropology as the discipline most closely related to her aspiration of working in a museum, positioning it as an alternative pathway to art conservation:

"I started thinking about what the closest field to working in a museum would be since that's where I've always wanted to work... anthropology seemed like the most relevant... and interesting."

5.2 Interest in Qualitative Research and the Human Aspect

In addition to serving as a foundation for future aspirations, anthropology was also perceived as a way of cultivating skills associated with the humanities. More specifically, this perception was reflected in the varied interests expressed by interviewees, ranging from specific qualitative methods to broader engagement with people's lived experiences.

For Daniel, the qualitative dimension of anthropology was especially significant, as it aligned with the kind of humanities-related work he had already come to see as meaningful. This, in turn, became a key motivation for his decision to pursue anthropology:

"I knew that I wanted to do something humanities-related... I did an internship at a market research firm in the qualitative research department, and I really enjoyed the work we did—we talked to people and did moderation. So, I knew I wanted to do something like that when I applied [to an undergraduate programme], which led me to anthropology."

Charlotte likewise described her preference for qualitative methods as a reason for choosing anthropology. It is within this discipline that such methods enable her to focus on her interest in understanding human experience, particularly in relation to broader societal issues:

“I had a preference for qualitative over quantitative for a while... [and]... was interested in lived experience [which] informed a lot more about societal issues than simply just a top-down thing.”

Several other interviewees similarly echoed Charlotte’s view that understanding human experience and broader societal issues was central to their interest in anthropology. They perceived the discipline’s focus on everyday life as enabling them to pursue their own curiosity about human experience in society, which in turn shaped their decision to pursue the major.

Nathan, for example, expressed a curiosity about human behaviour that he felt anthropology could satisfy:

“I switched to anthropology, which was what I had always wanted... I began to develop a curiosity about why people do the things they do... I wanted to understand how people function collectively—as a group, a tribe, or a community. That curiosity was what first led me to anthropology, at least in a very vague sense.”

Sophie, in particular, highlighted her interest in both human culture and broader societal structures, especially in terms of how they affect people’s everyday lives:

“I resonated more with anthropology’s focus on human culture in general... I’m also interested in how those structures affect everyday life, which is something we also study in anthropology, although it is just one aspect of the field.”

Joyce, meanwhile, explained that anthropology appealed to her because it offered a way to explore the human-centred questions she found most compelling:

“I think what really drew me to the subject was how broad it was. When I first looked up what anthropology was and saw it described as the ‘study of humans,’ I thought that sounded broad enough for me and like something I would be very interested in. I enjoy learning about people—how we construct things and how we assign meaning to the world around us.”

The interviewees’ shared interest in human lived experience, which drew many of them to anthropology as a major, was especially vividly reflected in Jack’s account. He spoke with considerable enthusiasm about the fieldwork he undertook in the introductory anthropology module AN1101E prior to deciding to switch majors.

Jack first explained that his interest in anthropology developed through the ethnographic readings assigned in the module. He found these readings especially compelling because they conveyed “a real story, from someone’s point of view, situated in a very

specific context,” one that invited him to “put yourself in that person’s shoes... [it] requires a lot of empathy, which I really appreciate.” This was particularly meaningful to him because, as he reflected, “before studying anthropology, I had this idea that academic work was very disembodied and distant.”

The readings then sparked his interest in conducting fieldwork firsthand in an area he was already interested in, as he felt it was “quite hard to imagine [other people’s stories] if I’ve never met someone like that before or experienced their story firsthand.” For Jack, the experience of living alongside others during fieldwork and gaining an in-depth understanding of their lives was profoundly enlightening, ultimately marking a turning point in his academic trajectory. As he shared:

“I was interested in kampongs and village life, because we don’t really have that in Singapore anymore... I went to Johor. Initially, I thought I would just visit a kampong there and find out what it was like. But I ended up learning so much from the experience. I cycled there, met people, and spent time with families in the village. They were incredibly kind to me. At first, I was just talking with people at a restaurant there and got carried away in conversation. Eventually, someone invited me to stay overnight at their house, so I did. Through that, I made a good friend. They told me a lot about what life is like there. Interestingly, much of my research and reflection actually came after that visit... It felt less like I was imposing theories onto people and more like I was actually learning from them... Spending time with them—hanging out and even living with them for about two days—changed the way I thought [about things]... It felt like a transformative moment for me, because I had never done anything like that before... I felt like I was genuinely learning from people, and everything felt new. That feeling was really amazing... For me, it was a kind of eureka moment, and it felt really meaningful during my first year.”

Overall, these accounts reflect a shared interest in qualitative inquiry and its use in exploring human experiences, which shaped their decisions to pursue anthropology.

5.3 Embracing Uncertainty

Beyond motivations related to future aspirations and the development of humanities-related skills, anthropology also appealed to some students because, as a newly established major at NUS, it entailed a degree of uncertainty that they were willing to embrace.

Grace and Charlotte, for example, both conveyed an openness to the risks and possibilities associated with joining a new major. As Grace noted, “I was entering NUS as part of the first cohort, so it felt like a... risk,” but she also regarded it as “trying something new,” an “adventure” that reflected her receptiveness to uncertainty. Charlotte expressed a similar sentiment when she shared:

“It’s just fun and exciting to be part of something that hasn’t been done before—to see a new major come into existence and observe how it develops, and then compare the experience with a more established major.”

This openness to uncertainty extended beyond the novelty of the programme itself. For Arthur, entering anthropology without prior knowledge of the discipline became a means of discovering new possibilities. He framed his transition from a science background into anthropology as a willingness to explore the unfamiliar and place trust in an educational path he had not previously considered. As he shared, “Back then I thought, ‘If you go into science, you will always get a job...’ But I decided to open my hands a bit and believe in the school that was actually invested in my learning.”

6. The Ending of an Anthropological Journey in NUS

After four years of majoring in anthropology, the interviewees came to view the discipline not merely as an academic obligation, but as one of the most meaningful aspects of their undergraduate experience, shaped by a genuine passion for the field. As Isabelle explained, “A lot of [people from our batch] are doing anthropology because we fundamentally really like anthropology... [we are] not just going through the motions of class.”

This deep passion appears to stem from a concern with human lives, cultures, and social experiences—the very core of anthropology—as reflected across the interviews. Daniel expressed this especially clearly, capturing a sentiment widely shared by the other interviewees through the language of empathy and a desire to better understand others:

“Anthropology has given me a lot more empathy, honestly. It encourages me to ask: how do I understand someone not just through my own judgments, but through what they say about themselves? What meanings do they give to the things they say and the things they do?”

What was particularly striking was that this concern was never understood in terms of monetary exchange. When asked how they hoped to apply anthropology in their future work, the interviewees did not frame their responses in capitalist or narrowly career-oriented terms. Charlotte captured this especially clearly when she reflected, “It’s never really been about money or career for me... I’m still enjoying it enough—after all.”

This shared passion for anthropology further developed into each interviewee’s specific field of interest, encompassing both their original and newly emerging academic interests (Section 6.1). Their engagement with these fields also reflected a more concrete and nuanced understanding of the discipline than before, as discussed in Section 5. The pursuit of these interests then enabled the interviewees to better grasp the meaning of anthropology’s positionality (Section 6.2). Taken together, anthropology came to shape how they understood themselves beyond those specific fields of interest (Section 6.3).

6.1 Bridging Diverse Academic Interests with Anthropology

The breadth of anthropology as a discipline allows it to accommodate a wide range of intellectual interests and lines of inquiry. As Daniel observed, “anthropology’s scope can be wide,” and therefore “everyone is doing something interesting all the time.” This diversity was reflected in the honours-year theses, which engaged with topics such as

heritage, healing, art, and the subculture of spiritual mediums through the application of anthropological skills (Section 6.1.1), as well as in broader anthropological interests beyond thesis work, including urban power and the subfield of medical anthropology (Section 6.1.2).

6.1.1 Diverse Interest in Honours-Year Anthropology Theses: Heritage, Healing, Art, and Spiritual Medium Subculture

The four honours-year theses all drew on anthropology, with Isabelle and Ava primarily adopting its frameworks as analytical lenses, while Grace and Daniel engaged more directly with its methodology.

Isabelle, whose interests lie in archaeology, explained how she applied anthropology's critical approach—particularly its emphasis on making the familiar unfamiliar, as mentioned in Section 4.1, paragraph two—to examine archaeology and heritage in Singapore. More specifically, she used this framework to question how archaeology comes to narrate history in familiar ways and to probe the underlying assumptions and exclusions that shape these narratives:

“[My thesis is about] the relationship between archaeology and heritage in Singapore... [focusing on the question of] how archaeology contributes to what we perceive or do not perceive to be heritage, like: ‘Why do we think that our history is 700 years old. Why is it specifically 700 years old? And why did that 700 years of history narrative only come out or get really put into the spotlight during the bicentennial?’ And it's very strange because when we say 700 years, we should think about our Malay history, our Malay past in Fort Canning Hill. But people don't think about that. People just think about 13th, 14th century history in Singapore. It's all about the buzzwords that they're using that make you think a certain idea of heritage even though it is one side of the same coin as another side of heritage that they're trying to bury.”

Ava brings anthropological perspectives into her psychology thesis by examining healing method preferences among individuals with adverse childhood experiences. Although her project is situated within psychology through its focus on emotional distress, self-regulation, and help-seeking, anthropology informs the way she approaches the topic. In particular, she draws on anthropology's sensitivity to cultural difference, meaning-making, and non-Western healing practices to question the dominance of Western psychological models. Rather than limiting healing to psychiatry or psychology, she considers a wider range of practices, including religion, community, worship, and somatic forms of regulation such as yoga or running. In this sense, her work can be understood as a point of intersection between psychology and anthropology, particularly in relation to indigenous psychology and medical anthropology:

“I'm doing my thesis on healing method preferences among individuals with adverse childhood experiences... I'm trying to see what kinds of help outlets people normally turn to. This can include religion, community, Western psychiatry or psychology, or more somatic practices like yoga, for example, or running—basically anything that helps you regulate, and anything you do when you are in emotional distress... I'm also interested in

how people view themselves, how they conceptualise emotional distress, and how important they think it is. I guess when I was doing my own interviews, I also had this perspective that learning about different healing methods, or including them in the conversation, was very inspired by anthropology. Because it is through anthropology that I became more sensitive to the ways different people make meaning in their lives, and also gained more exposure to different cultures and their modes of healing—or not just healing, but also their modes of worship... We mostly learn about Western psychology, but especially for the older generation, they do not necessarily participate in that. So, then what does healing look like for them? For my grandparents, for example, it is very different... [I want to] marriage the two disciplines. It is called indigenous psychology, [which] is kind of similar to medical anthropology, but more focused on emotional healing or spiritual healing.”

For Grace, whose interests are rooted in art, anthropology offered a way to connect artistic practice with anthropological inquiry—an approach she described, in her own terms, as *arthropology*. In her thesis, art became the medium through which she applied an anthropological approach to her field site. By interviewing participants, documenting their artistic practices, and reflecting on the meanings they attached to the exhibition, she treated the curatorial process as a form of ethnographic engagement. Rather than beginning with a fixed research question, she allowed her interactions in the field to shape the direction of her inquiry. In this way, anthropology informed her method and ultimately led her to conceptualise gotong royong, or communal labour, not only as the topic of her thesis but also as a social philosophy and a possible anthropological methodology. As Grace explains:

“I want to try to bridge anthropology and art, and see how I can use the stuff I learned in anthropology through my own artistic practice to help people... We did an exhibition... I’m kind of reflecting on the process of it... I was also kind of going around interviewing everyone who participated, videoing their art practices, and interviewing them about what they did and how they thought about the concept of our exhibition—art and anthropology... I have done the work, collected most of the material, and then come back and retrospectively thought, ‘What can I write about this?’ So, I kind of have a whole list of questions to narrow it down... I went back to Yogyakarta in September during the recess week... I was basically trying to listen to the people [to see] like what is the research question, instead of me trying to find the research question. That’s why I ‘let the field speak to you’ kind of thing, although that is such an exotic conversation... It’s like... what do the people I work with think is important versus what I think is important. That’s where I started to zoom into the social organization of art and think about how I conceptualize it... It is resting on the concept of ‘gotong royong’, which means communal labour, but is also a very old philosophy in Java... is not just an ideology or philosophy, but also has [a] very everyday kinds of practices, as well as negotiation and contestation that come with the term. Or maybe you can think of ‘gotong royong’ as a local social science method for doing research. So, I’m going to talk about how ‘gotong royong’ can also serve as a methodology for anthropology.”

