

PERCEPTIONS OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS IN CACREP-ACCREDITED
COUNSELING PROGRAMS

A Dissertation

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This dissertation meets the standards for scope and quality of
Texas A&M University–Corpus Christi and is hereby approved

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ABSTRACT

With the increase of international students in American universities, there has also been an increase of international students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs.

However, there is limited information available in the literature concerning specific needs of international students enrolled in counseling programs.

The purpose of the present qualitative study was to explore the lived experiences of international students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs and to identify student perspectives about the ways in which counseling programs and faculty members could facilitate a successful and supportive educational experience. A phenomenological-hermeneutic approach was utilized for this purpose.

Seven international student participants currently enrolled in either masters or doctoral level CACREP-accredited counseling programs across the United States and willing to be interviewed about their experiences as an international student were recruited for this study.

Seven core themes along with their sub-themes emerged through analysis. The seven core themes include: adapting to the foreign land, clinical concerns, academics, multiculturalism and diversity issues, social connectedness, impact of the counselor training program, and the role of counseling faculty and department.

Findings of this study imply that, counseling programs recruiting international students should facilitate a smoother transition for them, by faculty members being aware of their difficulties and by orienting them to the structural, cultural, and academic differences. In addition, counseling faculties' willingness and commitment to reach out to these students may assist them to share concerns and seek support. Recognizing issues concerning social connectedness and language limitations, by providing necessary resources to deal

with such concerns may prove beneficial to this student population. Counselor educators must consider expanding multicultural coursework beyond western nomenclature for better understanding of the material by these students. Counselor educators and supervisors may also recognize clinical training difficulties due to language limitations and cultural differences and perhaps monitor the clientele with whom they work. Finally, this research suggests the importance for CACREP and CACREP-accredited programs to work towards ensuring the importance of attending an accredited program in the United States is better understood internationally, especially for student who wish to stay in U.S. post their degree.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this dissertation work to all my family members and friends. A special thanks to my husband Aneesh Bhalerao, who always believes in me and my ability to succeed in life. Thank you so much for always being there and not giving up on me. I will always appreciate your love and support in my life.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Background of the Problem

Students pursue international education in order to explore new cultures, develop new ways of thinking and behaving, enhance cross-cultural competence, develop new perspectives, and improve self-confidence as a result of an independent life experience in a different environment (Sherry, Thomas, & Chui, 2009). International students represent a culturally heterogeneous group and contribute to the growing diversity of the United States (U.S.) colleges and universities (Yakunina, Weigold, & McCarthy, 2011). “They enrich the campus community and expand our intellectual, ethnic, and cultural experiences” (Carr, Koyama, & Thiagarajan, 2003, p.131). Although international students demonstrate perseverance in adapting to U.S. lifestyle, these students face unique challenges that demand attention (Carr et al., 2003; Sherry et al., 2009).

Over the past few decades, American universities have seen a rise in the number of international students from across the world (Ng, 2006). According to the Institute of International Education (IIE) (2011) annual report, the number of international students during the 2010-2011 academic years increased to a record high of 723,277, indicating a 32% increase since the year 2000-2001. “Of the million plus international students studying worldwide, half of them are studying in the United States” (Tochkov, Levine, & Sanaka, 2010, p. 2). The largest population of international students in the United States is comprised of Asian students, with China, India, and South Korea being the top three countries sending students. According to IIE (2011) these three countries contribute nearly “half (46%) of the total international enrollment in U.S. higher education” with Canada, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, and Japan each representing approximately 3% to 4% of the total international student population (para. 8).

With the increase in the number of international students across academic fields, there has been considerable growth noticed in programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). For example, in a study conducted with international students in CACREP-accredited programs, Ng (2006) found that international students were enrolled in at-least 41% of the programs surveyed during spring 2004 and at-least 49% of the programs surveyed had international students enrolled during the most recent three years. This indicated that international students were represented in half of the CACREP programs.

A considerable amount of research described various adjustment difficulties faced by international students when transitioning from their home countries to a new environment (Tochkov et al., 2010). A number of studies using quantitative and qualitative methodologies investigated the difficulties encountered by international students. The studies revealed an array of stressors such as homesickness, culture shock, accommodation problems, social isolation, English language proficiency, unfamiliar academic teaching styles and assignments, financial difficulties, and psychological stress (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Additional challenges included racial discrimination, cultural misunderstandings, and acculturation stressors (Sodowsky & Plake, 1992; Tochkov et al., 2010). Adjustments made by international students become multifaceted and complicated due to the difficulty of staying away from one's home country (Jacob, 2001).

Sodowsky and Plake (1992) highlighted that international students are a diverse group with many within-group differences that may also contribute to their unique as well as common issues. Adjustment concerns for international students are divided into three areas: (a) common difficulties that are shared by students of color and international

students, (b) issues common to most international students, and (c) those issues unique to international students based on country of origin (Jacob, 2001). Enrollment of international students in nearly 49% percent of CACREP-accredited programs (Ng, 2006) has augmented the need for awareness in counseling and counselor education programs about the difficulties faced by this vulnerable student population. Counselor educators should be sensitive to and aware of the needs of international student population in order to enable these students to have a healthy learning experience. Counselor educators could contribute by designing and implementing academic and social support programs to help international students adapt to the counseling profession (Jacob, 2001). Although the literature explicitly addresses the varied challenges encountered by international students, there is limited attention given to the specific needs of international students enrolled in counseling programs. This lack of information merits consideration.

Statement of the Problem

International students come from different cultural and educational backgrounds, with varied levels of acculturation and experience stressors (Lo, 2010). Cultural differences and the educational system specifically contribute to the stress experienced by international students (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). An increase of international students in CACREP programs, diversity within the counseling profession, and potential stressors have magnified the need for providing support for international students to help them with challenges in their personal and professional life. However, there is a dearth of information concerning specific needs of international counseling students. The problem under investigation looks at the specific experiences of international students enrolled in counseling programs and their perspectives on how counseling programs or faculty members could facilitate a successful and supportive educational experience.

Purpose of the Study

With the lack of literature providing information on international counseling student experiences or support available for them, the need for research in this area is evident. As the number of international students enrolled in U. S. higher education has increased, so has the number of international students in counselor preparation programs. The purpose of this study was to (a) explore the lived experiences of international students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs and (b) describe international students' perspectives about ways counseling programs and faculty members can facilitate a successful and supportive educational experience.

Research Questions

The following grand tour questions were used to guide this investigation:

1. What are the lived experiences of international students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs?
2. How can counseling programs support international students enrolled in graduate counseling programs?

Significance of the Study

Students from across the world come to the United States for their studies due to minimal academic opportunities offered in their home countries. Homesickness, language barriers, unfamiliar surroundings, depression, anxiety, and role expectations are common stressors that lead to psychological and mental stress by international students (Tochkov et al., 2010). Stress is a significant component related to wellness (Myers & Sweeney, 2005). The American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Council of Accreditation of Counseling and Related Programs (CACREP) emphasize the importance of counselor wellness (ACA, 2005; CACREP, 2001). Stress experienced by international counseling

students may be exacerbated due to unique barriers and challenges. In order to assist international students in counseling programs, an understanding of their experiences as well as their ideas about guidance and support that would be helpful to them is necessary.

Investigations aimed at understanding international counseling students, may increase awareness of the counseling profession globally. Globalization and the expansion of the counseling profession may benefit society from theoretical, practical, and cultural perspectives (Freeman, 2009). Exploring ideas about barriers experienced by international counseling students and their perceptions of what will help them in successfully completing the programs could provide crucial information for developing models to work with diverse clients as well as with these students.

Investigating international students' perspectives on different types of support that have or could help them during their counseling programs may facilitate international students' ability to cope with the challenges of living in a new country and may enhance student completion. Being informed about what helps international counseling students cope could enable counselor educators to work more effectively with them and contribute to their overall counselor competence. Competently trained international counseling students could not only serve as effective counselors in the United States, but also in their home countries (Ng, 2006). Elements of the research outcomes may also be used to address issues of international students across other academic domains.

This study may contribute to the available literature about training international students, particularly those in counseling, and may contribute to international collaboration and research. Counselor educators, practitioners, researchers, and others associated with mental health professions may find this study useful.

Population and Sample

International students who were currently enrolled in either masters or doctoral level CACREP-accredited counseling programs across the United States and willing to be interviewed about their experiences as an international counseling student were recruited for this study. Research participants were obtained by two methods. First, the researcher sent out an email request to participate in the study on CESNET, a listserv that is subscribed to by faculty members and doctoral students in accredited counseling programs and which is also regularly used to solicit research participants. The second method included sending an e-mail request to department chairs of CACREP-accredited counseling programs, who were asked to circulate the research invitation to the e-mail accounts of international students who were enrolled in their counseling program or to post the invitation on their departmental website or listserv.

The e-mail invitation contained a brief introduction to the study, a SurveyMonkey™ link that would guide the participants to the demographic survey, and an informed consent to participate which was built into the SurveyMonkey™. Students who chose to participate provided contact information as part of the information requested on SurveyMonkey™. Return of the demographic survey and contact information indicated their consent to participate.

Prospective participants were recruited for the interview based on their responses to the demographic survey that served as inclusion/exclusion criteria. In order to be qualified for the interview potential participants had to meet the following inclusion criteria: (a) the participants must possess an F-1 Student Visa or must self-identify as an international student, (b) the participants must not have spent more than five years in the United States, (c) the participant must be at-least 21 years of age, (d) the participants

must be willing to be interviewed and provide consent by completing and submitting the demographic questionnaire and, (e) the participants must have the ability to both read English and communicate orally in English.

Qualitative Approach

The intent of the qualitative approach is to understand a social situation, event, role, group, or interaction. Creswell (1998) suggests that a qualitative approach is particularly well suited for research when the nature of the research question is *how* and *what* instead of *why*. It is also implemented when, “the variables cannot be easily identified, theories are not available to explain the behavior of participants or their population of study, and theories need to be developed” (p.17). Marshall and Rossman’s (1989) work suggests that the researcher enters the informants’ world through ongoing interaction and with intent to seek their perspectives and meanings (as cited in Creswell, 2009). Thus a qualitative investigation is appropriate to explore international students’ perspective on their experiences as an international student in counseling programs.