For Daniel, anthropology provided an ethnographic approach through which he could pursue his growing interest in subcultures, particularly that of spiritual mediums. His

research examines the interactions between mediums and their clients in online spaces, paying particular attention to how these relationships are shaped by social media platforms and their differing affordances. More specifically, he explores how spiritual practitioners construct authority, negotiate moral values, and establish brand identities while marketing religious or spiritual goods and services on platforms such as Carousell, TikTok, and Instagram. As Daniel shared:

“I’m looking at how spiritual authority and moral values are constructed when spiritual practitioners go online. I focus on certain e-commerce businesses or brands that operate on platforms like Carousell, TikTok, or Instagram, selling spiritual or religious goods and services, and how they construct their brand identity. I also examine how they negotiate with platform affordances and their relationships with clients.”

When he was further asked how anthropology figured in his work, he framed his research anthropologically by examining how people interact with platforms, build businesses, and form networks within the moral economies of online purchasing—drawing on an analogy with how anthropology often studies everyday social relations within societies, and applying this lens to understand interaction on digital platforms. This points to an ethnographic interest in online social relations:

“I think that when looking at certain moral economies involved in purchasing things online, it is important to understand how people interact with these platforms and how they construct businesses within them. Since the digital space is one that demands visibility and makes things legible—whether through text or certain metrics—I think this becomes an important aspect of social interaction that I wanted to understand... So, I was interested in how these networks are formed, how they are structured, and how they operate online.”

6.1.2 Anthropological Interests in Urban Power and the Subfield of Medical Anthropology

Beyond the thesis projects, other interviewees also described how they engaged with anthropology through areas that interested them, particularly the broader topic of urban power and the subfield of medical anthropology.

For example, Sophie, who consistently expressed a strong interest in power dynamics throughout the interview, described her interest in exploring power within urban infrastructure through what she referred to as urban anthropology:

“Right now, I’m thinking about exploring urban anthropology—looking at how infrastructure can act as a form of power or influence in an individual’s life, and how human culture or behaviour is shaped by urban structures.”

For Joyce, her intellectual interests gradually shifted from biological anthropology to medical anthropology. As she explained:

“What I found myself enjoying much more was medical anthropology. I really like analysing those aspects of the discipline. So, in a way, I’m still somewhat connected to healthcare—many of the topics I focus on relate to the body, medicine, healing, and similar themes.”

She further reflected on a class she took during her exchange at the University of California, Berkeley, which deeply shaped her understanding of healthcare systems. In particular, an anthropological perspective was evident in the way she attended to how illness is interpreted and managed within social, cultural, and institutional contexts, rather than as merely a biological or medical issue. As she reflected:

“I was on exchange at University of California, Berkeley, for medical anthropology. I really enjoyed the class because my TA [teaching assistant] shared a lot about their experiences in hospital settings. They were also a veteran, and they talked about how their medical conditions were interpreted and handled by many different stakeholders within the healthcare system. Through the class, I learned about things like triage systems and the limitations of public healthcare interventions in different parts of the world. It also made me think about how illnesses are understood and addressed in different contexts. In Singapore, it often feels straightforward—if you have a problem, you just go to the doctor. But the class pushed me to think about other aspects, [such as] who else people turn to when they are sick, and how different social, cultural, and institutional factors shape how a person understands their illness. One thing that particularly interest me was the power dynamic between doctors and patients. There’s a strong tendency to trust doctors and accept what they say without much questioning. That made me reflect on why that dynamic exists and how authority operates in medical settings.”

Similar to Joyce, Arthur showed a strong interest in medical anthropology. He understood healthcare, healing, and disease as shaped by cultural context, echoing Ava’s emphasis on culturally specific understandings of healing discussed in Section 6.1.1. However, Arthur did not reject the biological dimension of medicine. Instead, he valued an approach that holds together both physical-scientific and social-cultural perspectives, allowing him to understand health and healing through both lenses. He articulated this perspective through his reflection on Anne Fadiman’s *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down*, mentioned in Section 4.2, which served as both a source of inspiration and a contextual reference:

“*The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down* by Anne Fadiman to me, was really an eye-opener. It made me understand that medicine, healing, disease, and health are all cultural conceptions. They are things that are rooted in people's cultural contexts. You cannot separate them from those contexts. They arise from a particular place and a particular time. But to me there is also a biological aspect to it, because you cannot deny that medicine has had good effects for people. At the same time, you also cannot deny the fact that medicine has been used in the name of science to justify certain kinds of oppression against certain types of peoples. So, to me, you cannot really have one without the other. I still keep a very strong grasp on the physical sciences part of things, as well as the social and cultural part of things.”

6.2 Positionality in Fieldwork

As these fields of interest developed, most, if not all, interviewees engaged in fieldwork related, either directly or indirectly, to those interests. Through such fieldwork, they were often entrusted with a significant amount of information. This entrustment, in turn, led them to recognise that they became instruments through which information is shaped in two key ways.

First, their very presence within a space influences how information is presented. This is reflected in Grace's account, in which she recognised herself as transforming the people involved in the process of her thesis discussed in Section 6.1.1. As she reflected, "Basically, the ethnographer is not a passive observer, but is actively transforming the interaction that people are having with the ethnographer, and that interaction creates the field."

Second, the position of the anthropologist as a researcher who is, in many ways, a complete stranger to their informants also influences the extent to which individuals are willing to disclose information. As Daniel explained:

"You are the instrument, in a very real sense... because it's me reaching out to people I've never talked to before, entering these practices and saying, 'Hey, I'm a nobody. I'm just really curious,' and then relying on human goodwill alone, hoping that they will reply."

The uncertainty surrounding how much informants are willing to disclose is further compounded by the limited timeframe given to students to develop sufficient field knowledge before representing their informants and becoming the instrument through which the field is conveyed, thereby creating anxiety. Daniel elaborated on this point through his thesis, discussed in Section 6.1.1, which serves here as a contextual reference:

"After [gathering that information], you have to construct academic arguments or analyses about these spaces, often within a very short time frame, when you may feel like you do not even know enough yet. It is challenging because it asks a lot of you, and it makes you very vulnerable."

The interviewees, as anthropologists conducting research in their field sites, may also come to feel that they are using the people they study. This is reflected in Hana's account:

"I really felt like, once you're done talking to them and doing what you need to do, you just say goodbye and then you may never see them again. I remember feeling like I had used them."

6.3 Self and Anthropology

Beyond academic and practical inquiry, anthropology also provided a space for self-reflection. Across the interviews, interviewees described several ways in which anthropology contributed to their self-awareness and self-exploration: (1) challenging

the boundaries of their comfort zones, (2) encouraging them to treat themselves with greater care, (3) deepening their understanding of their own lives, both in relation to specific desires—such as freedom—and more broadly in terms of their present life state, and (4) fostering greater tolerance.

For Daniel, engaging with unfamiliar fields became a way of moving beyond his usual comfort zone, which in turn deepened his self-understanding, particularly in terms of how he should conduct himself. As he explained, his research “pushed me out of my comfort zone in certain ways—talking to new people, going to different venues, gigs, and bands... in understanding myself: how I conduct myself, or how I approach my studies.”

Ava indicated that her time in anthropology classes enabled her to explore and become more at ease with her own way of seeing the world and, in turn, encouraged her to treat herself with greater care:

“As [classes of AN3210 – Happiness: Toward an Anthropology of the Good] went on... we started trying to understand life in general. It’s also about shedding light on different possibilities of how to live. I think there’s a very standard idea of what an ideal life looks like, especially in Singapore. For me, it’s not just about well-being in a general sense, but about having positive well-being and making sure that you’re actually living your life well. I’m not sure if it’s specifically about Singapore, but when I was younger, I didn’t really think about these things. I guess I was just younger and less reflective. As I’ve learned more about myself and made certain changes in my life, I’ve felt like I’m living more fully than before. Previously, I don’t think I was really living well. I was just surviving rather than living. That’s why I like this process of self-discovery. It makes me feel better about the way I’m living now and about the progress I’m making in my life.”

She further drew on anthropological readings about other people’s lives to situate herself within unfamiliar worlds, enabling her to learn from others’ experiences and reflect more deeply on her own life and social environment. In turn, this led her to a clearer self-realisation of her desire for mobility:

“The paper discussed why these Brazilian women dated foreign men. It wasn’t just about relationships, but about wanting a better life and the opportunity to live overseas—to move away and have different opportunities... I really liked the idea of mobility. Sometimes in Singapore I feel a bit trapped. When I was in Europe on exchange, I realised that people with European citizenship, under the European Union, can just live in many different countries in Europe. They can move around quite freely, and the cost of living can still be somewhat comparable. It’s also more common for students to move out and live independently. For me, in Singapore, it feels like you can’t really move out in the same way. I still feel like I want the freedom to move more freely in the world. That’s why that idea of mobility really resonated with me. It’s something I want as well... Sometimes it just changes your perspective on what you thought you knew, or what you thought was normal.”

Similarly, anthropology enabled interviewees to attend more carefully to experiences genuinely different from their own and to reflect on how their own lives might have

unfolded under different circumstances. In turn, this deepened both their self-awareness and their appreciation of their present circumstances, thereby contributing to a broader perspective on life.

As Sophie observed, “[anthropology] is more than just the content or theories; what we gained were lessons about life.”

This point was further developed by Jack, who explained that:

“[Anthropology] was about wanting to listen and to meet people who are quite different from myself. From those experiences, I think we learn a lot—not just about others, but also about ourselves. We start to see how our lives might have turned out differently if we had been in another context. It opens up a lot of space for imagination and reflection about how things could have been otherwise.”

Anthropology’s reflexive orientation also fostered greater tolerance. In Arthur’s account, he explained how reflexivity enabled him to become more accepting of everyday situations, including ordinary classroom interactions, that differed from his own ways of thinking and acting. He illustrated this through an experience in a gender studies class, in which he caught himself making an immediate judgment about another student’s unfamiliarity with a concept he considered basic:

“[In a gender studies class, we were taught that] ‘intersectionality is an important thing because people’s identities are not just defined by one characteristic.’... People were taking out their notepads and jotting it down like it’s the most revolutionary thing they heard. And I was like, ‘But we learn this in year one anthropology classes... [where] you need to understand cultural relativism [such that] every culture has their own cultural context—you need to understand it from this perspective...’ I remember a girl who turned to me; she was like, ‘I don’t understand what that means.’ And I was like, ‘Okay?’ And she was a year three sociology student, alright... In my mind, I was like, ‘This is very basic. Why don’t you get it?’”

Arthur then described stepping back from this initial reaction and reflecting on the assumptions behind it. In doing so, he came to recognise that his response was shaped by the privilege of having been trained within a particular disciplinary framework in which cultural relativism is a core concept, and that not everyone had been exposed to the same concepts or modes of thought. This reflexive awareness enabled him to become more tolerant of those less familiar with ideas he had come to regard as basic. As he reflected:

“But of course, this is the privilege of having studied in a particular field and with a particular way of knowing things more. And so, I have to backtrack a bit now and say, ‘Hold up, take a moment. Not everybody has done this yet.’”

His reflection demonstrates an effort to resist imposing his own assumptions and to reconsider his immediate judgments in order to understand others within the context of

their own experiences—an approach that reflects a central tenet of anthropological training—thereby fostering greater tolerance.

7. Challenges Encountered in the NUS Anthropology Major

Beyond the growth they experienced over the course of four years, they also encountered a number of challenges. These included the broader dilemmas associated with undergraduate research (Section 7.1), as well as more specific difficulties tied to being the first cohort, including limited course offerings (Section 7.2) and the experience of being treated as the “guinea pig” cohort in a newly established major (Section 7.3).

7.1 Dilemmas Associated with Undergraduate Research

The interviewees encountered a range of dilemmas as undergraduate researchers, including the bittersweet experience of parting from relationships formed with informants (Section 7.1.1), the frustration of becoming armchair theorists (Section 7.1.2), difficulties accessing the fields they hoped to study (Section 7.1.3), and doubts about their own abilities, which in turn affected their capacity to identify more broadly as anthropologists (Section 7.1.4).

7.1.1 The Temporary and Bittersweet Nature of Fieldwork Relationships

During fieldwork, relationships often develop, particularly when rapport is established and more intimate details are shared. Although such relationships may sometimes continue beyond the research itself, they often come to an end once fieldwork concludes. This was one of the more striking points raised by the interviewees. Several described feeling saddened by the ending of relationships formed in the field, though it was most vividly articulated by Sophie and Hana.