This research used two related analytical viewpoints to explore participants’ experiences of being international counseling students and to gain their perspectives on possible ways counseling programs could provide supportive educational experience. A phenomenological approach was used in an attempt to understand the lived experiences of a phenomenon (Patton, 2002), while a heuristic qualitative approach explores human experiences in understanding the essence of the phenomenon with systematic observation of self and others (Patton, 2002). “Heuristic inquiry does not exclude the researcher from the study; rather, it incorporates the researcher’s experiences with the experiences of co-researchers (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010, p.1572). As both the researcher and an international student in counseling, I explored my personal experiences as an

international student along with experiences of other international students presently enrolled in counseling programs.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from the Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board (IRB) on July 23rd, 2012, IRB# 52-12. The IRB research acceptance letter is included in Appendix A. Protection measures were employed to guard the participants from any potential risk. These measures included participant's choice to either agree or disagree to participate. When conducting interviews, the researcher created a non-judgmental and a non-threatening environment. The researcher obtained online and verbal consent, reminded the participants that they had control of the content and the length of the interview, and informed them that they had the right to discontinue the interview(s) at any given time.

All recorded information and transcripts were stored in locked filing cabinet and only the researcher had access to it. Identifying information of the participants was omitted and replaced by pseudonyms chosen by the researcher to ensure confidentiality. Each participant's demographic information and Skype or audio recordings were protected in the researcher's computer with a private password. Any recordings will be kept for duration of three years from the time of data collection and then erased.

Data Collection and Analysis

Data collection was conducted in three phases. In the initial recruitment, demographic data were collected from international students who were willing to participate in the research study. Willingness to participate was demonstrated by responding to the e-mail invitation received in their personal e-mail account, via CESNET, or on the departmental university website or listserv. The e-mail invitation

contained an introduction to the research study, a link to a brief demographic survey via SurveyMonkey™, and an informed consent, which was built into the SurveyMonkey™ link. Consent to contact for interviewing and audiotaping was obtained via agreement to participate on SurveyMonkey™ and through responses to the demographic survey, which included contact information to be provided by potential participants. Those who did not wish to be contacted or to participate did not respond.

After they had provided demographic information and consent to contact, prospective participants were identified based on predetermined inclusion criteria outlined above. Participants meeting the criteria constituted the pool of potential participants. The researcher then contacted potential participants to schedule a time for an interview. During the initial direct contact, the principal researcher reviewed the purpose of the study, sought consent, and responded to any questions about the research. If potential participants chose not to participate at this point, the interview was not scheduled and the demographic information provided by that individual was destroyed. Skype and telephonic interviews based on student proximity and the availability of electronic means were used. The interview began with a broad, open-ended question regarding participants' experiences in the counseling program as an international student. A semi-structured interview guide was utilized to provide consistency during the interviews. This strategy was implemented to create a balance between a highly structured interview style on one hand and a conversational interview on the other hand (Patton, 2002). The initial interview was anticipated to last approximately from one to two hours, with participants controlling the length of the interview. The interview was audio taped and then transcribed verbatim for analysis purposes.

Once interviews were transcribed, I delivered a copy of the transcript via e-mail to the participants. Each participant had the opportunity to review and clarify or correct any information in the transcript, thus providing member checking as one method of demonstrating trustworthiness of the study. Once the participants verified transcripts, I conducted data analysis, reading line by line to identify units of meaning. These units were coded into initial themes that were eventually analyzed into final themes and subthemes. The next phase of data collection was reviewing and discussing final themes and sub-themes with individual participants. The final themes along with their sub-themes in a tabular format were sent to the participants electronically. Participants were asked to review the themes thoroughly and provide necessary feedback.

The researcher's journal was another source of data collection, recording my personal experiences as an international student, and the challenges encountered throughout my personal and professional journey. A reflective journal was also maintained to record thoughts and reflections about the research process. This enabled me to address any preconceived notions or biases related to the study.

Data Analysis

Analysis of data continued throughout the research process. Information from the demographic survey, interview data, the researcher's journal, and the researcher's reflective journal were utilized for analysis purposes. Details from participants' demographic surveys were compiled in a Microsoft® Excel document to help organize the data and select participants suitable for the study. I transcribed audiotaped interviews verbatim and reviewed the transcription against the audiotape to ensure accuracy of the data. Data immersion occurred by listening to the audiotapes, re-reading transcriptions, studying the journal entries, and reflecting on the field notes. Heuristic inquiry

methodology was considered for analysis purposes (Patton, 2002) and initial coding to identify units of meaning, in-vivo coding to capture participants' words, and focused coding to establish final codes were used (Saldana, 2009). "Heuristic research epitomizes the phenomenological emphasis on meanings and knowing through personal experience" (Patton, 2002, p. 109).

Initial coding involved line-by-line reviewing of the transcript and identifying of units of meaning. Words and phrases were highlighted, and notes were made in the margins of transcripts. From the initial notes, 14 initial codes were identified and additional codes were identified to describe the units of meaning that did not fit into one of the 14 initial codes, resulting in 20 codes. All the codes and units of meaning were reviewed again and initial codes that best fit together were grouped under broad overarching categories, reducing it to 12 categories. The second cycle coding procedure utilized focused coding (Saldana, 2009). The data were set aside again at this point thus encouraging new perspectives to the data (Moustakas, 1990). On arriving at 12 salient categories, the researcher revisited the data once again and attempted to identify core categories' that further grouped the 12 categories within them. On reviewing the material again and using focused coding methodology the researcher further categorized the 12 codes into 7 broad core themes and 14 sub-themes that resulted as the findings of this study.

Trustworthiness

The researcher to ensure the trustworthiness of the current study implemented several measures. Credibility was maintained through a systematic process of data analysis, triangulation of data, and member checking. Triangulation of sources such as interview data, observations, field and reflective notes, and the researcher's journal were

used to confirm that the data were accurately collected. Member checking took place when participants were provided with transcripts of their interviews and presented with the final findings in order to elicit corrections and feedback and assure fidelity to their voices. An open-ended interview format that provided thick description of the participants in the form of quotations and contextual information was utilized to allow the readers to make judgments about the usefulness and transferability of the research (Creswell, 1998). To guard confirmability within the study, I maintained a reflective journal that recorded an open and honest narrative about my biases and prejudices that may reverberate well with the readers and further establish trustworthiness.

Basic Assumptions

I have made several assumptions about the participants and the problem being addressed. One basic assumption was that the participants would openly and honestly share their experiences, obstacles, and expectations. I also assumed that international counseling students would have some experiences that differed from those of international students in general. Finally, I assumed participants would provide honest feedback in the member checking process.

Limitations of the Study

Although several methods were implemented to conduct sound research, there are a few limitations within this study. First, this study was restricted to only international counseling students enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. Second, the research was conducted in the English; however, this language was not the researcher's or the co-researchers' primary language. Limitations with English fluency may have contributed to the way in which participants perceived and responded to the interview questions and the way the results may have been interpreted. Third, cultural differences

between the researcher and her co-researchers were evident in this study and may have influenced the findings of this research. Lastly, participants were from different cultures and countries; this study did not address or attempt to address particular issues related to specific cultural or ethnic groups.

Organization of Remaining Chapters

The study intended to explore the lived experiences of international counseling students and identify methods that may assist them with a supportive educational experience. Chapter one serves as an outline and provides a theoretical background for the study. Chapter two reviews the literature in depth and identifies research related to the problem being investigated. Chapter three discusses the research methods and procedures employed in this study. The results emerged from the data analysis are presented in chapter four. Chapter five contains a summary of the findings, discussion of the core themes related to literature, limitations, implications for counselors and counselor educators, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter Two: Review of Literature

Introduction

This chapter provides an overview of the literature related to international students and their experiences of seeking education in a foreign country. The first segment provides a historical overview and explores the reasons for recruiting international students in American universities. The second segment discusses the unique challenges faced by international students. The third section focuses on the under-utilization of counseling services by international students and emphasizes methods to encourage them to use counseling services. The fourth section provides recommendations for improving international students' experiences. In the last section, intersection of the previous domains leads to the research questions that delineated this study.

Historical Overview and International Student Recruitment

Post World War II, “global goodwill, friendship, and tolerance through cross-cultural education” (Redwood & Cindyann, 2010, pg. 2) were promoted with a goal to increase international students in the United States. Over the past two decades, the increase in globalization and internalization has induced cross border student mobility around the world. International activities of universities have allowed students to engage in study abroad programs, learn about other cultures, and pursue higher education in countries where local institutions in their home countries cannot meet the educational demands (Attach & Knight, 2007). Globalization has resulted in the arrival of foreign students in countries such as the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Of these countries, the United States hosts the highest number of international students in the world (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007).

Globalization through academic trends has resulted in an increased presence of international students worldwide. The presence of international students in academic classrooms benefits universities in many ways. First, global trends facilitate interconnectedness across regions worldwide and enhance the ethnic diversity of college and university campuses. Second, exchange of knowledge improves the chances of international relations and world peace. Third, the presence of international students encourages intercultural learning and increases understanding of diversity and global issues. Lastly, recruiting international students contributes to economic growth of the host nation (Carr et al., 2003; Redwood & Cindyann, 2010; Pedersen, 1991). Thus encouraging international students to seek foreign education has contributed to an understanding of ethical heritage, linguistic backgrounds, and cultural diversity, as well as to economic advantages to American universities.

Defining International Students

Students pursuing foreign education are often denoted as foreign students or international students in the literature. The argument about the term foreign is that it has a negative connotation and the word international does not (Pedersen, 1991). For the purpose of this study the term international students is used and is defined as “students who are pursuing a degree in [the] host nation, but are not citizens or permanent residents of that particular country” (Tran, 2011, pg. 80). Most international students, unlike other ethnic minorities, refugees, or recent immigrants, plan to return to their home countries eventually, and are in the United States only temporarily (Mori, 2000). “They are thus people in transition who choose to live in a foreign academic setting to realize their educational objectives” (Mori, 2000, p. 137).

Studying abroad has now become a common practice typically for students who would like to seek intercultural understanding, learn a new language, or gain a foreign degree (Andrade, 2006). Students seek foreign education to gain cross-cultural knowledge, enhance their self-esteem, develop new outlooks, and gain experience that will help them grow personally and professionally (Sherry et al., 2010). Some international students may originate from large cosmopolitan cities and thus are aware of western cultural norms, ideas, or value systems. Others may come from rural, close-knit families with interdependent value systems, and are unaware of western nomenclature and structural underpinnings (Yakunina et al., 2011). Attempts to adapt to a new academic and cultural setting increase a range of adjustment issues that may interfere with international students' academic success and overall experience (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Universities that do not consider international students' need for a healthy academic experience "may leave these students feeling disappointed, unfulfilled, and even exploited" (Sherry et al., 2010, p. 34).

International Students in the United States

International students have essentially become the largest service export industry in the United States (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011) and are a growing population in American universities. According to the current statistics from the IIE, international students represent 723,277 students, indicating a 32 % increase since the year 2000-2001. China, India, South Korea, Canada, Taiwan, Saudi Arabia, and Japan are among the top 25 nations sending students to the United States.

The main three fields of study among international students seeking U.S. education are business and management (21.5%), engineering (18.7%), and math and computer science (8.9%) (IIE, 2011). However, Ng (2006) conducted a descriptive study

on the presence of international students in counseling programs accredited by CACREP. He found that international students were enrolled in at-least 41% of the counseling programs surveyed during spring 2004 and at-least 49% of the programs surveyed had international students enrolled during the preceding three years. The statistical data indicate that with the ever-increasing international students attending universities in the United States, there has also been an increase in the number of international students in graduate counseling programs (Reid & Dixon, 2012).

International students' representation in counseling programs enhances the growth and development of the counseling profession and particularly contributes to the profession's internationalization movement (Ng, 2006). "The presence of counselors from other nations may enhance immigrant and international clients' access to mental health services in the U.S." (Ng, 2006, p.23). While international counseling students may contribute significantly to the overall development of the counseling profession, limited research focuses on providing them with a facilitative and supportive educational experience.

Unique Challenges Faced by International Students

When coming to the United States to study, international students are met with an unfamiliar social, structural, and educational environment. Consequently, the adjustment difficulties faced by them are unique and are not shared by their U.S.-born counterparts (Olivas & Li, 2006). A substantial amount of research has describes various challenges faced by international students when transitioning from their home country to a new environment (Tochkov et al., 2010). A number of studies using both quantitative and qualitative methodologies have investigated multifaceted difficulties encountered by

international students (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Sherry et al., 2010; Yeh & Inose, 2003; Sodowsky & Plake, 1992).

Initial Transition

Previous research exploring challenges of international students has revealed higher adjustment difficulties during the initial period after arrival. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) conducted a study to examine the adjustment needs of international students within academic and social communities. They found that students were more in need during their initial transition after arrival to the United States and experienced a number of challenges in their attempt to adjust. Students viewed acquiring a social security number, getting a driver's license, registering for classes, and learning to use transportation system as initial transition difficulties. Using a qualitative approach, Khawaja and Stallman (2011) studied the challenges faced by international students along with coping strategies that promoted their personal resilience and advice for future international students. Participants in this study were asked to comment on their experiences during the initial period after arrival. As in Poyrazli and Grahame's (2007) study, participants reported the initial period of first few days, weeks, and months to be the most difficult. The interviewees discussed feeling homesick, not being aware of accommodation rules and regulations, lacking information about food outlets, and dealing with transportation difficulties as initial transition adjustments. Participants also expressed adjustment difficulties in finding ways to cope in an independent/individualistic society and lacked awareness about where to seek information on daily matters.

During this transition phase, a language barrier may also impact an international student's ability to adjust (Yeh & Inose, 2003). International students' discomfort with

speaking English may limit their interaction with the community members who could help to fulfill their initial requirements (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Hechanova - Alampay, Beehr, Charistiansen, and Van Horn (2002) emphasized that the initial transition for students with higher levels of self-confidence may differ as they may experience reduced levels of stress and have better adjustment ability. In addition, married students who come with families may experience stressors such as difficulty finding a school for children or helping a spouse find a course in English as a second language (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Thus the initial period is a critical phase, where an individual from a foreign country makes attempts to adapt to the host country with minimal resources.

English Language Proficiency

“A key variable that interrelates with many stressors in educational and socio-cultural domain is second language anxiety” (Chen, 1999, p. 51). In studying the major concerns of international students Pedersen (1991) found that language difficulty was at the top of the list. Yeh and Inose (2003) explored how age, gender, self-reported English language fluency, social connectedness, and social support satisfaction are predictors of acculturative stress among 369 international students. Consistent with Pedersen’s (1991) earlier findings, they found that English language proficiency may be the single greatest barrier experienced by international students because it keeps them from succeeding academically and also impacts their ability to engage in social interactions. A qualitative study conducted by Sherry et al. (2010) examined the experiences of international students, who comprise 10% of the population, at the University of Toledo. The respondents of this study also highlighted language barriers; however, the emphasis was placed more on spoken language barriers rather than written language problems.

In order to deal with language limitations of international students, many graduate programs, along with graduate counseling programs, have attempted to address this issue in the admission screening process. “Students are required to take the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) to assess their English proficiency and there is a minimum score that students must achieve to be eligible for many educational programs” (Reid & Dixon, 2012, p. 31). Despite these provisions, international students struggle with English. Reid and Dixon (2012) assert although one may understand English in a formal context, it may be challenging to understand slang terminologies or English in a casual conversational style for non-native English speakers. In addition, Pedersen (1991) suggested that TOEFL is not an accurate measure for oral comprehension and communication as it is for reading skills; thus, acquiring a minimum score on the TOEFL is not an accurate predictor that guarantees sufficient English competency for international students to succeed in American universities.

Academic and Employment Hurdles

Apart from linguistic difficulties, international students also experience challenges in academic domain. Khawaja and Stallman (2011) identified academic challenges such as unfamiliar teaching styles, interacting with professors, written assignments, and group work that often impeded the academic growth of international students. English proficiency often is seen as a significant challenge that may influence academic adjustment and hinder confidence. Limitations with language obstruct international students’ ability to comprehend the subject matter in classrooms and impede them from performing well on their exams (Lin & Yi, 1997).

Foreign students who choose to be teaching assistants encounter barriers in teaching as they are unaware of the American accent, teaching style, testing, grading

system, and the culture of the university (Lin & Yi, 1997). In addition, Pedersen (1991) stressed that even though teaching assistants maybe experts in their fields, the non-American teaching methods and foreign accents often makes it difficult for them to gain trust, acceptance, and respect from U.S. students.

Many international students also experience intense financial pressure while in school. Due to their student visa status, international students are expected to assume full-time student status, causing them to pay heavy out of state tuition (Lin & Yi, 1997; Sherry et al., 2010). Only a limited number of students may have scholarships or assistantships depending on the university or program in which they are enrolled. Due to heavy tuition fees and dependency on family funds, many international students seek part-time employment while going to school. However, securing employment often comes with multiple unexpected hurdles such as lack of U.S. degree or distant job locations that cause difficulties with transportation (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011).

Sociocultural Factors

Social isolation. “Moving to a new country for the first time, international students experience a profound sense of social loss” (Hayes & Lin, 1994, p.8). With different cultural backgrounds and limitations in English, they experience difficulty in making new friends and developing a social support system (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). In the study done by Khawaja and Stallman (2011), results revealed high levels of social isolation and loneliness, particularly with students who did not have relatives or acquaintances in the host nation. Results also indicated that busy lifestyle, already existing networks of domestic students, and personality traits such as being shy, modest, or passive limited international students from forming social relationships with domestic students. Students also reported that their relations with domestic students often seemed

superficial. While they could seek help and interact about coursework, instances of harassment and discrimination were present, thus increasing social isolation. Difficulty in understanding accents and comprehending language compelled international students to avoid interactions with domestic students, thus further increasing isolation. In addition, Sodowsky and Plake (1992) highlighted that international students are diverse and experience many within-group differences. Within-group differences among international students may also limit social bonding and reinforce the sense of helplessness. Social isolation is thus seen as a major factor that may hinder international students' overall well being while living in the United States.

Cultural factors. Culture shock is a form of anxiety commonly experienced by international students. It is defined as an anxiety resulting from disorientation encountered upon entering a new culture (Schumann, 1986). International students often experience culture shock due to differences in the types of beliefs and values between them and the residents of the host country. Often these differences inhibit socialization and communication amongst international and domestic students (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). When there are differences in culture, issues can arise as a result of misunderstandings based on those differences and can make it difficult to adapt to a new environment (Sherry et al., 2010).

International students migrating from Asian countries, for example, follow a collectivistic culture that tends to place high value on team effort or collectivity (Lin & Yi, 1997). In contrast, in the American mainstream culture there is a clear demarcation between the self and the other that highly values independence (Markus & Kitayama, 1991). Hence, when students from collectivistic cultures prioritize close relationships they may find it difficult to interact with students from individualistic cultures that place

importance on aspects of individualism such as independence, assertiveness, and self-reliance (Cross, 1995). Subsequently, many international students perceive friendships in western culture to be superficial than in their home countries (Cross, 1995; Mori, 2000), which may contribute to social isolation.

Racial discrimination and prejudice. In addition to other concerns faced by international students in the host country, racial discrimination and prejudice (Lin & Yi, 1997) are also a significant problem. Pedersen (1991) emphasized that racism is highly visible in social institutions such as colleges and universities in the United States. Since international students are accustomed to being members of the majority population in their home country, they are often surprised when they face racial discrimination in the United States. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) found that “students of color (i.e. Asian, Hispanic, and Middle Eastern) experienced different forms of discrimination primarily outside campus” (p.38). In addition, racial prejudice disrupts healthy acculturation process of international students, leading to low self-esteem, and self-confidence in their overall adjustment ability (Chen, 1999). Such experiences may derail their well being and further affect their academic and social lives.

Psychological Stressors

Psychological stressors such as academic demands, lack of support systems, and homesickness may lead to social isolation and could have an adverse effect on the psychological well-being of international students (Tochkov et al., 2010; Lin & Yi, 1997). Depression, anxiety, lack of motivation, stress, and psychosomatic complaints such as sleeplessness, loss of appetite, fatigue, stomachache, or headache often stem from various psychological stressors. Homesickness is a major stressor, particularly in international students. Tochkov et al. (2010) studied homesickness in a sample of

international students from India attending U.S. universities and compared it to a control group of American students. They found that homesickness was significantly more prevalent in the Indian sample than American freshman. Anxiety and depression were positively correlated to homesickness for Indian students. Students also feel homesick for their ethnic cuisine and worry about their families in their home country (Lin & Yi, 1997). The period of homesickness leads to painful feelings of loneliness that may often cause a profound sense of helplessness and hopelessness indicative of depression (Mori, 2000).