Sophie recounted the entire process, from building rapport during the interview stage to experiencing the sadness of parting when the study concluded, through her interviews with her co-curricular activity (CCA) peers in NUS Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). She described the interview process as both enjoyable and meaningful, as it became a space for bonding:

“I interviewed some of the girls who were in the same CCA as me at MMA. It was actually a really fun interview because we did it after one of our training sessions. We were on the way to supper together, just eating and chatting while I was collecting my interview data.”

Yet when the semester ended, and the study concluded with it, the rapport that had been built within the group also began to fade as everyone went their separate ways. As she described, “After the semester ended, we all kind of went our separate ways.” For Sophie, this parting was marked by sadness, but also by an appreciation of the joy that had been created through that rapport during the shared experience of fieldwork:

“While it was a bit sad that the group dispersed, it was also sweet in a way. During the time we had together, we enjoyed training, interacting, and doing drills together. Given

that NUS MMA is mostly male-dominated, having a small group of girls who always trained together felt very special. It was like a small safe space for us.”

She concluded by reflecting more broadly on the temporary nature of such connections and the importance of cherishing them while they lasted:

“There have been moments in my life where I had really meaningful conversations with people, but afterwards the connection just fades or stops there... [But] even when someone shares a big part of their life story with me, and afterwards the connection ends and I never see them again, I try not to feel too upset about it. In a way, the fact that it ends reminds me to cherish the present moment—that at that point in time, the person chose to share their story with me, trusting that it could contribute to my project or something meaningful. So, I think of it as a bittersweet ending.”

Similarly, Hana shared that her project involved meaningful conversations with her interviewees that felt both joyful and fleeting. Recounting one memorable encounter, she said:

“We kind of stumbled upon this shop by chance. We ended up talking to the shop owner for about two to three hours. They were sharing their life story, and [my project partner] and I were just listening. We also shared more about what we were trying to do, and they were very eager to help us. It turned into a very memorable afternoon. It really felt like, ‘Wow! This is what fieldwork feels like. You go in without knowing what will happen, and things just unfold naturally.’ In that moment, I really felt like this is what being an anthropologist feels like. For the first time, I felt like, ‘Oh my god, I’m actually doing this.’”

Yet, as meaningful as the interaction was, it also ended with a sense of finality: “But at the same time, it also felt a bit bittersweet. After we finished talking and doing what we needed to do, we just said goodbye and left, and we never saw them again.” Reflecting on this, Hana wondered whether such bittersweet endings might simply be an inherent part of anthropological fieldwork:

“I wondered whether that is just an inherent part of doing anthropology. I’m not sure. Even now, sometimes I think back to that moment. The interaction felt so meaningful and the connection meant a lot, but then it just ended there. It happened, and then it stopped, with no continuation afterwards.”

7.1.2 *Armchair Theorist*

At the other end of the fieldwork experience lay the disappointment and frustration associated with becoming an “armchair theorist.” As undergraduate students, several interviewees felt confined to the classroom, where they engaged deeply with theory but had limited opportunities to apply it in the fields they cared most about. This gap between classroom-based theoretical learning and its practical application contributed to their sense of frustration and disappointment.

In Jack's account, a sense of disappointment emerges when he remarks that "it feels quite different from the ideas of fieldwork that anthropology is known for." This disappointment appears to stem from his expectation that anthropology would "be a more hands-on" and immersive discipline. However, as the semester progressed, he came to feel that the communities he was writing about were not being engaged with directly, but rather observed and understood from a distance through assigned readings. Consequently, this mode of writing could feel at odds with the moral responsibility of representing those communities well:

"During the semester itself, it often feels very classroom-based. There's a lot of reading and a lot of writing. Sometimes it feels a bit strange when I'm writing an essay about people I've never actually met and all my information comes from second-hand sources. It reminds me a bit of the idea of 'armchair anthropology,' which used to be much more common before anthropologists like Malinowski began emphasizing fieldwork and going out to study people directly. In the classroom, it can feel like I'm reading about many different groups of people, trying to imagine their lives, and sometimes watching videos about them—but I've never actually been there. And then I'm expected to write an analysis about them. That's quite hard for me, because it sometimes feels like I'm not really doing them justice. I wonder whether I'm just writing things based on what I think, rather than on real engagement with their lives."

This, in turn, led him to question his own authority to write about people whose lives he had not personally encountered. As Jack noted: "So there's always that sense of doubt—wondering whether I'm actually qualified to do this when I've never been there myself."

In Charlotte's account, this frustration was reflected in her concern that theoretical engagement may not necessarily translate into meaningful forms of support for the communities she hoped to assist. Her repeated question, "So what?", captures this dissatisfaction clearly:

"A lot of the time it feels like we have theories and systems to explain things—but then the question is, so what? Does it actually change anything about people's lives? A lot of the people skills involved—talking to people, understanding their lives, hearing their stories—aren't things you necessarily learn in a textbook or classroom. So, I'm not fully convinced that theories and systems always directly inform how we actually help people."

7.1.3 Barriers to Accessing Relevant Field Sites

This sense of confinement extended beyond the classroom to the inaccessibility of the field sites they genuinely cared deeply about, further contributing to their frustration.

Arthur's account points to a challenge often faced by undergraduate students: limited access to the fields they are most interested in studying. Without access to relevant communities or the relationships needed to enter those spaces, it becomes difficult to apply what they have learned in ways that align with their interests. As he explained:

“Even if you are interested in specific topics, if you don’t have the ability to access these fields, if you don’t have people you can talk to, and if you don’t build proper connections, it’s impossible for you to study what you want.”

Joyce’s account further demonstrates the emotional impact of this inaccessibility. She was troubled by the fact that even when class assignments involved hands-on fieldwork, they did not necessarily align with the kind of work she hoped to pursue. As a result, her academic work felt disconnected from her deeper interests. As she reflected:

“I think it’s very weird because... we’re always doing the same thing where we go into a community, talk about them, observe them, write about them, and that’s it. For the past two years, I felt like I wasn’t really able to do anything with my work.”

Both Arthur and Joyce also reflected on how they navigated the practical and emotional difficulties created by the inaccessibility of the field by actively seeking opportunities to engage with the areas they genuinely cared about.

For Arthur, reconciling this inaccessibility was closely tied to his earlier point about the importance of building the right connections. He explained that access to these connections had enabled him to expand his research in the fields to which he hoped to contribute:

“I’ve had opportunities to work with professors from different departments. I’ve worked with the Alice Lee Centre for Nursing, I’ve worked with the Livestock Research Lab, and I’ve worked with professors from our own department as well... And I think that I can do a lot of good with what I study... And I think that if I manage to produce something that helps us get a better understanding, we can help Singaporeans get better medical treatment.”

Given Joyce’s interest in working-class struggle, her time at Berkeley gave her concrete opportunities to engage in organizing. By joining the League of Filipino Students, which advocates for workers’ rights, she encountered firsthand forms of resistance that had previously remained abstract in the classroom. Witnessing student activism in support of workers deepened her intellectual curiosity:

“In Berkeley, I joined an organization called the League of Filipino Students, which advocates for working-class rights. That’s where I learned about things like revolution and what real resistance efforts look like. In class, we talk about workers resisting, but I had never actually seen it before. When I saw the student movement in the United States—my friends literally walking out of class to protest workers’ rights—I started wondering why we weren’t doing that. And I don’t just mean protesting, but actually putting into practice the things we talk about in class. That’s when I started doing more reading on my own and talking to people on the ground about what their struggles actually are.”

However, upon returning to Singapore, she felt that such opportunities were harder to find at NUS because of the nature of the environment, reinforcing her earlier sense of constraint and limited access to the field site. As she explains:

“When I came back to Singapore, I tried to find people with similar perspectives. But it’s actually quite hard to do that in NUS. The university attracts a certain profile of people, and it can feel like a bubble. Once I started talking to people outside of NUS, I realised how limited our perspectives can be when we stay within that environment.”

Arthur further acknowledged the nature of the environment Joyce described, recognising that those with more niche interests would face greater difficulty in gaining access:

“I acknowledge that for people with more niche interests, perhaps they want to study animals, or perhaps they want to study art, they want to study archaeology, they want to study Chinese cultural conceptualisation, or something like that. It’s a lot harder for them to get into those fields.”

7.1.4 Uncertainty About Ability and Identity

Beyond the issue of inaccessibility to the field site, Jack’s account (in Section 7.1.2) also raised another key concern: uncertainty about his ability to justify his claims without fieldwork experience. A similar sense of uncertainty emerged in the accounts of Hana and Sophie, although in their cases it was more closely tied to their anthropological knowledge and qualitative research skills, which at times diminishing their sense of identification as anthropology students.

For Hana, this uncertainty manifested as a feeling of being less knowledgeable than those around her, which in turn made her feel less like an anthropology student:

“I sometimes felt like quite an imposter... when everyone else was sharing their thoughts, I was really impressed by the people around me. Many of them were very passionate and had already cultivated a strong interest in anthropology for a long time. I couldn’t really relate to that at first, and that feeling stayed with me for quite a while.”

Similarly, Sophie described moments of feeling like an “imposter,” particularly because she did not view herself as extroverted, a quality she associated with qualitative research:

“At times I do feel a bit like an imposter as well, mainly because I’m not the most extroverted or social person. When you think about doing anthropology or ethnography, you imagine having to go out, talk to people, and collect a lot of qualitative data in order to ‘prove’ that you’re an anthropologist.”

Within this broader conversation surrounding feelings of being an “imposter,” the identity of “anthropologist” emerged as an even more distant and difficult to claim. Nathan, for example, explained that he usually referred to himself as an “aspiring anthropologist” rather than simply as an anthropologist. Hana and Sophie likewise agreed that they did not identify themselves as anthropologists. Arthur provided a particularly clear explanation of this phenomenon, noting that being an anthropologist implied a level of further training that undergraduates had not yet attained, making it more difficult for them to identify themselves as anthropologists:

“I think I would say that I studied anthropology. I’m not sure if I would feel comfortable calling myself an anthropologist, because that seems to imply further academic training. Our professors often remind us that real fieldwork is very long-term. We don’t really have the luxury of spending long periods in the same place, especially given the structure of our modules.”

7.2 The Mismatch Between Student Interests and the Anthropology Curriculum

Beyond the broader dilemmas associated with undergraduate research, the major’s strong emphasis on cultural anthropology also emerged as a limitation of anthropology at NUS, as it did not adequately accommodate the exploration of a broader range of interests. This was especially challenging for the interviewees, who belonged to the *first cohort* of students undertaking the anthropology major. As noted in Section 6, although anthropology is a wide-ranging discipline that allows students to develop their own intellectual interests, the interviewees did not perceive a direct correspondence between those interests and the content taught within the department’s cultural anthropology curriculum.

This mismatch between interviewees’ interests and the curriculum was particularly evident in Isabelle’s account. She described how her interest in archaeology might have been better supported if the curriculum had not been so narrowly centred on cultural anthropology:

“It’s not that I don’t like what I’m studying. A lot of what we study is relatable, but it’s not necessarily a one-to-one match with archaeology. Our department mainly focuses on social and cultural anthropology, whereas archaeology is more about material culture. In anthropology more broadly, there are usually four main fields: social and cultural anthropology, archaeology anthropology, biological anthropology, and linguistic anthropology. But in our department, we really only focus on the social and cultural side, so the other areas aren’t as present in the curriculum.”

Similarly, Joyce explained that her interest in medical anthropology was not fully supported. As a result, she had to pursue the subject through her own reading rather than through the curriculum:

“I was a little disappointed to find out that NUS doesn’t offer biological anthropology. The focus here is mostly on cultural anthropology. So, a lot of the topics that interest me in anthropology aren’t really covered in the courses offered here. Because of that, many of the things I end up writing about are topics that I read about on my own, outside of class.”

A similar point emerged in conversation with Arthur, who is likewise interested in medical anthropology. He shared that he aligned more closely with the holistic model of anthropology commonly found in the United States, which encompasses a broader scope, including sociolinguistic, medical, biological, and cultural anthropology (see Section 4.1 for an overview of the subfields).

Relatedly, interviewees also pointed to the limited availability of modules. As Daniel noted:

“I just hope the registrar and the department are able to get more modules approved, because it’s quite sad at the moment. NUS can feel like a pretty glacial place when it comes to getting new modules out, especially for newer majors.”