Students who hold unrealistic expectations about their abilities and their quality of life in the United States may experience disappointment in the face of reality (Mori, 2000). International students who fail to obtain their expected grades show decline in their confidence and self-esteem (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Poor grades may contribute to a sense of inferiority in international students, particularly if they have been highly successful in their home countries (Mori, 2000). Families may hold high expectations of students that limit students from sharing their challenges or problems with families (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Olivas & Li, 2006). In addition, international students may experience frustration due to the transitory nature of their status in America and the uncertainty of their future (Mori, 2000).

Given the evidence of demands for various adjustments, international students are at a greater risk for experiencing psychological problems than students in general (Mori, 2000). Despite this fact, this population underuses mental health services. A number of researchers have explored reasons for under-utilization of college counseling services by international students.

Under-utilization of College Counseling Services

Despite the varied challenges experienced by international students (Pedersen, 1991) and the urgent need for psychological assistance, Bradley et al., in their study assert that mental health services are significantly underused by this population (as cited in Mori, 2000). For example, a study conducted by Hyun, Quinn, Madon, and Lustig (2007) “examined the prevalence of mental health needs in international graduate, their knowledge of mental health services, and their use of on-campus and off-campus counseling services” (p.109). The results revealed that 44% of international graduate students experienced stress-related problems that significantly affected their well-being. International students are less likely to use mental health services than domestic students. Students with a functional relationship with their advisor reported using minimal counseling services while students with low financial confidence reported using counseling services.

Critical cultural differences in basic beliefs about mental health may determine international students’ use of mental health services (Mori, 2000). Carr et al. (2003) posit that more than half of international students come from Asia with minimal belief in seeking college-counseling services. In addition, Hyun et al. (2007) highlighted that Asian international students were significantly less likely to use counseling services than were African, Mexican, and other ethnic groups of international students. Asian students may under use college counseling services as American counseling is grounded in western values (Carr et al., 2003). In addition, Asian students specifically view counseling as shameful and embarrassing due to the stigma attached to emotional expression in their societies. The collectivistic society places emphasis on privacy, which

may prevent Asian students from seeking help from outsiders and non-family members (Carr et al., 2003).

Other factors such as lack of English language proficiency, financial concerns associated with counseling services, lack of awareness of the available services, and perceptions of counseling services to be exclusively for American students often hinders international students from seeking counseling services (Carr et al., 2003; Mori, 2000; Hyun et al., 2007; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). International students often seek help for somatic complaints such as headaches, stomachaches, indigestion, weight loss, fatigue, or sleep problems. However, Carr et al. (2003) suggest that such somatic complaints are metaphors for psychological issues that lead to organic processes. Lastly, lack of culturally knowledgeable and sensitive counselors is seen as an important obstacle for international students intending to seek counseling services (Mori, 2000).

Encouraging International Students to Utilize Counseling Services

International students have outlined various factors above addressing the under-utilization of counseling services. To help international students more effectively address their stressors, counseling services at universities must be more proactive in reaching out to these students and also be more culturally relevant (Chen, 1999). Due to lack of initiation in counseling services by international students, counselors need to increase their visibility and accessibility. Advertising through brochures, campus newspapers, orientation programs, English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, networking with medical professionals, and providing introductory videotapes of counseling centers may help international students feel welcome to seek counseling services (Mori, 2000). Universities may also translate flyers in the language most common to the international students in specific universities to help in the recruitment process (Dipeolu, Kang, &

Cooper, 2007). In addition, increasing diverse counseling staff including bi-cultural and bilingual personnel may encourage international students to seek counseling services (Mori, 2000).

Importance of effective counseling strategies. Counselors working with international students must possess willingness, openness, and cross-cultural competence to cultivate a constructive helping relationship (Chen, 1999). Many international students are comfortable with hierarchical relationships and hold expectations of counselors being the expert or authority, so counselors may have to implement an active, directive, and formal role of a teacher during the initial stage of counseling. An appropriate balance, which encourages client disclosure and avoids client dependency, may be crucial when working with international students (Mori, 2000).

Dipeolu et al. (2007) asserts that support group treatment offers more advantages than individual counseling. A support group system enables students to discuss adjustment concerns, promotes socialization, and diminishes concerns with English fluency, thus encouraging a non-evaluative environment (Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991). Group counseling, in short, may instill hope, impart information, make students feel useful, assist them in developing social skills, provide a sense of cohesiveness, and modify students' feelings of being alone (Carr et al., 2003). Despite the promise of international student groups, designing groups that are culturally sensitive and recruiting students to groups may be challenging (Mori, 2000).

Yakunina et al. (2011) suggested counseling groups as a treatment modality for addressing international student concerns. Practical considerations such as group type, group locations, frequency, duration, group facilitators, and recruiting strategies must be considered when forming the group. In addition, leaders of the group need to examine

their own cultural characteristics and theoretical orientation, and select appropriate interventions suitable for the group (Dipeolu et al., 2007; Yakunina et al., 2011). Ethical considerations such as informed consent as concepts of privacy and confidentiality vary across cultural backgrounds (Carr et al., 2003; Dipeolu et al., 2007).

Issues of dual relationships should also be addressed when forming groups due to the cohesive nature of these communities (Carr et al., 2003; Yakunina et al., 2011). Given the diversity among international students, it is likely that even students from the same country of origin may differ in their religious beliefs, moral values, and cultural backgrounds (Yakunina et al., 2011). Thus, exploring cultural differences, defining cultural identities, considering preferences for group leadership, increasing multicultural awareness, and respect would be essential components in facilitating group counseling with international students (Yakunina et al., 2011).

It is clear that international students across academic domains experience unique challenges. Despite the challenges faced, international students enrich the community by expanding intellectual, ethnic, and cultural experiences for themselves and for domestic students. They demonstrate perseverance and resiliency in adjusting to U.S. campuses (Carr et al., 2003). With international students facing various adjustment issues due to cultural and structural differences of the host country, it becomes crucial for universities and counseling services to focus on this population and provide effective support. Provision of support and counseling services would facilitate healthy academic experiences for these students.

Improving International Student Experiences

With the growing number of international students in American universities, several studies have been conducted that identify strategies or interventions that may help

international students experience a healthy academic and social lifestyle. Specific interventions for international students to cope with the stressors of American lifestyle, along with suggestions for universities recruiting international student population are presented.

Recommendations for Students

Khawaja and Stallman (2011) explored strategies international students used to help them better cope with the challenges of living in Australia and to improve adjustment. Participants in this study suggested the need to become independent prior to departure or immediately after arrival. Living independently before departure would allow students to adapt quickly to the new environments. They also emphasized the importance of learning how to cook, as it would enable students to prepare inexpensive meals consistent with personal taste.

Limited English proficiency interferes with international students' abilities to adjust to social and academic environments (Chen, 1999). Khawaja and Stallman (2011) suggested that students learn and master the English language before leaving their country of origin. International students may also take advantage of the university writing centers and other language institutes across the country to further enhance their writing skills (Sherry et al., 2010). Further recommendations included guiding international students to identify interests, hobbies, and activities enjoyed by local students to initiate conversations with domestic students. Joining clubs or organizations and sharing apartments with local students were considered possible ways to develop links with the locals (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011).

Recommendations for Universities

International students face concerns with housing and transportation following their arrival to a new country. As it is in the long-term interest of universities to attract and retain international students, Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) highlighted the need for universities to consider long-term planning regarding housing problems. In addition, temporary housing services, modified cost of on-campus living, and re-institution of on-campus graduate family housing were recommended to help benefit international students with initial transitions. Free pick-up services from the airport by volunteers recruited from campuses and shuttle services for initial transportation were suggested as helpful in the transition (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Orientation programs organized by the universities must emphasize the United States' "culture and traditions, university adjustment, stress management, sexual and racial harassment, financial planning resources, banking systems, health care systems, counseling services, and university rules and regulations" (Lin & Yi, 1997, p. 473).

Universities could develop special workshops that teach American idioms and slang and create an environment where international students meet local students interested in helping them (Sherry et al., 2010). International students may also benefit from university writing centers to further enhance their writing skills (Sherry et al., 2010). Since the U.S. universities have a growing population of international students with most of them experiencing language difficulties, colleges and universities may profit from recruiting more staff for their international students' offices (Liu, 1995).

To help international students deal with academic challenges, implementing programs and strategies during the first semester of coursework may prove successful in enabling international students to adjust to their new academic life (Poyrazli & Grahame,

2007). Orientations that familiarize students to services available on campus along with academic expectations may help reduce academic stress (Olivas & Li, 2006). Also, providing mentors from the same country to assist students to master academic concepts and subject matter is an effective way to deal with educational difficulties (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Assigning an advisor who is culturally sensitive could have a profound impact on students' academic growth and development. Moreover, advisors could encourage students to take an ESL course to help them deal with language difficulties and American educational standards (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Lastly, Khawaja and Stallman (2011) recommend that professors encourage international students to prepare for lectures and tutorial in advance, manage time, seek help for written assignments, and record classroom lectures as effective ways to help them lead a successful academic life.

One of the main stressors for international students is lack of social connectedness in the host culture, causing social isolation and loneliness (Chen, 1999; Tochkov et al., 2010). Various strategies may help enhance the support system and interaction of international students with local students, potentially minimizing social isolation and loneliness. Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) suggested peer mentoring or peer networking as possible means to facilitate social interaction among international students. Peer networking perhaps used to match students with other international students, preferably from a similar culture, before their arrival. Thus, students enrolled currently in the university may share information on housing, transportation, and campus life and be an ongoing support for the incoming student. Peer mentoring, on the other hand, may be used to match an international student with an American student for a few hours at regular interval to facilitate familiarity with American culture, thus encouraging interaction (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). In addition, program advisors and professors

who are well informed about psychological and cultural issues of international students may contribute to a support system that may enhance their ability to adapt quicker to university life (Liu, 1995).

Counseling centers at universities could also offer ongoing support groups for international students (Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007) with an aim of helping them deal “with bi-cultural conflicts and achieve a balance between participating in the new culture and maintaining their own cultural identities” (Lin & Yi, 1997, p.473). Reading materials on American culture could be offered to help international students be more knowledgeable about American culture (Yakunina et al., 2011).

International Counseling Students

A review of literature revealed a considerable amount of studies conducted about international students across academic domains. However, very limited literature was related to international counseling students. “International students may face challenges as counselors-in-training” (Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009, p.52) that are different from or additional to those experienced by international students in other academic professions.

Challenges may be manifold specifically for international counseling students as they represent a smaller percentage of students as opposed to international students from other academic domains. Ng (2006) indicated that international students were enrolled in nearly 50% percent of the counselor training programs accredited by CACREP.

However, numbers of international students enrolled in any one counseling program appears to be trivial, given that only 2.3% and 8.8% of all international students are enrolled in education and social sciences, respectively (IIE, 2011). These figures reflect all international students, and not just graduate students. While there is no specific data

about numbers of international students in counseling programs, it can safely be assumed that those numbers are small. Fewer international students within a program and specifically from the same country of origin may be a potential source of stress for international students enrolled in counseling programs. With limitations in language and fear of social interaction, international students in all programs may avoid interaction with domestic students (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). For international students in counseling programs, this avoidance may mean significant isolation.

Nilsson and Anderson's work indicated that international counselors-in-training encounter challenges in language barriers, understanding different cultures, role ambiguity, and absence of social support systems (as cited in Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009). While these issues are shared by other international students, those who are counseling students are training to work with clients and will, in fact, work with clients in the U.S. as part of their training experience. This may require different or deeper understanding of both language and culture.

According to Sangganjanavanich and Black, (2009), supervision is an important aspect of counselor development both at a personal and professional level. "Supervising international counselors-in-training adds additional challenges for supervisors in terms of cultural perspectives and languages differences" (p.54). Supervisors who lack cultural competence may not provide adequate guidance or necessary support to international counseling students, thus limiting their growth and development as professional counselors. If supervisors fail to initiate or discuss cultural issues in counseling, it may lead to miscommunication, misunderstanding, hidden agendas, and disconnection between the supervisor and the supervisee (Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009). A

counselor's growth may be determined by an effective supervisory relationship in the counseling profession, which may not be common in other professions.

A number of other issues may have particular importance for international counseling students. Understanding ethical norms may be common to international students across professions; however, dealing with clients with mental health issues and diverse backgrounds may be unique to international counseling students. With the growing diversity of international students and ethnic minority populations, multicultural counseling has become a significant component of counselor preparation programs (Ng, 2006). In addition, counseling students are expected to understand the value of personal growth and learn about multicultural issues (Locke & Kiselica, 1999). International counselors-in-training, when working with clients from diverse backgrounds, may face challenges in understanding clients' cultural framework, social interactions, expectations, values, and beliefs. They may also have difficulties in understanding their clients' language or metaphors, thus interfering with the therapeutic process (Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009).

Previous research emphasizes the range of adjustment difficulties and challenges faced by international students across academic domains (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Although various challenges and support programs for international students in general have been explored in the literature, there is little information addressing specific issues of international counseling students and strategies to help them cope with their academic issues. Thus, research on international counseling students is warranted. This study is being conducted to give voice to international students enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling programs, and to explore how counseling programs or faculty members could contribute to their academic success.

Summary

This study focused on exploring the lived experiences of international counseling students and aimed to identify methods that may facilitate a supportive educational experience. This chapter provided an overview of the literature related to international students and brought specific attention to the need to concentrate on international counseling students. The next chapter offers a detailed description of the research design and methodology utilized in this study. The chapter is concluded with data collection and analysis procedures used in this research study.

Chapter Three: Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

International counseling students are a growing population in American universities. This study was designed to give voice to international students enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling programs and to explore methods that can facilitate a supportive educational experience. Such voice may have the benefit of providing a sense of empowerment to this group of students. In addition, the results of this study may provide information that will contribute to understanding specific concerns of international students in counseling programs as well as what those students find helpful. This chapter provides a detailed description of research design and methodology employed in the study.

Research Questions

In order to understand the perceptions of international students, the following overarching research questions were addressed:

1. What are the lived experiences of international students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs?
2. How can counseling programs support international students enrolled in graduate counseling programs?

Rationale for Qualitative Research Design

A number of studies using quantitative and qualitative methodologies have investigated the difficulties encountered by international students. The studies revealed an array of stressors such as homesickness, culture shock, accommodation problems, social isolation, English language proficiency, unfamiliar academic teaching styles and assignments, financial difficulties, and psychological stress (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011;

Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Although literature explicitly addresses the varied challenges encountered by international students, there are no studies that explore the experiences of international counseling students or their perspectives about ways counseling programs or faculty members could be of assistance to them.

The best way to explore people's subjective experiences is by asking them about their experiences and listening carefully to what they say (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). A qualitative approach was considered appropriate for this study as qualitative research provides an in-depth description of the phenomenon being studied, its exploratory nature allows professionals to learn about the lived experiences of people, and findings emerge from data and not from a preconceived hypothesis of potential findings (Berrios & Lucca, 2006). Qualitative research involves "analyzing and interpreting texts and interviews in order to discover meaningful patterns descriptive of a particular phenomenon" (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p.3). Using qualitative research methodology, the researcher unfolds the subjective experiences of study participants and thus provides insight into their stories through naturalistic inquiry (Patton, 2002).

Design Methodology

The present study explored the lived experiences of international students enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling programs along with my personal experiences of being an international student. A phenomenological-heuristic approach to data collection and analysis is designed to elicit deep understanding of the meanings of shared experiences of a phenomenon among people or groups, and includes the personal experiences and insights of the researcher (Patton, 2002). Thus, a phenomenological-heuristic approach was considered appropriate for this study.

Phenomenology

A phenomenological approach focuses on understanding the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experiences of a phenomenon for an individual or by many individuals. According to Creswell (1998), “researchers search for essentials, invariant structure (or essence) or the central underlying meaning of the experience and emphasize the intentionality of consciousness where experiences contain both the outward appearance and inward consciousness based on memory, image and meaning” (p.52).

Heuristic Qualitative Inquiry

According to Moustakas (1990), a heuristic approach is most suitable when something has called the researcher from within his or her life experiences. Heuristic inquiry is a form of phenomenological theory that describes personal experiences and insights of the researcher (Patton, 2002). It focuses on the experiences of the researcher and the co-researchers in the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2002).

It refers to a process of internal search through which one discovers the nature and meaning of experiences and develops methods and procedures for further investigation and analysis. The self of the researcher is present throughout the process, and while understanding the phenomenon with increasing depth, the researcher also experiences self-awareness and self-knowledge. Heuristic processes incorporate creative self-processes and self-discoveries (Moustakas, 1990, p.9).

The uniqueness of heuristic inquiry is that the researcher uses personal experiences, reflections, and insights and then comes to understand the essence of the phenomenon through shared reflections and inquiry with co-researchers as they also intensively experience and reflect on the phenomenon in question (Patton, 2002). “A

sense of connectedness develops between the researcher and the research participants in their mutual effort to elucidate the nature, meaning and essence of a significant human experience” (Patton, 2002, p.108). When conducting a heuristic study, the researcher should have had autobiographical connections. This inquiry is demanding, places high responsibility on the researcher, involves self-search, self-dialogue, and self-discovery throughout the process (Moustakas, 1990). The intention of the researcher is to awaken and transform self as the initial data lie within the researcher (Moustakas, 1990).

Phases of heuristic research. A heuristic investigator guides the investigation using the following six phases of heuristic research. A brief description of each phase is provided below:

Initial engagement. In the initial engagement phase, an interest within the researcher calls out to the researcher and invites self-dialogue to discover the topic or question (Moustakas, 1990). My self-dialogue about my experiences and challenges as an international counseling student motivated me to arrive at the identification of the phenomenon being studied.

Immersion. Once the question is discovered, the researcher in this phase immerses themselves completely into the research question being investigated (Moustakas, 1990). I immersed myself in the data as I transcribed interviews, read and reread the data, made notations in the margins of transcripts as well as in my journals, and revisited the data throughout the analysis process.

Incubation. During the incubation phase the researcher retreats from the intense concentrated focus on the research question and becomes detached from the topic or anything related to understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1990). During the

process of analyzing the data, I took breaks in order to process the information and gain a fresh perspective.

Illumination. In the illumination phase the researcher is more open and receptive to tacit knowledge and intuition and has awareness of qualities and clustering of qualities into themes (Moustakas, 1990). On setting the data aside for some time and returning back to it, I had more clarity in my thoughts, was able to organize the data better, and could group or regroup themes into broad categories.

Explication. “The purpose of the explication phase is to fully examine what has awakened in consciousness, in order to understand its various layers of meaning” (Moustakas, 1990, p.31). In the explication phase I thought through my own thoughts and feelings as they related to the participant of this study. I also examined all the materials and created exemplary portraits of the participants that best represented the experiences of the group as a whole and then readied myself for creative synthesis.

Creative synthesis. In the final phase of heuristic inquiry, the researcher is thoroughly familiar with all the data in its major constituents, qualities, themes, the explication of the meanings, and details of the experience as a whole (Moustakas, 1990). At this final stage I put my thoughts together and constructed a narrative about my experiences as an international student along with my experiences as a researcher throughout the research process.

Role of the Researcher

In any qualitative study the researcher acts as an instrument, thus being an integral part of qualitative research (Hunt, 2011). Qualitative researchers are considered key instruments, as they gather information and do not rely on instruments developed by other researchers (Creswell, 2009). In this study, my role constituted being a participant

observer that involved direct participation and observation, interviewing respondents, and introspection (Patton, 2002). I was part of the research and not a bystander or an analytic observer.

As an observer, I remained open and attentive to each individual's body language, facial expression, and what was said or implied. As a participant, I maintained a journal where I wrote my personal experiences as an international student that contributed to the study. The researcher's journal was utilized as a form of data where I fully engaged myself in experiences of being an international student, while also interacting with participants about their experiences (Patton, 2002).

Qualitative inquiry is interpretative in form, meaning the researchers make interpretations of what they see, hear, and understand (Creswell, 2009). During fieldwork it is essential for "the observer to observe self as well as others and interactions of self with others" (Patton, 2002). In this study, I was introspective and transparent, and recorded all my personal biases and reflections as I moved through the process.