7.3 The “Guinea Pig” Cohort

In addition to the mismatch between their broad range of interests and the curriculum’s narrow focus on cultural anthropology, the first-cohort interviewees also had to contend with challenges specific to being the inaugural cohort. This included miscommunication surrounding module-related information within the administrative structure, as well as a broader lack of structure in the modules during their first iteration (Section 7.3.1). Such challenges were further compounded by the absence of experienced peers to rely on (Section 7.3.2). For this reason, the interviewees described themselves as “guinea pigs,” reflecting their experience of being part of a new major.

7.3.1 Miscommunication and Ambiguity in a Newly Established Major

The lack of administrative cohesion was particularly evident in the coordination of examinations during the first iteration of AN2101 – Research Methods in Anthropology. Several interviewees described inconsistencies in communication between professors and the department regarding whether a final examination would form part of the module’s assessment structure. Charlotte conveyed this especially clearly, emphasising their position as subjects of institutional trial and error:

“There was a module where there was suddenly a final exam, even though the professor didn’t originally plan for one—or didn’t even realise there was supposed to be a final... our batch still had to go through the final. Then for the next batches, the final was removed. So, in that sense, we were kind of the test run for a lot of these things.”

A similar issue arose in relation to administration is the module registration for SC4101 – Practising Anthropology and Sociology. Anthropology students were required to take a recognised sociology-coded module to meet their graduation requirements and should therefore have been eligible to enrol. However, within the administrative system, eligibility was instead defined as the completion of seven sociology-coded modules, a requirement that most anthropology students would be unable to meet due to their focus on anthropology-coded modules. This misalignment reflects the administration system’s failure to account for the curricular structure of anthropology students while still mandating enrolment in a sociology-coded module. As a result, students were required to navigate a lengthy administrative process to resolve the issue. Isabelle described this clearly:

“One of the big complaints recently was about module registration... our entire batch couldn’t apply for SC4101 even though it’s a required module for us. The system said we didn’t meet the requirement of having seven modules in the department, but of course

we couldn't meet that requirement yet because we are not doing a sociology major. So, we ended up emailing back and forth, and eventually we had to compile a list of everyone's names and matric numbers and send it to Prof Eric so he could manually enrol us."

The internal structure of the course during its first iteration was another aspect that some first cohort interviewees had to navigate without clear guidance, resulting in a degree of uncertainty and ambiguity. This was particularly evident in the lack of clarity surrounding assignment instructions for the module AN1101E – Anthropology and Human Condition. As Isabelle noted:

"The first iterations of some modules aren't always the most polished yet. For example, when we first took Prof Ivan's AN1101 module, a lot of people were telling him, 'Prof, could you be a bit clearer about the assignment requirements?' Since it was the first time the module was being run, some of the instructions weren't always very clear. But I guess that's just how it is when a module is being offered for the first time."

7.3.2 Lack of Senior Figure

Moreover, as members of the first cohort, many of their experiences were shaped by uncertainty because there were no senior figures within the major to provide guidance or serve as points of reference. This uncertainty was evident in both the academic and student-exchange administrative dimensions of their undergraduate experience.

Within the academic context, particularly in relation to the honours-year thesis, some interviewees expressed concern about the absence of senior theses to use as reference points. Without earlier examples to consult, both the formation and content of the thesis became more uncertain. Jack articulated this clearly:

"I was a bit more worried. For example, for the thesis we don't really have any senior theses to cross-reference, because this is the first batch. So, there's a lot of uncertainty around that, and naturally some concern. But I think it will sort itself out eventually. Not having seniors to look to for guidance just makes the process feel a bit more uncertain."

Within the administrative context, particularly in relation to student-exchange course mapping, Isabelle expressed concern that, if not properly managed, such processes could affect the fulfilment of graduation requirements. Access to guidance from senior students would likely have reduced this concern. However, for the first cohort, the absence of senior figures to consult for course-mapping advice created an additional layer of uncertainty that students in more established majors would not typically experience. As she explained:

"It hasn't always been great because we don't really have seniors to ask for advice. When we were applying for exchange, or even figuring out things like graduation requirements, a lot of us were just asking each other, 'What are we supposed to do?'"

This lack of reference points in navigating these systems became a key turning point, prompting them to create support structures for subsequent generations of anthropology students, as will be discussed in Section 10.

8. Making Sense of a Four-Year Journey Marked by Growth and Challenges

Throughout their four-year journey in anthropology, the interviewed students from the first cohort demonstrated significant growth, both intellectually in their engagement with the discipline and personally in the ways they used anthropology to challenge themselves and make sense of everyday life. This shift becomes clear when comparing their perspectives at the beginning and end of their anthropological journey at NUS, as discussed in Sections 5 and 6, and can be understood in two main ways.

First, many of them initially understood anthropology in practical terms, particularly as a means of working toward future goals. Over time, however, these orientations developed into a deeper appreciation of anthropology as something they genuinely valued. This development is evident in Isabelle's case. Her initial goal appears to have been clearly defined: anthropology was understood primarily as a pathway to archaeology (Section 5.1).

As she progressed through the major, however, she came to appreciate anthropology in its own right. She was no longer merely "getting by," as suggested by her repeated emphasis on the major's practicality as a route into archaeology. Instead, she expressed a deeper appreciation for anthropology, particularly for its approach to archaeology, because "a lot of it is like carving out individual stories or societal stories from the ground." She found this approach especially meaningful and later incorporated it into her anthropology thesis on archaeology and heritage (Section 6.1.1).

For her, this understanding also distinguished anthropology from history, which, although similarly relevant to archaeology, tended to adopt a more top-down approach that she found less appealing. Her preference for anthropology therefore suggests that, despite both disciplines offering pathways towards archaeology, anthropology had become more than merely a practical means to achieve her goals; it had developed into a genuine intellectual interest in its own right.

Second, their understanding of what they wanted from the discipline was initially relatively abstract. Over time, however, this orientation became more intellectually grounded and more practically integrated into their lives. For example, in Section 5.2, Daniel expresses a general preference for qualitative research, but this remains at the level of simply stating that he is "interested" and suggests that he did not yet have a clear direction for beginning that journey.

By the end of the four years, however, this abstract interest had become more concrete. He developed an understanding of how qualitative research could be applied anthropologically and identified a specific area of interest that he could investigate through anthropological inquiry. In his case, this meant applying ethnographic qualitative methods to his interest in subculture (Section 6.1.1). Beyond identifying a field of interest,

he also extended his use of anthropology as a means of challenging his own boundaries and stepping beyond his comfort zone, thereby becoming more self-aware of how he wanted to conduct himself (Section 6.3).

One particularly notable shift, given the consensus around it, was that many interviewees said they had initially entered the major expecting that they would “just kind of get the degree over with,” as Jack remarked. As they progressed through the programme, however, anthropology became increasingly integrated into their lives. They began to use its readings, encounters, and analytical frameworks to question their experiences, reflect on them, and make better sense of their lives and of themselves as individuals (see Ava’s and Jack’s account in Section 6.3). This process also fostered a greater capacity for tolerance and understanding, as they became more able to reflexively position themselves in relation to the perspectives of others (see Arthur’s account in Section 6.3). In this sense, they developed a genuine passion for anthropology’s way of learning about people, beyond the monetary or instrumental value that the degree might offer (as Isabelle and Charlotte noted at the beginning of Section 6).

However, like any process of growth, this development was accompanied by a range of challenges encountered in the course of learning anthropology, which also shaped who the interviewees became. First, the constant need to part with informants became a meaningful lesson about life, highlighting the importance of cherishing each moment, a point reflected upon by Sophie (Section 7.1.1). Similarly, Hana described fieldwork as a valuable and memorable journey in itself (Section 7.1.1).

Second, challenges also emerged in the classroom. While some struggled to apply theory in the absence of fieldwork, as noted by Jack (Section 7.1.2), others recognised this difficulty and were eventually able to find an entry point through which they could engage meaningfully with the field and develop a deeper interest in it, as illustrated by Arthur and Joyce (Section 7.1.3). At the same time, it should be recognised that not everyone was able to find such an entry point, given the nature of their interests and the social context in which relevant opportunities appeared limited, inaccessible, or distant. Consequently, some interviewees may have had to reconcile themselves to being unable to engage more fully with the field they were most interested in, while for others, this constraint became a source of motivation to pursue available opportunities more actively, as demonstrated by Joyce’s experience (Section 7.1.3).

Third, the interviewees’ perceived level of own experience in the discipline also shaped how they grappled with their identities, both as undergraduate anthropology students and in relation to the more professional identity of the anthropologist (Section 7.1.4).

Collectively, these experiences became integral to their learning and research as anthropology students and, ultimately, to their personal and intellectual development.

Another significant challenge that shaped their journey was the administrative difficulties associated with being the first cohort of anthropology students. As the first group to progress through the programme, they were required to navigate and test many aspects of the major that students in more established programmes, or even those in later

cohorts, did not have to face (Section 7.3). Yet, these struggles can be understood not only as evidence of their perseverance in reaching the fourth year of their studies, but also as a basis for bonding and for recognising the need to support and improve the major. These will be discussed further in the following two sections, Section 9 and 10.

9. The Friendship

This section presents the findings from the first observation at the 60th Sociology and Anthropology Department Anniversary Gala Dinner. It begins by outlining the context that motivated the inquiry into why friendships among more than half of the first cohort present at the dinner appeared so closely knit, together with the initial claim (Section 9.1). It then moves to the findings (Section 9.2), followed by an interpretation of the findings in relation to the claim made (Section 9.3).

9.1 Observation

During the dinner and afterparty, which continued until midnight, about 11 members of the first cohort of anthropology students spent the entire evening together, revealing something that extended beyond the academic realm: friendship. Despite the relatively large number of people present, the group appeared to have built strong relationships characterised by a considerable degree of mutual familiarity with one another's habits, current activities, and significant personal life events. The following field notes, taken after the dinner, illustrate this observation.

Level of familiarity:

First, they appeared to have a strong understanding of one another's lives and the events currently taking place in them, and were able to enter conversations comfortably without requiring prior context to be explained. For example, everyone seemed to know about Joyce's part-time job and the work-related call she was expecting to receive during dinner.

Second, when Hana spoke to me about her future career aspirations, interests, and job interviews with a museum, she explained that these career interests stemmed from her interest in archaeology, which was also one of the main reasons she was drawn to anthropology. This information appeared to be already familiar to her anthropology peers. During the conversation, Hana also pointed out that Isabelle shared similar interests, which Isabelle later confirmed when we shared a Grab ride home. Isabelle explained that her interests were indeed similar to Hana's and that this had likewise influenced her decision to study anthropology. Importantly, I had not explicitly told Isabelle that Hana had spoken to me about her interests or that Hana had chosen anthropology as a major because of archaeology, which might otherwise have influenced her response. This indicates a substantial level of mutual understanding among them.

Third, at the beginning of dinner, Arthur initiated the idea that the group get drinks after the gala dinner. This seemed to reflect a low fear of rejection, likely because of the close-knit nature of their ties. If such an invitation had been extended to relative strangers, the

person making it might have spoken more hesitantly or even felt reluctant to ask. Everyone at the table agreed comfortably and without hesitation.

Familiarity with habits:

There was also a clear familiarity with one another's habits. Hana, for example, was jokingly teased by Joyce in relation to her Instagram story documenting her workout at the gym, particularly because she was *often* absent at the beginning of the post, prompting Joyce to remark, "I was like, where is Hana?" This recurring pattern, noticed by Joyce and becoming a subject of teasing due to its frequency, reflects a level of familiarity with one another's habits.

Another interesting example of teasing arising from familiarity with one another's habits emerged during a discussion about whether Jack would arrive at the gala dinner by bicycle, dressed in a sweaty Dri-FIT outfit. A student from the first cohort of anthropology undergraduate who was not interviewed mentioned that he and Isabelle had been speculating about whether Jack would show up cycling and perspiring. Jack did, in fact, arrive exactly as predicted. In later conversations with Hana, I learned that Jack regularly attends anthropology classes in this manner, making it a distinctive personal trait that was clearly recognised by others in the group. The accuracy of this prediction suggests a high level of familiarity with Jack's habits and routines.

Many of them also appeared to attribute their closeness to the cohort's small size. As Hana noted, it was difficult not to become close in such a small group. Jack similarly remarked, "Of course we are close—there are only about 20 of us," after asking whether I experienced a similar sense of closeness within the sociology cohort. I replied, "Friendly, yes. But close, no—not as close as you all."

What was particularly striking was not simply their friendliness, but the degree of comfort, familiarity, and mutual understanding among them, which suggested a form of social intimacy comparable to the close ties typically associated with a clique. More notably, this level of closeness appeared to extend across a relatively large number of individuals. Yet, as the density index in social network analysis suggests, the degree of connectedness within a group tends to decrease as its size increases (Forsyth, 2019, p. 187). In other words, interpersonal closeness would generally be expected to diminish as group size grows. This, however, was not reflected in my observations of the first cohort of anthropology undergraduates.