Population and Setting

Recruiting Participants

In order to meet the purpose of this study, international students enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling programs were recruited. The recruitment approach followed a purposive sampling methodology that "focuses on selecting information-rich cases whose study will illuminate the questions under study" (Patton, 2002, p. 230). International students who were currently enrolled in either a masters or doctoral counseling program in the United States and were willing to be interviewed about their experiences as an international counseling student were included in the sample.

The researcher implemented two recruitment methodologies. First, the researcher posted the research invitation on CESNET, a listserv that is subscribed to faculty members and doctoral students in accredited counseling programs and, which is regularly used to solicit research participants. International students who were subscribed to CESNET and who were willing to participate responded to the invitation request. The research invitation request to participants can be found in Appendix B.

The second recruiting procedure included sending an e-mail request to the department chairs of CACREP-accredited programs to circulate the research invitation to the e-mail accounts of international students who were part of their counseling program or to post the invitation on their departmental website or listserv. This procedure required the researcher to conduct an intensive search of university websites and identify the department chair or head of all CACREP universities. The CACREP-accredited universities were listed in alphabetical order on the CACREP website. In situations where a departmental head could not be identified, the next significant member of the university was contacted via e-mail. The researcher created a Microsoft® Word document, listing all CACREP university names, the names of their departmental chair along with their e-mail address, and link to their university website. This document was created for better organization and to ensure that all universities were contacted. From among 275 CACREP universities, only departments of 17 universities were not available to be contacted. The research request e-mail invitation to the departmental chair (Appendix B) was followed by the participant's research invitation.

Participants who were interested in being recruited for the study had to provide a consent that was built into the SurveyMonkey™ link, complete a brief demographic survey, and provide contact information (Appendix C). The participants also had to meet

the inclusion criteria to be a part of the study. The inclusion criteria were: (a) the participants must possess an F-1 Student Visa or must self-identify as an international student, (b) the participants must not have spent more than five years in the United States, (c) the participant must be at-least 21 years of age, (d) the participants must be willing to be interviewed and provide consent by completing and submitting the demographic questionnaire, and (e) the participants must have the ability to read and communicate orally in English.

Participants' responses to the demographic survey were saved to the SurveyMonkey™ website. I downloaded those responses and compiled them into a Microsoft® Excel file along with contact information for each respondent. This file served as a contact log allowing me to identify potential participants meeting all criteria and to keep a record of contacts. Forty-one participants took the demographic survey; however, only eight participants gave consent, provided contact information, and met the inclusion criteria. Participants who met all criteria were coded in green, indicating potential participants for the study, and the remaining participants were coded in red, signifying inappropriateness for this study. Participants were contacted individually when they posted responses to Survey Monkey™ and it was determined that they met of required criteria. I made initial contact with seven participants by telephone and one via email. One of the potential participants I contacted by phone agreed to participate and scheduled an interview; however, that individual was not available for two scheduled interviews and was further unavailable to be contacted. Thus a total of seven participants were recruited for this study.

Initial contact served to introduce the researcher, provide an outline of the research, and schedule an interview time, as well as determine the medium for interviews.

Skype and telephonic interviews were considered appropriate media based on distance and availability of resources. Six participants chose to have Skype interviews while one of them requested a phone interview. The interview procedures are described more fully in the data collection section.

Participants

Participants recruited in this study were international students whose intent in coming to the United States was to seek higher education. The participants had resided in the United States for no more than five years. From all of the participants who took the demographic survey and gave consent to participate in the study, seven potential participants were recruited based on inclusion criteria for the study. Six countries of origin were represented, with two participants being from the same country. Participants were on an international F-1 student visa status and were either enrolled in their masters (M.A. or M.S.) counseling program or doctoral (Ph.D.) counselor education program at a CACREP-accredited university in the United States. Six of the participants were females and one of them was a male. Participants' ages ranged between 18 and 29 years and two out of seven were married. Each participant was given a pseudonym by the researcher to maintain participant confidentiality. The readers provide a detailed description of each participant below for better contextual understanding of the participants.

Omega. Omega had been in the United States for four years at the time of this study and was working on her Ph.D. in Counselor Education and Supervision. She has her masters in counseling from the United States and is originally from China. She had four other international students in her program, but no student from her country of origin. She is single and does not hold any religious beliefs. She discussed her reasons for choosing the counseling program in the United States:

I come from China and at that time in my college, I had two American friends in China and we always spend time together, and that was a good chance for me to know about America and also in my undergraduate I studied education, but I had a lot of classes in psychology and I became interested in both education and psychology and when I was about to graduate there was a chance for students to pass an exam and we can get a counseling certificate. So I took the exam and that was my first chance to know about the field and I passed it. According to what I know in my undergraduate, all textbook regarding to counseling and psychology is translated from American authors, we just translate those knowledge in our language, so I think why I not go there, because I heard that counseling is very advanced in U.S and I am interested in it so I just came here.

Chi. Chi is originally from India and was working on completing her Master of Science degree in clinical mental health counseling, from a university in New York. She follows the Hindu religion and has been in the United States for the last year and a half. She is single and has her siblings in the United States. Chi had four other international students in her program, but was the only student from her country. She discussed her reasons for choosing the counseling program in the United States:

When I was 13, I decided I really like psychology. I know it was like an early decision but I decided. Like I had one of those career things happening in school. So you know we were introduced to like a lot of fields I was unaware of like, anthropology, sociology, and psychology. I wanted to do something different and then I did some reading in psychology and I found it to be a really interesting field and since then I stayed on the track and I did my bachelors in psychology, and psychology was my major and from the best university in India. So after I

finished my bachelors I took a year off. I was also doing my first year of masters in India with my other classmates from [university name omitted] but the education level in India at the master's level is not really good, as you already know I am sure. I was doing it at [university name omitted] and I hated it. It was the worst experience and I always wanted to apply to America because I was always keen on studying abroad and I didn't do that in undergrad because [university name omitted] was amazing so I didn't want to leave undergrad. So I wanted to finish my bachelors and plus I plan on doing my Ph.D. after my masters, so I didn't want to be away from home for so many years. So I applied to U.S. I picked U.S. over U.K. because for what I am interested in, U.S. is better in counseling and psychology is better in U.K. you know what I mean. There is a difference and I am into counseling not anymore into psychology.

Delta. Delta is a married woman from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. She had resided in the United States for three years and was working on her Master of Arts in community counseling. She is of the Muslim religion and lives with her spouse. Delta had no international students in her program, but has one colleague who is originally from Egypt who had lived in the United States for the past 20 years. She described her reasons for choosing the counseling program in the United States as follows:

I studied my undergrad from Saudi Arabia, where I come from. My undergrad was law, my major was law and I came to the states to study law. I was not really satisfied by my major even though I loved it the most, but because I have seen that sexism exist in Saudi Arabia unfortunately, like they don't allow us to practice law as a female. I wasn't like satisfied with the changes that is going so slow. They are taking it step by step and it's so slow. When I came to States, I

decided to study law as like my master's degree; I was decided to major in international law. Then, I found myself the counseling program. I researched about it, but nobody told me about it except my sister who was student in [university name omitted].

Gamma. Gamma is originally from Malaysia and was enrolled in the master's program in counseling. She is single, but is in a relationship with a significant other who is in the United States. She is a Buddhist who had been living in the United States for the last five years. She had 20 other international students in her program. One student was from her home country, but is either a citizen or a permanent resident and was not an international student. She described her reasons for choosing the counseling program in the United States, saying:

I first came to the United States and attended [university name omitted] in 2008 through a twinning program [American Degree Program] with my former university in Malaysia. I decided to pursue my masters in counseling upon undergrad graduation knowing that counseling program in [university name omitted] ranks 12th nationally and also due to my interest in the play therapy program under the department.

Beta. Beta is a male from Nepal and follows the Hindu religion. He was in a master's program in student affairs and counseling and had lived in the United States for the last five years. He had one international student in his program who was not from his home country. He was single and had his siblings in the United States as a support system. He discussed his reasons for choosing a counseling program in the United States:

U.S., it was a quite interesting story like, I was doing my Bachelors in business administration back home in Nepal and I was in the second year program like

fourth semester and my friend she told me let's try abroad study or something. Then, I didn't even tell my parents that I am going to apply for it or something. And, she told me my sister is in U.S and she goes to [name omitted] university and we can apply to that university, so we applied, we both applied for the same university and I got the visa and, but she didn't get the visa. So I just came here. It was not like my plan or something I would come I will apply and come. It was just like my friend asked, let's do it and we just did it ourselves. And, to help people and do something for other is my hobby so I want make my hobby as my career, that's the reason why I chose the counseling program at USA.

Alpha. Alpha is a married woman originally from China. She had been in the United States for two years and was working on completing her master's degree in counseling. She had four international students in her program and four from her home country. She identifies as an Asian and does not follow any particular religious belief system. She discussed her reasons for choosing the counseling program in the United States, saying:

I thinking about when I want to study abroad, I think about a program or a degree related to sociology but I don't want to study sociology anymore. I am married so I don't think I can study sociology that well because I am a foreigner that is something for sure. It is not that easy to change my cultural background. If I studied again it is so much related to history, policies all these things, so I don't think I can handle it, but I still want to study something related to society because I am that kind of person. So I think psychology is little better to what I have learned and that is the reason why I chose psychology. And, now concerned with the counseling program it just happened because I wanted to learn something

related to psychology and my school had this opportunity and like I think the program is good, its CACREP-accredited so I just picked it. And, reason why I come to America is I have some relatives here and they are encouraging me to study abroad so finally through this and that I just came here.

Sigma. Sigma is a single woman from Portugal and has been living in the United States for less than one year. She was working toward completing her doctoral program in a counselor education program with four other international students. There were no international students from her home country. Her support system included her siblings who lived in the United States. She described her reasons for choosing the counseling program in the United States as follows:

I chose the counselor education program because my internship in Portugal was in two different middle schools. I taught a program in sexual education for ages between 12 to 16 years old. This was my first experience with children and adolescents at that level, and I loved it! Was a great experience and a hard learning process with all the different classes in the two schools. They were public schools with poor social economic status. With this internship I was still able to work in the field of Justice Psychology and also start working in the educational field! So, once that my brother was here in [city name deleted] working at [university name deleted], I decide to apply to this school. My friend and my brother were always telling me that I should come, that the program was great and I thought, why not? So I applied and I got into the program and as a worker in one of the elementary schools of the district I am able to live again the experience of the educational field and not just teach but also learn with the children.

Ethical Considerations and Participant Protection

Several protection means were implemented to minimize any risk to the participants during the course of the study. The study was approved by the Texas A&M University –Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board (IRB) on July 23rd, 2012- IRB# 52-12. After the approval was granted, prospective participants received an e-mail invitation via CESNET, a departmental listserv, or on their personal e-mail account sent by their university departmental chair. The research invitation contained a link to a brief demographic survey that was preceded by an informed consent built into the SurveyMonkey™ link. Reading the informed consent, participants had the choice to either agree or disagree to participate. Those who chose to participate also gave consent to be contacted for interviewing and audiotaping through the informed consent agreement on SurveyMonkey™. Participants who gave consent, met the inclusion criteria, and provided contact information were contacted for the study. During the initial direct contact, the principal researcher reviewed the purpose of the study and responded to any questions about the research.

In addition to obtaining consent via SurveyMonkey™, I also obtained verbal consent, reminded the participants they had control of the content and the length of the interview, and provided a nonjudgmental interviewing atmosphere. The participants were informed that they had the right to discontinue the interview at any given time should they desire. I replaced identifying information of the participants with pseudonyms when labeling interview tapes, transcribing the interview, and reporting results to maintain confidentiality of the participants. Only information of participants who met the inclusion criteria was kept. Other unrelated information was erased from the database. Participants' demographic information and Skype or audio recordings were protected in the

researcher's computer with a private password. All tapes and transcripts were maintained in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's residence and only the researcher had access to them.

Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted in two phases for the purpose of this study. In the initial stage participants were provided with a demographic survey that consisted of a few open and close-ended questions. Participants who agreed to participate in this study took the demographic survey that was built into the SurveyMonkey™ link in the research invitation. The survey began with an informed consent explaining the purpose of the study, the procedure, and consent to participate. After consent to participate was provided, participants were taken to the survey page that required them to provide specific demographic details. The demographic details were used to recruit participants who met inclusion criteria and to add to the description of the participants.

The second phase of data collection involved either telephonic or Skype interviews. The interviews were scheduled at the convenience of the interviewer and the interviewee. A two-hour block was requested from the participants for the interview. Skype interviews were conducted via the researcher's private laptop at the researcher's residence. A feature to record the Skype call was downloaded prior to the interview for recording purposes. The telephonic interview was conducted using the Skype call feature and an audio recorder, which was available on researcher's cell phone, was used to record the interview. All the interviews were double recorded, using the Skype recording feature and the phone recorder. This was done to obtain a quality recording and to have a back-up method in case the recording equipment malfunctioned.

Interviews

I began the interview by establishing rapport with the participants through the ability to convey empathy and understanding (Patton, 2002). After establishing rapport with each participant, I reviewed the informed consent and the purpose of the study. Participants' additional questions regarding the research and their participation were answered. Verbal consent to record the interview and consent to participate were secured at the beginning of each interview.

A semi-structured interview guide was utilized "to ensure that the same basic lines of inquiry are pursued with each person interviewed" (Patton, 2002, p.343). It also allowed the interviewer to maintain a conversational style of interviewing yet illuminate responses and ensure the purpose of the inquiry was met. The interview guide can be found in Appendix D. Interview questions were simplified for participants who had difficulty understanding certain terminology to obtain accurate perspectives.

It was important to provide a safe and nonjudgmental environment for participants. In order to facilitate rich responses, I utilized active listening and paraphrasing and communicated empathically with participants. In addition, I used verbal encouragers and appropriate feedback to let participants know they were being heard and to ensure I understood what they were communicating.

Reflective Notes and Researcher's Journal

I maintained reflective notes throughout the research project. I documented my initial thoughts, impressions, feelings, and the overall experience of interviewing each participant. These notes were taken immediately after each interview was conducted to note experiences while they were fresh in the memory. Reflective notes helped to address my specific biases or notions about the research project or participants.

My experience of being an international student was documented in the researcher's journal. Significant experiences and challenges throughout my personal and professional journey while in the United States were documented as another potential source of data. My journal was utilized in an attempt to be consistent with heuristic inquiry methods and was used as a tool to reflect on the meaning of my experiences.

Transcription Methods

All of the interviews were transcribed by me into a Microsoft Word® file for analysis purposes. The traditional transcription methodology was implemented, where I listened to the audio recordings and typed what was heard. According to Patton (2002), “doing all or some of your interview transcription (instead of having them done by a transcriber), for example, provides an opportunity to get immersed in the data, an experience that usually generates emergent insights” (p. 441). Frequent rewinding and slowing was required to capture accurate and verbatim responses of the participants. After the completion of the transcription, I reviewed each of the transcripts to check for accuracy of the data and to further allow for data immersion.

After reviewing all of the transcripts, I sent an electronic copy of the transcript to the participants. The participants were asked to review the transcript and to check for accuracy and intentionality of their responses. They were also asked to make comments where they felt were required and to further explain their experiences and perspectives of being international students in a CACREP-accredited program. Each participant emailed back their transcript after making necessary changes to their responses. All the data from initial interviews were analyzed and the final themes and sub-themes were sent electronically to the participants for further feedback. Two participants responded approving to the themes and sub-themes.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed phenomenological-heuristic inquiry methods (Patton, 2002; Moustakas, 1990). Initial coding to identify units of meaning, in-vivo coding to capture participants' words, and focused coding to establish final codes were used (Saldana, 2009). The researcher maintained brief, informal notes during the data collection process. Data was sorted and organized regularly to ensure accurate analysis and emergence of findings. A detailed description of the above listed procedure is described thoroughly in the section below.

Coding Procedure

Initial coding involved line-by-line reading and identifying of units of meaning. Words and phrases were highlighted, and notes were made in the margins of transcripts. From the initial notes, 14 initial codes were identified and written on index cards. Highlighted words and phrases, or units of meaning, were then printed on smaller cards and sorted according to the initial codes. Additional codes were identified to describe the units of meaning that did not fit into one of the 14 initial codes, resulting in 20 codes. Each of these codes was separated and organized in individual bags. At that point the data was set-aside for a while to facilitate awakening of fresh perspectives (Moustakas, 1990).

All the codes and units of meaning were reviewed again and initial codes that best fit together were grouped under broad overarching categories, reducing it to 12 categories. The second cycle coding procedure utilized focused coding. As Charmaz (2006) explains, focused coding searches for frequent or significant initial codes to develop categories in data (as cited in Saldana, 2009). The data was set aside again at this point to allow for an incubation period. I revisited the data once again and attempted

to identify yet broader core categories. This final phase of coding resulted into 7 broad core themes and 14 sub-themes.

As I worked on grouping and ungrouping codes, I maintained a journal where I noted my reflections about the coding process. I immersed myself in the data during the transcription and the analysis process. Reflective notes and my researcher's journal were employed to track my decision process as I analyzed codes and form meaningful categories.

Data Organization

Data generated from qualitative research are often voluminous (Patton, 2002). In order to organize a large volume of data, I began at the initial stage of data collection. The demographic data was the initial source of data that was compiled into a Microsoft® Excel file and then color-coded. Participants who provided responses to the demographic survey, provided consent, and gave contact information were coded as green and participants who did not provide any of the abovementioned information were coded red. Green color codes indicated that all inclusion criteria were met and these individuals were considered as possible participants for the study. Color-coding and sorting details of participants on a Microsoft® Excel file helped me to condense a large amount of data into valuable source of information.

Interviews were conducted with the participants and the interview data was transcribed verbatim for analysis purposes. The transcript data was reviewed initially line-by-line and words or phrases with actual language were identified and highlighted. I coded the data by hand, as actually seeing the data in concrete form was vital in recognizing emerging themes (Patton, 2002). Each participant's data was coded with a different color for better identification of the source of data. Similar words or phrases

were assembled together and meaningful categories or themes were developed through physical sorting and conceptualization of the data. Similar codes were organized in individual bags that were separated by emerging themes.

Trustworthiness

Theoreticians of qualitative paradigms posit that trustworthiness of a research study is important in evaluating its worth. Validity and reliability are quantitative concepts used to evaluate a quantitative study. Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that quantitative concepts were incompatible to foundational assumptions of qualitative research. Thus Lincoln and Guba (1985) presented the concept of trustworthiness and its elements of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability as a more appropriate framework to qualitative research. The techniques utilized to establish trustworthiness are described in-depth below.

Credibility. Credibility refers to demonstrating that the research was conducted in such a manner to ensure that the phenomenon was accurately and truthfully identified and described (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). For the purpose of this study utilizing interviews, member checking, reflective notes, and the researcher's journal accomplished triangulation as sources of data. These different sources were used to build a coherent justification for themes (Creswell, 2009). Member checking took place twice during the process. The first member check took place when I transcribed the interviews verbatim and provided participants with the transcript to review for accurate responses. The second member check took place after the final analysis, where the findings were provided to the participants for their examination and feedback. Member checking allowed for accurate interpretations of participants' responses.

Transferability. Transferability refers to showing that the findings of the study are applicable to other settings (Hunt, 2011). Lincoln and Guba (1985) postulate that a qualitative researcher “cannot specify the external validity of an inquiry; he or she can only provide the thick description necessary to enable someone interested in making a transfer to reach a conclusion about whether transfer can be contemplated as possible” (p.316). The open-ended interview format provided thick description of the participants in the form of quotations and contextual information that allows readers to make judgments about the usefulness and transferability of the research.

Confirmability. Confirmability refers to ensuring that the data represents the experiences of the participants and is not overly influenced by researcher biases and motivation. “Reflexivity or self-reflection on the part of the researcher is another procedure to establish trustworthiness” (Hunt, 2011, p.298). The researcher’s journal and reflective notes were maintained throughout the research process to document my thoughts, perceptions, and research decisions throughout. In the reflective journal, I took notes during the interview and analysis process and recorded an open and honest narrative about my biases and prejudices. In researcher’s journal, I recorded my experiences as an international student and also recorded what influenced me towards this research topic. The reflective journal helped consider how my biases might influence the study. The researcher’s journal was used as a basis for the creative synthesis presented in chapter four. In addition, the dissertation chairperson reviewed my findings throughout all phases of data analysis in order to check my biases and discuss my reasoning.