One possible explanation for this clique-like interpersonal closeness lies in Jack's comment: "there are only about 20 of *us*." The use of the term "*us*" appeared to signal a strong sense of in-group identity, suggesting that this cohesion may have been tied to their shared position as the *first cohort* of anthropology undergraduates. This interpretation is reinforced by the fact that "*us*" referred specifically to the 20 members of their cohort rather than to the broader population of students pursuing an undergraduate major in anthropology. This sense of distinctiveness was also reflected in the Telegram group name, *NUS Anthro'22*, where the inclusion of "22" subtly marked the cohort's identity as a distinct and salient social group.

In addition, as discussed in Section 7.3.1 and further examined in Section 10, the challenges they faced as the first cohort of undergraduates in a newly established major may have strengthened their shared identity, since they experienced hardships unique to their cohort. This unique, shared pioneering experience may therefore have fostered a particularly strong sense of solidarity.

On this basis, it may be argued that first-cohort anthropology undergraduate identity may have worked in their favour by fostering, perhaps subconsciously, a sense of camaraderie and shared experience that, in turn, gave the group a distinct sense of uniqueness and drew them closer together. To explore this further and assess the validity of this interpretation, interviewees were asked whether and how being part of the first cohort of students pursuing anthropology might have shaped their friendships. Although not all 11 people present at the gala dinner and afterparty were among my interviewees, eight of them were: Isabelle, Grace, Charlotte, Daniel, Hana, Joyce, Jack, and Arthur.

9.2 Results

Across the interviews, there was a strong consensus that the clique-like interpersonal closeness observed among the first cohort of anthropology undergraduates was not produced by their first-cohort identity alone. As Isabelle stated, “I don’t think the title of the programme necessarily brings us together, but I do think our batch is quite close.”

9.2.1 Repeated Encounters as a Basis for Cohort Closeness

Rather, this interpersonal closeness seemed to stem primarily from repeated encounters among members of the first cohort of anthropology undergraduates. These encounters were shaped by three main factors: (1) the cohort’s small size, (2) the limited number of available modules, and (3) the cohort’s seniority.

Firstly, the small size of the first cohort meant that its members repeatedly encountered one another across modules, which in turn fostered closeness. As Charlotte noted:

“Because it’s still new and the cohort is very small, it’s almost impossible to take an anthropology course and never see the same people again—unless someone drops out of the major. As long as you’re majoring in anthropology, you’ll keep running into the same people in different classes. Because of that, you naturally get to know names and faces much more easily... Because of the small size, anthropology also feels more close-knit.”

Secondly, this small size was coupled with the limited number of available modules, which further concentrated students in the same classrooms and contributed to the strengthening of interpersonal closeness within the cohort. As Isabelle explained:

“Because we didn’t have many module options, a lot of us ended up taking the same classes together. Each semester there were maybe only two or three modules available, so you’d see the same people in almost every class. I think that naturally made our batch quite close.”

She contrasted this with the subsequent cohorts, which had more module options and were therefore more dispersed:

“Compared to the batches below us, they might be a bit more spread out because they now have more module options to choose from. So, they don’t necessarily end up seeing the same group of people in every class.”

Thirdly, the cohort’s seniority also shaped these repeated encounters, as members of the first cohort generally took modules at their own level. This, as Isabelle’s remarks suggest, limited their opportunities to form relationships with juniors: “I don’t know if I know a single junior, [because] if you take 2Ks and 3Ks, you can’t really see them.”

These repeated encounters also generated shared memories among the first cohort, which in turn contributed to their sense of closeness or connection. As Hana reflected:

“Our batch, even if we weren’t necessarily very close, we still share the memory of taking the class together. Because of that, we can still talk about it... Overall, our batch was about twenty people, and we were quite close. At the very least, everyone was a familiar and friendly face, and we would always say hi to each other.”

9.2.2 Shared Disposition as a Basis for Cohort Closeness

Nonetheless, personality may have shaped the formation of these close relationships. Hana suggested that choosing to join the first cohort of a new major may itself reflect a particular disposition, specifically the courage to take risks and embrace uncertainty:

“I was thinking that to choose to be part of the first batch of a new major, you probably need a certain type of personality or a bit of courage. It’s likely that people who decided to join the first anthropology batch shared similar mindsets or a willingness to take that step.”

This assumption—that members of the first cohort possessed the courage to embrace such uncertainty—was evident in Section 5.3, both in Arthur’s reflections on the education system more broadly and in Charlotte’s and Grace’s comments on the anthropology major specifically.

9.2.3 The Emergence of Smaller Friendship Groups Within the First Cohort

Although the first cohort as a whole was generally close, members within it nonetheless formed smaller and more intimate friendship groups. This is evident in Daniel’s account:

“Of course there are still cliques, but a lot of that just forms naturally because of classes. If you see the same people every week for twelve weeks straight, you’re probably going to become friends eventually, especially when the class is small—like six people or so. After a while you start hanging out after class, grabbing food together, and those friendships just form quite naturally. So, it’s not really anyone’s fault; it’s just how things happen when

you spend that much time with the same group of people... So, I think that helped us kind of grow and stay connected.”

One common catalyst for this organic formation of smaller, more intimate friendship cliques was shared academic stress. One example is the friendship group consisting of Grace, Charlotte, Jack, Arthur, and Sophie, which emerged through their shared experience of coping with the intense theoretical and assessment demands of AN3101 – Anthropology and Theory, a level of difficulty they had not previously encountered. More specifically, this module placed heavy emphasis on anthropological theory and dense readings, which many students found challenging, particularly alongside the requirement to write analytical essays rather than the ethnographic writing they were more familiar with. Consequently, this group formed among these students as a means of coping with the demands of the class. As Grace recalled:

“It began in AN3101, Theories of Anthropology. Everyone was quite traumatized by the class because it was the first time we were engaging with so much theory in such a short time. For example, if we were discussing functionalism, we would read Malinowski plus another contemporary author. Both readings were very long, and we had to read them before class. Then we would come to class not to discuss the theory—that was covered in the lecture—but to criticize it. So, we were expected to digest the theory on our own while doing the readings before class, and then come prepared to critique and deconstruct the theory during the class itself. It was quite traumatic, so we jokingly called it a kind of rite of passage. After that, we had our first essay, and we didn’t really know what counted as a good theoretical essay or analysis. We were more used to writing discursive, ethnographic-style essays, but this one required a much more analytical approach. Some of us were curious about the grades, so we created a small group chat with people who were willing to share their essays and the professor’s comments. We sent them to each other so we could learn from one another.”

However, this group extended beyond the class itself and developed into a friendship group. As Grace explained, “The group chat was very small—just a few of us. But after AN3101 ended, the group chat didn’t die. It just stayed active.”

Charlotte similarly noted:

“Even when only some of us are taking the same class, the others will still see the discussion in the chat. For example, if three of them are taking a course together, they might be talking about it in the group chat—like discussing something from urban anthropology—and the rest of us just see the conversation happening.”

She further added:

“People get busy with courses, but someone will occasionally send a message to rant about something or share something interesting about anthropology they found online. Some people are more active than others, but that’s normal. We still try to meet up at least once a semester—sometimes during the holidays—just to catch up. It’s basically just a friend group.”

It is important to note that this smaller friendship group also played a central role in organising bonding events for anthropology majors, a point that will be discussed further in Section 10.

9.2.4 Support Rooted in Closeness Within the First Cohort

Overall, the interviewees were grateful for the closeness of this first cohort, particularly because of the support it offered.

Daniel explicitly identified one form of this support as emotional:

“That’s probably been one of the most enjoyable parts—the sense of community. Being in the first batch can sometimes feel a bit less isolating, because everyone is figuring things out at the same time. So, I’m really grateful to the department and to my friends for creating that sense of support and community along the way.”

Arthur emphasised the interpersonal and organisational support that emerged from this interpersonal closeness, with the latter relating to the planning of anthropology events, which will be discussed further in Section 10. As he explained:

“You know people in the same course as you—and it’s already such a small course—means you know you can fall back on them and ask things... That kind of interaction creates an organic sense of trust and support. I wouldn’t say it’s very explicit. We don’t go around saying, ‘If you need to talk to us, you can come to us.’ But I know that if I ever need to talk about something happening in my life, or something related to anthropology, I can fall back on these people because they’ve been with me since the start.”

9.3 Interpretation

Based on the observations in Section 9.1, it was argued that first-cohort identity may have fostered close relationships by giving members of the first undergraduate anthropology cohort a sense of distinctiveness that drew them closer together. However, the findings in Section 9.2 suggest that this identity operated not through a conscious attachment to the distinctive label of being the “first-cohort” itself, but through the experience associated with occupying that position. As the inaugural cohort, members were unprecedentedly exposed to repeated encounters and shared experiences (Section 9.2.1), as well as a sense of similar personality dispositions (Section 9.2.2) that brought them closer.

The repeated encounters stemmed from several structural conditions: the small cohort size, the limited number of modules available for enrolment, and the students’ similar level of seniority. This similarity in seniority contributed to the phenomenon due to the curriculum structure. As higher-level modules required the completion of a certain number of lower-level modules, students within the same cohort tended to progress through the curriculum in parallel. Consequently, the limited range of available modules and the shared progression pathway concentrated the small first cohort in the same

classes for extended periods. Once they had fulfilled the relevant prerequisites, they also tended to advance together into higher-level modules, resulting in repeated encounters across multiple classes.

Repeated encounters, when coupled with shared struggles unique to the inaugural cohort, may also have contributed to the first cohort's sense of closeness. Bastian et al. (2014) argue that sharing painful experiences with others promotes interpersonal relationships by increasing the perceived bond among participants, thereby contributing to group formation. In this case, the repeated encounters described in Section 9.2.1, together with the struggles outlined in Section 7.3, may have created shared memories of overcoming hardship, thus strengthening the first cohort's sense of closeness. This interpretation is reinforced by the similar case of the academically based small friendship group discussed in Section 9.2.3, whose members developed closeness through their shared academic struggles in AN3101. Taken together, these repeated encounters and shared challenges may have played an important role in fostering the first cohort's sense of closeness.

At the same time, the first cohort's ability to form closer ties may also be linked to a shared personality disposition—namely, courage—as identified in Section 9.2.2. This may be understood through the concept of homophily, which suggests that people are more likely to form connections with others who are similar to themselves (Forsyth, 2019, p. 117). As Hana noted, choosing to join the first cohort of a new major despite anticipating possible challenges may already indicate a degree of similarity in disposition. Their willingness to embrace the uncertainty of a new programme may therefore have fostered a perception of shared character, making it easier for them to connect with one another.

In conclusion, the closeness of the first cohort was shaped less by identification with the label of being the first cohort than by the repeated encounters, shared experiences, and compatible personality dispositions that arose from their unique position as pioneers of the major. These findings document a particularly organic form of relationship formation during the early stages of anthropology major, especially the emotions and experiences that fostered such bonds. Documenting these dynamics is particularly important, as they may be difficult to observe among subsequent generations of anthropology undergraduates. The conditions that facilitated these friendships are likely to diminish or disappear as the major becomes more established, student enrolment stabilises, and modules are systematically rolled out.

10. Efforts to Support the Major

This section presents the findings from the second observation at the potluck. It begins by outlining the context that motivated the inquiry into why the potluck was organised solely by the first cohort of anthropology undergraduates, together with a research question (Section 10.1). It then moves on to the findings (Section 10.2), followed by an interpretation of them in relation to the research question (Section 10.3).

10.1 Observation

During the potluck event, Professor Eric mentioned that the event had always been organised by the first cohort of students for the wider anthropology student body. He further noted that, beyond the potluck, this cohort had also organised a range of other events for the broader group of anthropology students.

As the potluck event unfolded, conversations with other professors in the event space turned to this paper's research topic and the observations made thus far (as of the point when potluck occurred, as discussed in Section 9.1). From Professor Ivan's remarks, it became clear that he regarded the "first-cohort identity" as being strongly expressed among this first cohort of anthropology undergraduates.

Taken together, the remarks of both professors created the impression that, as the first cohort of anthropology undergraduates, these students may have felt a particular responsibility to create rituals or occasions that would bring people together. This impression gave rise to a research question extending the earlier discussion of first-cohort identity in Section 9: namely, whether members of the first anthropology undergraduate cohort assumed organising roles because of the strong sense of responsibility embedded in their closely connected identity as the inaugural cohort.

To explore this further, the first interviewee, Isabelle, was asked about her reasons for taking on an organising role after she mentioned hosting an event with other anthropology peers from the first cohort to share her student exchange experience. Her account identified a small group of primary organisers responsible for planning, while other members of the first cohort occasionally join in to help when available. One of the key organisers she mentioned was Grace, who was subsequently asked the same question to better understand her perspective. Grace's account further identified the core organising group as Charlotte, Sophie, Arthur, Jack, and Grace herself. These were also among the individuals discussed in Section 9.2.3 as having formed bonds through their shared experiences in the module AN3101.

10.2 Results

Across the interviews, it became clear that efforts to organise events for the wider anthropology student body were not driven by a sense of responsibility embedded in first-cohort identity. Instead, they were motivated by a desire to build a support system for junior students, shaped by the pioneer cohort's own experiences. These experiences informed their recognition of the importance of support systems in navigating challenges (discussed in Sections 7.3.2 and 9.2.3) and in accessing networks that create opportunities, such as research opportunities facilitated through connections, as Arthur discussed in Section 7.1.3.

10.2.1 Building a Supportive Community for Future Anthropology Students

According to Isabelle, her experience of uncertainty—stemming from the absence of senior guidance on the Student Exchange Programme (SEP) course mapping, as

discussed in Section 7.3.2—led her to view event organisation as a means of providing junior students with a clearer sense of direction. As she explained:

“It could be something for the juniors, since we were struggling ourselves trying to figure out how to do SEP and that kind of thing. So, it would be nice—kind of like helping or guiding the juniors.”

Throughout the interview, Grace placed strong emphasis on the importance of fostering connections. She explained that these events were intended to create opportunities for the anthropology students to interact with one another:

“[We] organize informal anthropology events throughout the semester... things like a film screening, a small ethnography workshop, or other activities... these are similar to what the student society does, but we wanted to create events that were more specifically focused on the anthropology cohort... we wanted to create more opportunities for anthropology students—especially across different years—to interact with each other.”

Note that the society mentioned by Grace is a student-run club formed by the sociology students, with some anthropology students, that organises events for the students from Department of Sociology and Anthropology.

Sophie expressed a similar view, describing the aim as being to “create a space and opportunity for people to talk to one another and break the ice, because sometimes it’s difficult to do that during classes, or people might feel a bit intimidated to reach out to others.”

With interactions established among peers within the anthropology cohort, it becomes easier for students to develop networks of connections that can expand their opportunities and broaden their engagement with areas of interest, as Grace explains:

“We try to encourage people to share any ideas they have and to contact any of us if they need help. For example, if you need support with networking—such as how to approach professors or even getting introductions or contacts for professors—we can help with that.”

Furthermore, Arthur clearly explained the importance of such connections, framing these efforts more broadly as an attempt to build a supportive community, particularly for future generations of anthropology students. As he explained, the goal was to consider “how we could build a better community for future generations of students... Sometimes it gets a bit lonely when there's no one to talk to about what you're supposed to learn, the topics that you're studying, the dilemmas that you encounter as a student of this particular social field... Looking further down the line, the hope was that this could help support newer generations of students and future anthropologists in NUS. That was really my motivation.”

10.2.2 The Challenge of Sustaining Support Efforts in the Face of Limited Junior Engagement

This motivation to build a support system was not always easy to sustain, as the lack of support from the next generation of anthropology students could leave organisers from the first cohort feeling disheartened. As Isabelle observed, “we have [different events] every semester and usually there's quite a strong turnout, but it's really from our batch. Very few juniors come.”

Likewise, Arthur, who regularly posted weekly anthropology updates in Telegram group chats, explained that such efforts could become discouraging when they were not met with a visible response:

“When you don't see the response, it gets a bit disheartening sometimes now, like, ‘why are you even doing this for people who maybe don't even appreciate it’. But even if people don't outwardly appreciate it, I do see the effects of the activities that we have had on the community now, so to me that is like, ‘you know what, we'll take that.’”

10.2.3 The Fragility of Established Event Rituals Beyond the First Cohort

These efforts to periodically organise anthropological events are also shadowed by the possibility that they may not continue after the first cohort of anthropology undergraduates graduates. As Isabelle noted, there was already concern that the next cohort was not engaging extensively with the department: “Prof Ho was like, ‘oh, yeah, you need to ask your juniors to engage with the department more.’” She further suggested that this lack of engagement might lead to the disappearance of such initiatives: “after we leave, nobody's going to organise all these tea sessions anymore.” Similar concerns were raised by Grace and Arthur, both of whom were part of the main organising team.

10.2.4 Collaborative Efforts Between Professors and the First Cohort

In addition to ensuring that support was available within anthropology through these events, they also maintained active communication with professors who were deeply committed to ensuring that the major functioned well for anthropology students, thereby fostering a better environment for subsequent cohorts.

As Grace shared, many professors sought feedback from the first cohort in order to further develop the major:

“I'm not sure if it was officially called a roundtable, but we had about six or seven professors and around six or seven students who showed up. We basically talked about what we think are the major problems in the program, as well as our aspirations moving forward—what changes or improvements might be needed. So, it was more like a group reflection or discussion session.”

Charlotte likewise expressed a broader consensus that the professors, with Professor Ivan playing a particularly important role, were doing their best to further develop the major:

“I think Prof Ivan—and some of the other professors in the department—were part of the group that really pushed to make the anthropology major happen in the first place. It was a collective effort among several faculty members.”

10.2.5 Cultivating a Distinct Anthropology Identity

Amid these efforts to advance the major, one important task is to cultivate a distinct anthropology identity so that it is not overshadowed by the much larger sociology cohort. Arthur highlighted the importance of sustaining this identity through tangible symbols such as T-shirts and mascots:

“I really wanted us to have an NUS Anthropology shirt, so that anthropology students could identify with something of their own and wear it proudly. At that time, we only had NUS Sociology shirts... So, if you were a sociology student, you could wear that shirt and say, ‘Look at me, I’m a sociology student.’ But anthropology students didn’t really have anything. If we wore the shared shirt, our identity always felt tethered to sociology. I always wanted to advocate for an anthropology T-shirt... we eventually did come up with a sort of mascot—a group identity for ourselves... it’s Clifford Geertz and his idea of the ‘webs of significance.’”

Similarly, Grace shared concerns about being absorbed into sociology, the department’s larger counterpart, whose greater numbers could dilute the anthropology cohort and weaken its ability to build its own network within a small discipline:

“There is a fear that if we do [events] together with sociology, because there are so many more sociology students, it will end up becoming more of a sociology-centred gathering, which kind of defeats the original purpose of the event.”

This, however, should not be interpreted as antagonism toward sociology, but rather as an attempt to preserve the anthropology cohort’s ability to develop its own “support ecosystem.”

10.3 Interpretation

Based on the observations in Section 10.1, the research question was formulated to explore whether members of the first anthropology undergraduate cohort took on organising roles because of the strong sense of responsibility embedded in their closely connected identity as the inaugural cohort. The findings in Section 10.2 suggest that this was driven less by a sense of responsibility attached to that identity than by the first cohort’s experience of navigating challenges without adequate support. These experiences appear to have motivated them to help subsequent cohorts of anthropology undergraduates access the support they themselves lacked. In other words, this motivation arose not from their first-cohort identity or any sense of responsibility

associated with it, but rather from their lived experience as members of a pioneering cohort who had struggled to find support in a newly established major and, as a result, came to recognise the importance of adequate institutional support.

In this sense, the first cohort's desire to organise events exclusively for anthropology students may be understood as an effort to protect and support those who came after them, so that they would not have to endure similar challenges.

More specifically, as shown throughout the paper, the first cohort encountered multiple forms of uncertainty, challenge, and struggle. Section 7.3.2, for example, highlights the importance of senior guidance, which the first cohort lacked. In addition, as Section 9.2.3 demonstrates, students faced difficulties in writing-related classes. Yet, as a newly established major that had not yet developed strong internal support structures, as discussed in Section 7.3.1, anthropology may have lacked the kinds of support typically available in more established disciplines. Taken together, these experiences led the first cohort to recognise the importance of support for the survival of subsequent cohorts within the major.

Such support, however, does not emerge easily. As a relatively newer major situated within a department where sociology is a larger and more established counterpart with significantly larger cohort sizes, anthropology students could easily feel overwhelmed in larger classes. In this context, finding more specific forms of support—such as guidance in ethnography writing, which is rooted in distinctly anthropological forms of knowledge—became especially difficult. This was precisely what Grace and the other interviewees recognised.

Having identified both their own challenges and the structural conditions of the department, in which help could be difficult to obtain, they sought to plan and organise events specifically for anthropology students in order to foster connections that could eventually develop into a support system.

These findings therefore suggest that although neither a sense of responsibility tied to being the first cohort nor first-cohort identity itself was the primary motivation behind these efforts, their position as the inaugural cohort and the challenges that came with it nevertheless indirectly shaped their desire to organise such anthropology events. Documenting this inclination offers a meaningful way to recognise the first cohort's contributions to the development of the major, as well as their intention to foster a supportive academic environment for subsequent cohorts. More importantly, it captures the formative origins of these events within anthropology and the meanings they carry. These events also symbolise the first cohort of anthropology undergraduates, with their significance rooted in the struggles they experienced throughout their pursuit of academic knowledge within a newly established major. Beyond the challenges they faced prior to establishing these events, it also documents the difficulties encountered during the ongoing process of creating and sustaining these ritualised events.

11. Recognising the Valuable Commitments Behind the Major's Development

Beyond answering the research question, it is vital to recognise several key commitments that have contributed to the major in the hope that they will support its continued success.

Firstly, the resilience of the first cohort of anthropology undergraduates is evident in their commitment to supporting their juniors. Despite experiencing discouragement (Section 10.2.2) and recognising the possibility that such events might cease after their graduation (Section 10.2.3), they nevertheless persevered in contributing as much as possible to the department and its future students. Such actions extend beyond what is typically expected of students within an academic institution. Therefore, regardless of the future trajectory of these rituals, their efforts should neither be overlooked nor undervalued.

Secondly, these findings also highlight the shared commitment of both the first cohort and the anthropology professors to making the discipline viable. This commitment is evident in the efforts invested in ensuring its success through curriculum development, student support, and the broader consolidation of the constructive feedback on the major, as discussed in Section 10.2.4.

Lastly, it is important to recognise that the first cohort's efforts to build an anthropology identity (Section 10.2.5) mirror the historical struggles discussed earlier in this paper (Section 2). Their concern about being overshadowed by the larger sociology cohort echoes, in a different form, anthropology's earlier marginalisation within sociology. This suggests that identity-building is not merely secondary, but central to the success and sustainability of the major. The department's renaming, which formally recognised anthropology as a distinct discipline, illustrates this point and laid the foundation for the development of the major traced throughout this paper. In this sense, the identity-building efforts taking place today may likewise play a crucial role in ensuring the continued success of the anthropology major.

References

- American Anthropological Association. (2025). *What is Anthropology? - The American Anthropological Association*. The American Anthropological Association. <https://americananthro.org/practice-teach/what-is-anthropology/>
- Anderson-Fye, E. P. (2012). Anthropological Perspectives on Physical Appearance and Body Image. *Encyclopedia of Body Image and Human Appearance*, 1, 15–22. <https://doi.org/10.1016/b978-0-12-384925-0.00003-1>
- Bastian, B., Jetten, J., & Ferris, L. J. (2014). Pain as Social Glue: Shared Pain Increases Cooperation. *Psychological Science*, 25(11), 2079–2085. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797614545886>
- Department of Sociology and Anthropology. (n.d.). *History – Department of Sociology and Anthropology*. Nus.edu.sg. <https://fass.nus.edu.sg/socanth/history/>
- Fadiman, A. (1997). *The Spirit Catches You and You Fall Down: A Hmong Child, Her American Doctors, and the Collision of two cultures*. Simon Fraser University Library.
- Forsyth, D. R. (2019). *Group Dynamics* (7th ed.). Cengage.
- Lewis, D. (1973). Anthropology and Colonialism. *Current Anthropology*, 14(5), 581–602. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2741037>
- McMahan, B., & Nichter, M. (2011). Medical Anthropology. *Encyclopedia of Environmental Health*, 274–281. <https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-444-63951-6.00541-6>
- Sinha, V. (2019). Documenting “Anthropological Work” in Singapore - The Journey of a Discipline. In E. C. Thompson & V. Sinha (Eds.), *Southeast Asian Anthropologies: National Traditions and Transnational Practices* (pp. 169–203). NUS Press.

Department of Sociology
Working Papers Series

1. Riaz Hassan and Geoffrey Benjamin, "Ethnic Outmarriage Rates in Singapore: The Influence of Traditional Socio-Cultural Organisation", 1972, 26pp.
2. Hans-Dieter Evers, "Urban Involution: The Social Structure of Southeast Asian Towns", 1972, 19pp.
3. Erik Cohen, "Social Ecology -- A Multidimensional Approach", 1972, 97pp.
4. Noeleen Heyzer and Wee Gek Sim, "Trade Union Leaders in Singapore", 1972, 92pp.
5. Peter S.J. Chen, "The Political Course of Singapore", (in English and Chinese), 1972, 23pp.
6. Chan Heng Chee and Hans-Dieter Evers, "National Identity and Nation Building in S.E. Asia", 1972, 29pp.
7. Peter Weldon, "Indonesian and Chinese Status Differences in Urban Java", 1972, 41pp.
8. Geoffrey Benjamin, "Austroasiatic Subgroupings and Prehistory in the Malay Peninsula", 1972, 63pp.
9. Aline Wong, "Job Satisfaction among Higher Non-Expatriate Civil Servants in Hong Kong", 1972, 64pp.
10. Peter S.J. Chen, "Modernisation in Singapore: Changing Values and the Individual", 1972, 16pp.
11. Geoffrey Benjamin, "An Outline of Temiar Grammar", 1972, 41pp.
12. Peter S.J. Chen, "Social Stratification in Singapore", 1973, 99pp.
13. Peter D. Weldon, John S. Western and Tan Tsu Haung, "Housing and Satisfaction with Environment in Singapore", 1973, 30pp.
14. Mochtar Naim, "Penghulu di Minangkabau (Penghulu as Traditional Elite in Minangkabau)", 1973, 31pp.
15. Michael A.H. Walter, "A Comparative Examination of Systems of Kinship and Marriage in Fiji", 1973, 41pp.
16. Hans Dieter-Evers and Daniel Regan, "Specialisation and Involvement: The Modernising Role of Doctors in Malaysia and Indonesia", 1973, 33pp.
17. Myrna L. Blake, "Kampong Eurasians in Singapore", 1973, 45pp.
18. Mak Lau Fong, "The Forgotten and the Rejected Community -- A Sociological Study of Chinese Secret Societies in Singapore and West Malaysia", 1973, 150pp.
19. Erik Cohen, "Southeast Asian Urban Sociology -- A Review and a Selected Bibliography", 1973, 53pp.
20. Thelma Kay, "Group Cohesion and Productivity among Dockworkers -- A Study of Stevedores in Singapore", 1973, 28pp.
21. Eddie C.Y. Kuo, "Industrialisation and the Family Type: An Overview", 1974, 45pp.
22. Hans-Dieter Evers, "Changing Patterns of Minangkabau Urban Landownership", 1974, 45pp.
23. Peter S.J. Chen, "Social and Psychological Aspects of Fertility: Findings from Family Planning Research in Singapore", 1974, 27pp.
24. Hans-Dieter Evers, "The Role of Professionals in Social and Political Change", 1974, 28pp.
25. Geoffrey Benjamin, "Prehistory and Ethnology in Southeast Asia: Some New Ideas", 1974, 2pp.
26. Mochtar Naim, "Voluntary Migration in Indonesia", 1974, 41 pp.

27. Lawrence Babb, "Walking on Flowers in Singapore -- A Hindu Festival C: in Aram Yengoyan and Alton L. Cycle", 1974, 46pp.
28. Geoffrey Benjamin, "Indigenous Religious Systems of the Malay Peninsula", 1974, 27pp.
29. Aline K. Wong, "Women as a Minority Group in Singapore", 1974, 34pp.
30. Michael A.H.B. Walter, "Co-operation in East Fiji: A New Traditionalism?", 1974, 30pp.
31. Aline K. Wong, "The Continuous Family Revolution in China -- Ideology and Changing Family Patterns", 1974, 28pp.
32. Eddie C.Y. Kuo and Riaz Hassan, "Some Social Concomitants of interethnic Marriage in Singapore", 1974, 28pp.
33. Riaz Hassan, "Symptoms and Syndromes of the Developmental Process in Singapore", 1974, 11pp.
34. Hans-Dieter Evers and Riaz Hassan, "Studies on Social Stratification in Southeast Asia", 1974, 141 pp.
35. Pang Eng Fong and Thelma Kay, "Change and Continuity in Singapore's Industrial Relations System", 1974, 27pp.
36. Eddie C.Y. Kuo, "Field Theory as a Conceptual Framework for Divorce Study", 1974, 25pp.
37. Riaz Hassan, "International Tourism and Intercultural Communication: The Case of Japanese Tourists in Singapore", 1974, 23pp.
38. Riaz Hassan, "Towards a Dialectic Anthropology -- A Comment on Professor M. Freedman's Paper, Social and Cultural Anthropology", 1974, 7pp.
39. Hans-Dieter Evers, "Urbanisation and Urban Conflict in Southeast Asia", 1974, 16pp.
40. Michael A.H.B. Walter, "The Gardening Game", 1975, 15pp.
41. Frederic C. Deyo, "Organisation and Its Socio-Cultural Setting: A Case Study of Structural Compensation in an Atomistic Society", 1975, 31pp.
42. Mak Lau Fong, "Chinese Secret Societies in Ipoh Town, 1945-1969", 1975, 17pp.
43. Vivienne Wee, "A Preliminary Account of 'Buddhism' in Singapore", 1975, 56pp.
44. Geoffrey Benjamin, "The Cultural Logic of Singapore's 'Multiracialism'", 1975, 34pp.
45. Eckehard Kulke, "Social Class and Primordial Loyalty in Rural India -- An Approach to the Study of Indian Untouchables", 1975, 31pp.
46. Peter S.J. Chen, "Elites and National Development in Singapore", 1975, 15pp.
47. Riaz Hassan, "Social and Psychological Implications of High Population Density", 1975, 30pp.
48. Rory Fonseca, "Planning and Land-use in Singapore", 1975, 26pp.
49. Lawrence A. Babb, "Thaipusam in Singapore: Religious Individualism in a Hierarchical Culture", 1976, 19pp.
50. Rory Fonseca, "Growth, Transition and the Urban Environment; A Reference Frame for Singapore", 1976, 19pp.
51. Peter S.J. Chen, "Asian Values in Modernising Society. A Sociological Perspective", 1976, 17pp.
52. Eddie C.Y. Kuo, "A Sociolinguistic Profile of Singapore", 1976, 20pp.
53. Michael A.H.B. Walter, "On Transitional Society", 1976, 20pp.
54. Frederic C. Deyo, "Marital Status, Job Orientation and Work Commitment among Semi-Skilled Female Workers in Singapore", 1976, 20pp.

55. Frederic C. Deyo, "Decision-Making and Supervisory Authority in Cross-Cultural Perspective: An Exploratory Study of Chinese and Western Management Practices in Singapore", 1976, 24pp.
56. John R. Clammer, "Sociological Approaches to the Study of Language and Literacy in Southeast Asia", 1976, 28pp.
57. Peter S.J. Chen, "Ecological Distribution of Social Pathology in Singapore", 1977, 28pp.
58. Aline K. Wong, "The Value of Children and the Household Economy -- A Review of Current VOC Studies in the Developing World", 1977, 24pp.
59. Chiew Seen Kong, "Educational and Occupational Attainment of Singapore's Chinese Women and Men", 1977, 24pp.
60. Peter S.J. Chen, "Population Policy and Social Science Research on Population in Singapore", 1977, 28pp.
61. Michael A.H.B. Walter and Riaz Hassan, "An Island Community in Singapore: A Characterisation of a Marginal Society", 1977, 44pp.
62. Stella R. Quah, "The Unplanned Dimensions of Health Care in Singapore: Traditional Healers and Self Medication", 1977, 22pp.
63. John R. Clammer, "Islam and Capitalism in Southeast Asia", 1978, 22pp.
64. Robert G. Cooper, "Second World First: The Study of Films and the Use of Film in Social Studies", 1978, 20pp.
65. Peter S.J. Chen, "Ethnicity and Fertility: The Case of Singapore", 1978, 25pp.
66. Rolf E. Vente, "Urban Planning and High-Density Living. Some Reflections on their Interrelationship", 1979, 13pp.
67. William S.W. Lim, "The Case for Low-Rise High-Density Living in Singapore", 1979, 13pp.
68. Mak Lau Fong, "Subcommunal Participation and Leadership Cohesiveness of the Chinese in 19th Century Singapore", 1984, 23pp.
69. Eddie C.Y. Kuo and Huey Tsyh Chen, "Towards an Information Society: Changing Occupational Structure in Singapore", 1985, 29pp.
70. Ko Yiu Chung, "Industrial Workers and Class Formation: A Study of Chinese Industrial Workers in North China, 1900-1937", 1986, 31 pp.
71. Geoffrey Benjamin, "Between Isthmus and Islands: Reflection on Malayan Palaeo-Sociology", 1986, 43pp.
72. Habibul H. Khondker, "Is There a Dependency Paradigm?", 1986, 55pp.
73. Mak Lau Fong, "The Locality and Non-Locality Organising Principles: A Technical Report on the Taxonomy of Chinese Voluntary Associations in the 19th Century Straits Settlements", 1986, 33pp.
74. Chua Beng Huat, "Reading Foucault as a Conservative", 1986, 40pp.
75. Vivienne Wee, "Material Dependence and Symbolic Independence: Constructions of Melayu Ethnicity in Island Riau, Indonesia", 1986, 46pp.
76. Habibul Haque Khondker, "Famine Response: The 1984-85 Ethiopian Famine", 1986, 38pp.
77. Allen J. Chun, "Conceptions of Kinship and Kingship in Classical Chou China", 1986, 50pp.
78. V. Selvaratnam, "Ethnicity, Inequality and Higher Education in Peninsular Malaysia: The Sociological Implications", 1987, 44pp.
79. Trevor O Ling, "Buddhism, Confucianism and the Secular State in Singapore", 1987, 42pp.

80. Mak Lau Fong, "The Social Alignment Patterns of the Chinese in 19th-century Penang", 1987, 32pp.
81. Allen J. Chun, "Durkheim Reconsidered: A Critique of Primitive Structuralism", 1987, 30pp.
82. Geoffrey Benjamin, "Process and Structure in Temiar Social Organization", 1987, 46pp.
83. Eddie C.Y. Kuo, "Confucianism and the Chinese Family in Singapore: Continuities and Changes", 1987, 32pp.
84. Tatsuko Takizawa, "Facets of Musical Activities in Singapore", 1987, 35pp.
85. Geoffrey Benjamin, "Notes on the Deep Sociology of Religion", 1987, 37pp.
86. Habibul Haque Khondker, "The World According to Wallerstein", 1987, 48pp.
87. Mak Lau Fong, "Solidarity Models: A Sociological Framework For Comparative Criminal Organization", 1988, 29pp.
88. Geoffrey Benjamin, "Grammar and Polity: The Cultural and Political Background to Standard Malay", 1988, 51pp.
89. Viswanathan Selvaratnam, "Limits to Vocationally-Oriented Education in the Third World", 1988, 36pp.
90. Vivienne Wee, What does 'Chinese' Mean?: An Exploratory Essay, 1988, 41pp.
91. Geoffrey Benjamin, The unseen presence. a theory of the nation-state and its mystifications, 1988, 55pp.
92. Tong Chee Kiong, Perceptions and boundaries: problematics in the assimilation of the Chinese in Thailand, 1988, 30pp.
93. Alan J Chun, Toward a political economy of the sojourning experience: the Chinese in 19th century Malaya, 1988, 39pp.
94. Chua Beng Huat, Public housing policies compared: US, Socialist countries and Singapore, 1988, 41pp.
95. Eddie C. Y. Kuo and Bjorn H. Jernudd, Language management in a multilingual state: the case of planning in Singapore, 1988, 45pp.
96. Ho Kong Chong, The community study: a discussion of the method with modifications for research in Singapore, 1988, 44pp.
97. Tan Ern Ser, Employing organizations and the dynamics of social mobility in Singapore: an analytical framework and empirical analysis, 1988, 43pp.
98. Mak Lau Fong, Singapore Chinese traditional voluntary associations: convergence vs divergence, 1989, 36pp.
99. Tong Chee Kiong, Centripetal authority, differentiated networks: the social organization of Chinese firms in Singapore, 1989, 36pp.
100. Chan Kwok Bun and Ho Kong Chong (eds), Explorations in Asian sociology. 100th special issue, Singapore: Chopmen Publishers 1991, 54pp.
101. Eddie C. Y. Kuo, Ethnicity, polity and economy: a case study of Mandarin trade and the Chinese connection, 1990, 36pp.
102. Chua Beng Huat, Fashion shopping: programs, stages and audience, 1990, 29pp.
103. Georg Stauth, Revolution in spiritless times: an essay on the inquiries of Michel Foucault on the Iranian Revolution, 1991, 54pp.
104. Chua Beng Huat & Eddie C. Y. Kuo, The making of a new nation: cultural construction and national identity in Singapore, 1991, 43pp.
105. Alfred Choi, Policing domestic disturbances: a research review of police response, 1991, 40pp.

106. Vineeta Sinha, Some notes on 'temple'-building and image-worship in Indian religion, in historical perspective, 1991, 50pp.
107. Ho Kong Chong, Studying the city in the new international division of labour, 1991, 43pp.
108. Georg Stauth, Critical theory and pre-Fascist social thought, 1991, 35pp.
109. Zhang Xin-Xiang, A methodological critique of Marx's theory of surplus value, 1991, 37 pp.
110. Lee Siew Peng, Class and noise tolerance: some ruminations, 1991, 39pp.
111. Paulin Tay Straughan, Screening for early detection of cervical cancer: the relationship between social integration and preventive health, 1992, 34pp.
112. Lian Kwen Fee, Stratification in Maori society in the 19th century, 1992, 40pp.
113. Eddie C. Y. Kuo, Confucianism as political discourse in Singapore: the case of an incomplete revitalization movement, 1992, 29pp.
114. Syed Farid Alatas, Some problems of indigenization, 1992, 46pp.
115. Zhang Xin-Xiang, Crime and control: a neo-rational choice approach, 1993, 43pp.
116. Tan Ern Ser, Theorising the dynamics of industrial relations and trade unionism: lessons from the Singapore case, 1993, 31 pp.
117. Roxana Waterson, What to celebrate in the United Nations Year of indigenous Peoples?, 1993, 55pp.
118. Zhang Xin Xiang, Education as a vehicle for social stratificational change: the case of Singapore, 1993, 38pp.
119. James V. Jesudason, Statist democracy and the limits of civil society in Malaysia, 1993, 40pp.
120. Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr, Nouns that sail through history: reified categories and their transcendence in Marx's social theory, 1994, 50pp.
121. Syed Farid Alatas, Post-colonial state: dual functions in the public sphere, 1994, 45pp.
122. Chua Beng Huat, That imagined space: nostalgia for the kampung in Singapore, 1994, 39pp.
123. Habibul H Khondker, Globalization theory: a critical appraisal, 1994, 42pp.
124. Kwok Kian Woon, Social transformation and the problem of social coherence: Chinese Singaporeans at century's end, 1994, 39pp.
125. Chua Beng Huat, Culture, multiracialism and national identity in Singapore, 1995, 36pp.
126. Nirmala Purushotam, Disciplining differences. 'race' in Singapore, 1995, 33pp.
127. Chua Beng Huat and Tan Joo Ean, Singapore: new configuration of a socially stratified culture, 1995, 40pp.
128. Paulin Tay Straughan and Tan Ern Ser, Shiftwerk, job satisfaction, and turnover propensity: nurses in a Singapore hospital, 1996, 26pp.
129. Habibul Haque Khondker, Competing paradigms and conflicting theories in the studies of the development of Asian NICS, 1996, 37pp.
130. Geoffrey Benjamin, Rationalisation and re-enchantment in Malaysia: Temiar religion 1964-1995, 1996, 55pp.
131. Selina Ching Chan, Negotiating Coloniality and Tradition: The Identity of Indigenous Inhabitants in Hong Kong, 1996, 43pp.
132. Geoffrey Benjamin, Affixes, Austronesian and iconicity in Malay, 1997, 31 pp.

133. Chua Beng Huat and Ananda Rahah, Hybridity, Ethnicity and Food in Singapore, 1997, 24 pp.
134. Kay Mohlman, Home-base Workplaces and Workplace Domesticities: A Socio-Spatial Analysis, 1998, 28pp.
135. Paulin Tay Straughan, The Social Contradictions of the Normal Family: Challenges to the Ideology, 1999, 18pp.
136. Vineeta Sinha, Colonial Encounters: Transplanting "Western Medicine"; Ousting "Traditional" Healing? 1999, 42pp.
137. Tong Chee Kiong and Lian Kwen Fee, The Nation State and the Limits to Globalization in Southeast Asia, 1999, 30pp.
138. Chia Hwee Kim Karen, Experiencing Sacred Spaces: The Negotiation of Authenticity by Tourists and Worshippers, 1999, 45pp.
139. Leong Wai Teng, Consuming the Nation: National Day Parades in Singapore, 1999, 16pp
140. Maribeth Erb, What is a Tourist?: Tourists and Other Spirits in the Manggaraian World, 1999, 28pp
141. Syed Farid Alatas and Vineeta Sinha, Teaching Classical Sociological Theory in Singapore: The Context of Eurocentrism, 1999, 34pp.
142. Thomas Menkhoff and Jochen Wirtz, Local Responses to Globalisation-The Case of Singapore, 1999, 34pp.
143. Johannes Han-Yin Chang, China: An Unintended Transformation of Class Stratification, 1999, 32pp.
144. Srilata Ravi, "Antivoyages-Reflections on women travellers' writings", 1999, 18pp.
148. Goh Pei Siong Daniel, Space, Meaning and A "Neighborhood" Charismatic Fundamentalist Church, 1999, 30pp.
146. Ng Tang Nah, The Effects of Science Education on National Economic Growth in The World and Singapore, 1999, 21pp.
147. Md.Mizanur Rahman, The Asian Economic Crisis and Migrant Workers: The Case of Bangladeshi Workers in Singapore, 1999, 33pp.
148. Vineeta Sinha, Socio-Cultural Theory and Colonial Encounters: The Discourse on Indigenizing Anthropology in India, 2000, 38pp.
149. Chua Beng Huat, Taiwan's Present/Singapore's Past Mediated by Hokkien Language, 2000, 19pp.
150. Michael Hill, 'Asian Values' as Reverse Orientalism: The case of Singapore, 2000, 34pp.
151. Hans-Dieter Evers, Epistemic Cultures: Towards a New Sociology on Knowledge, 2000, 16pp.
152. Roxana Waterson, A Toraja Pilgrimage: The Life of Fritz Basiang, 2000, 46pp.
153. Tan Ern Ser, Globalization and National Industrial Relations Systems: Theoretical Implications from the Singapore Case, 2000, 12pp.
154. Thomas Menkhoff and Lena Kay. Worlds Apart? Reflections On The Relationship Between Small Entrepreneurs And External Change Advocates In Singapore, 2000, 22pp.
155. Michael Bourdillon. Children's Right and Children's Labour, 2000, 22pp.

156. Yasser Mattar, *Ethnic Entrepreneurship: Towards an Ecological Perspective*, 2000, 30pp.
157. Alwyn Lim. 'Intelligent Island Discipline: Notes on Culture, Governance, And Subjectivity', 2000, 50pp.
158. Woon-Ping Chin, 'The Mystery Of The Postcolonial Woman', 2001, 20pp.
159. Ryan Bishop. *Representations of Asians in the American Public Imagination: The Problems of Representation as a Problematic*, 2001, 20pp.
160. Maribeth Erb. *Conceptualising Culture in a Global Age: Playing Caci in Manggarai*. 2001, 32pp.
161. Alexius A, Pereira. 'Revitalizing National Competitiveness: The Transnational Aspects of Singapore's Regionalization Strategy (1990-2000),' 2001, 28pp.
162. Vineeta Sinha. *A critical study in concept formation: conceptualizations of 'primitive thought' and 'primitive mentality' in selected works of Franz Boas and Lucien Levy-Bruhl*, 2001, 32pp.
163. Johannes Han-Yin Chang. *Differential Educational Attainment and its impact on Social Stratification: A Symbolic Interactionist Perspective* , 2002, 41pp.
164. Mason C. Hoadley, *Why "You can't go home": The Legacy of Law and Indonesian Public Administration*, 2002, 26 pp.
165. Volker H. Schmidt. *Models of Health Care Rationing*, 2003, 24pp.
166. Volker H. Schmidt and Lim Chee Han. *Organ transplantation in Singapore: History, problems, and policies*, 2003, 27pp.
167. Eric C. Thompson. *Tribal Signifiers and Intersubjectivity in a General Theory of Group Identity*, 2004, 36pp.
168. Noorman Abdullah. *(Re)thinking the Categories of Halal and Haram: Notes on Islamic Food Rules in Singapore*, 2004, 37pp.
169. Shi Fayong. *Social Capital and Collective Resistance in Urban China Neighborhoods: A Community Movement in Shanghai*, 2004, 47pp.
170. Volker H. Schmidt. *Multiple Modernities or Varieties of Modernity?* 2004, 25pp.
171. Habibul Haque Khondker. *Globalization to Glocalization: Evolution of a Sociological Concept*, 2004, 18pp.
172. Syed Farid Alatas. *Ideology and Utopia in the Thought of Syed Shaykh Al-Hady*, 2005, 3 pp.
173. Kelvin E.Y. Low. *Olfaction and the Presentation of Self*, 2005, 29pp.
174. Douglas Farrer. *Deathscapes of the Malay Martial Artist*, 2005, 35pp.
175. Noorman Abdullah. *Exploring Constructions of the 'Drug Problem' in Historical and Contemporary Singapore*, 2005, 38pp.
176. Lim Bee Fong Lisa. *Hegemony, Dominance and Resistance in Singapore: Pulau Ubin As a Case Study*, 2005, 19pp.
177. Volker H. Schmidt. *Varieties of Social Policy: East Asian Welfare Capitalism in Comparative Perspective*, 2005, 23pp.
178. — Liang Yongjia. *Fertility, Kingship and Ethnicity: the Gwer Sa La Festival of the Bai in Southwest China*, 2006, 26pp.
179. Kelvin E.Y. Low. *Olfactive Frames of Remembering: Notes on the Smells of Memories*, 2007, 27pp.

180. Pereira Shane Nicolas. A New Religious Movement in Singapore: Syncretism and Variation in the Sai Baba Movement, 2007, 27pp.
181. Alexius A. Pereira. Explaining the Enduring Comprehensive Developmental State in Singapore: A Class Relations Perspective, 2007, 21pp.
182. Vineeta Sinha. Harriet Martineau-social thinker and methodologist: In danger of being forgotten once again? 2007, 30pp.
183. Vincent Chua. Social Networks and Labour Market Outcomes in the Meritocracy, 2007, 32pp.
184. Sarbeswar Sahoo. Globalization and “the Politics of the Governed”: Redefining Governance in Liberalized India, 2007, 30pp.
185. Noorman Abdullah. Rave encounters and the Meaningfulness of ATS Use: Realms of ‘Alternative’ Possibilities in Singapore, 2007, 31pp.
186. Justin Lee. Conditions for Progressive Research Programs in ‘Qualitative’ Sociology, 2007, 37pp.
187. Gloria Arlini. (Mis)remembering Soe Hok Gie: Transmitting and (re)constructing social memory in turbulent Indonesia, 2008, 24pp.
188. Ho Kong Chong. Meandering beyond the Single Case in Urban Studies, 2008, 21 pp.
189. Yuko Okubo. The Localization of Multicultural Education in Osaka, Japan: With a Focus on the Concept of “Native Speaker”, 2008, 39pp.
190. Wei-Jun Jean Yeung. Days of the Week: Intra-family Childcare Time Distribution, 2009, 39pp.
191. Volker H. Schmidt. Conceptualizing Global Modernity. A Tentative Sketch, 2012, 55pp.
192. Volker H. Schmidt and Tiffany Jordan Chuang May. Educating Global Citizens, 2013, 26pp.
193. Manjusha Nair. Protests and Political Society in China and India, 2013, 38pp.
194. Mike Douglass. Creative Communities versus the Cultural Economy — The Vernacular City as an Alternative to Globopolis in Asia, 2013, 23pp.
195. Manjusha Nair and Eli Friedman. Neither Reform nor Regime Change: Labor Politics in China and India’s Automobile Industries, 2017, 37pp.
196. Roxana Waterson, Vineeta Sinha, and Eric C. Thompson. NUS Anthropology: Three Narratives, 2023, 29pp.
197. Tan Si Ying Nicole. An Ethnographic Study of Anthropologists-in-Training, 2026, 44pp.