Summary

This chapter provided an in-depth explanation of the research design and the methodology implemented in this study. Research questions, along with

phenomenological-heuristic inquiry that guided the research, were included. It also included features of qualitative methodology such as the role of the researcher, population and setting, and processes of finding and protecting participants. The chapter concluded with data collection and analysis. The following chapter underlines a comprehensive description of the findings obtained.

Chapter Four: Findings

Introduction

International students are now entering counseling programs in the United States. While there is information concerning international students in general, there is none that addresses particular needs of those in counseling programs. The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of international counseling students and to identify ways in which counseling programs or faculty members could facilitate a supportive educational experience. This chapter presents the composite depictions for the group, which identifies and describes core themes and sub-themes. Then, two exemplary portraits (Moustakas, 1990) are provided that illustrate the themes. Finally, I present a creative synthesis, which includes a summary of my personal and professional experiences throughout this process.

The seven core themes were: adapting to a foreign land, clinical concerns, academics, multiculturalism and diversity issues, social connectedness, impact of the counselor training program, and the role of counseling faculty and department. The themes, along with their sub-themes, are explained in-depth further in this chapter. Participant quotes are included to exemplify the findings. An additional finding regarding student knowledge of CACREP is also included which did not reach the level of a theme but which may have meaning for CACREP-accredited programs. I regularly used extended quotes for the sake of clarity and context. Because English is not the first language of participants, using abbreviated quotations seemed to make participants' comments more susceptible to misunderstanding.

Composite Depictions

I immersed myself in the data until I understood each individual depiction of participant experiences of the phenomenon. These individual depictions are gathered together and examined until the researcher identifies universal qualities or themes (Moustakas, 1990). Once I was comfortable with my understanding of each individual, I worked to develop the “composite depiction that represents the common qualities and themes that embrace the experiences of the co-researchers” (Moustakas, 1990, p.52). Below are the composite depictions that include “the core meanings of the phenomenon as experiences by the individual participants and the group as a whole” (Moustakas, 1990, p.52).

Theme 1: Adapting to the Foreign Land

Adapting to the foreign country was emphasized as an essential component for participants to lead a healthy lifestyle. However, adapting to the United States for this group came with several hurdles that were described as initial challenges, language impediments, psychosocial and cultural factors, and sense of self as an international student. Challenges to adapt to the United States often hindered students from achieving success and managing stress effectively. Participants explicitly described factors that thwarted their healthy transitioning to the United States, as discussed in the sub-themes.

Sub-theme 1.1: Initial challenges. Acclimatization was most challenging for participants during the initial phase of their arrival to the United States. This phase ranged from the first few weeks to months to a year. The initial period was considered demanding as participants expressed having limited resources, lacking family support, feeling homesick, having a language barrier, feeling socially isolated, and having a sense of insecurity of being in a new country. They also commented on structural and

contextual differences. All participants experienced initial challenges as a result of moving to a new country and faced difficulties due to the geographical disconnect from one's home country. Alpha represented the views of most participants when she said:

Life is not that convenient when I just came to America. I don't have a car, I don't know nowhere and I have this kind of hesitation and this kind of insecurity because it is another country. So I just came here, umm, just like I don't know nothing at that time and, umm, because, when I just come here there where not that much student here. So I have some friends, but I still need to learn a lot of things by myself to experience a lot of different kind of things. So at that period of time so basically, I just want to catch up. I just want to catch up my school, I want to learn environment more and I wanted to like, just like, to start to adapt to everything. So that is a different period and now because everything is familiar so everything seems so easier.

Participants mostly expressed feeling lonely and missing friends and family during the first few months of their arrival. Homesickness was a common characteristic for this group that made adaptation more challenging. Gamma illustrated participants' responses about homesickness as she talked about a specific holiday:

I came with friends, so I wasn't really alone. I have a friend with me and, but I still got really homesick sometimes. When I first came here, especially during the beginning of year when us as Malaysians Chinese, we celebrate Chinese New Year and our Facebook will be bombarded with all sorts of Chinese New Year posts and pictures, and I am not there and so that will be the most difficult time for me to deal with, and I get really homesick . . .

Sub-theme 1.2: Language impediment. Language impediments were viewed as vital element that hampered international student participants' adaptation process. Limitation with language was seen across this group and restricted them from socializing, participating in class, asking questions, seeking support, and/or understanding instructions. In addition, participants indicated that feeling less confident, being unable to express their needs, feeling confused, and taking an extended amount of time to form sentences while having conversations with people resulted from inadequacy with language. Omega best illustrated how language difficulties can impact international students, and provided examples from two different points in her program. Omega indicated the first instance when she said, "I remember in the orientation activity, umm, I did not understand anything. I feel so confused because of language barrier I couldn't speak myself, couldn't understand what they are talking about and that is quite scary. . ."

Omega also described how language can continue to be confusing and create difficulties as students are adjusting to interacting in the United States. She provided the following example from her own experience:

I worked as a graduate assistant position for a year and a half and at the beginning of the third semester of working there my professor had a conversation with me . . . but I remember one thing what she said that I shouldn't say 'what's up' to her. She said it is offensive. I mean as an international student I learn language from here, I don't quite know what is right and what is wrong. I just take to risk to learning English, and I don't think 'what's up' is offensive because I see some other friends say to each other, use the same thing.

Sub-theme 1.3: Psychosocial and cultural factors. Various psychosocial and cultural factors influenced participants' abilities to adapt to the counseling program and

to the United States. Differences in culture often made it difficult to work with clients and other students and interfered in interactions with professors. Psychosocial factors such as depression, sleeplessness, confusion, fear, and conflict were reported for participants who experienced difficulty adapting to the United States. Omega indicated: “after the orientation I called my family and I said that I cannot stand, I cannot be here because I couldn’t understand anything. I could not sleep. . .”

Delta described anxiety and fear that others don’t understand that influenced her decision to drop a class:

It’s kind of confusing sometimes and it’s very complex for me because I feel nobody understand what I feel; they don’t understand that I am doing double work than I do . . . but it was not fine with the counselor education courses. I was really depressed and I couldn’t handle it. I did drop one of the classes because it was a really huge class about 30 people and we had to do our presentation in front of everyone so I felt, Oh my god, I cannot talk in front of all these people because I sometimes I do mistake for my language, and sometimes I cannot, like, be fine or determined on what I want to say, so I dropped the class. Which is really confusing and a conflict . . .

Sometimes, cultural differences were described problematic in terms of finding balance where the participant strived to maintain their own cultural norms while fitting into the United States culture. For instance, Delta stated:

Like American shake hands and we don’t, as a Muslim I don’t. Here, all the Muslims do that, they shake the hands sometimes, but not me, not in my culture and that is really confusing. Like sometimes you don’t want to embarrass anyone so I shake hands sometimes to avoid the embarrassment, but it really hurt me. It is

not healthy for men to shake my hands in my culture. It's fine with women and this is one of rules as Muslims, I really like it, but at the same time I don't like it here in the States because everyone shakes hands male and female.

Sub-theme 1.4: Sense of self as an international student. Another sub-theme that emerged among participants was their sense of self as international student. Situational or environmental demands often distinguished them as international students and sometimes led to feelings of frustrations and interfered with participants' needs to adapt to the foreign country. Chi illustrated this sub-theme when she indicated:

I feel like there hasn't been an Indian in the program for several years or there never was an Indian in the program. So I feel like I have to talk on behalf of the country, which I don't like doing . . . you're like the brand ambassador of your country. Everybody is like, 'why can't you make curry' I am like, 'I can't make curry.' Make some curry, makes some nana' and I am like, 'I can't make either of those, sorry.'

In addition, Alpha described advisement wherein it was suggested she change her program because of her international student status.

Originally I was in LMFT like Marriage and Family Therapy, after I studied about a year, I talk to my professor and they found out the reality that I'm an international student and they think it will be a little bit harder for me just find an intern or deal with the group dynamics because if I do family and marriage and deals with couples families and so they are more interaction in the group and it's going to cost me more attention and react faster but I'm an international student and language is not that perfect or good so finally I talked to them and they think it would be better to change to LPC it will be easier for me . . .

Chi also narrated how being an international student in the counseling program was different for her when she said, “Like as international student in the counseling program I have to fall back on no one, but students in the other programs have like other international students to fall back on, so it’s different for me.”

Theme 2: Clinical Concerns

Clinical coursework and internship/practicum experience characterizes the development of counselor-in-training. Participants discussed their apprehensions about working with clients or being in a clinical environment because of limitations arising from being an international counseling student. This theme relates specifically to participants’ experiences specifically pertaining to the clinical aspects of the counseling program. Consideration of three sub-themes provides an explanation of different dimensions of the core theme: language limitations, anxiety towards seeing clients, and internship.

Sub-theme 2.1: Language limitations. Because counseling is most often talk, and involves deeply understanding another and communicating that understanding effectively, issues concerning language specifically related to clinical concerns is warranted. Limitations with language often hindered the counseling process and the counseling relationship. Being misinterpreted by their clients and misunderstanding what clients say due to grammatical limitations was a prominent concern among participants. Feelings of being judged by their clients, lack of trust in the counseling relationship, self-doubts, increased client resistance, and questioning by internship sites on their ability to do counseling because of language limitations were some of the other factors that contributed to participants’ clinical concerns. Sigma shared her anxieties about not understanding the client or being misunderstood in the process:

I can do the work, but sometimes with adults we need to use language more official, and now I think my English is not good enough to work with adults because sometimes I mix the verbs, sometimes confuse myself. And, the language right now is the main concern when working with adults . . . the main concerns is really the language because to work with adults you really need to speak well, because if you don't they will think you don't even know how to speak English, how will you understand me. So yeah, as international, about the practicum I think that is the main thing, the language, because, if you're not in the same level, they will think you're not good enough and they will not trust you and they will judge you in a wrong way because you can't.

Alpha described her fear of working with clients who are resistant and her minimal language ability as a contributor in increasing client resistance:

I think the big concern is still the talking ability the language thing, like if we do the internship or practicum we are really like dealing with the real client . . . and if they see that I am a foreigner and they can figure it out that I cannot speak English well, I don't know if this is going to increase their resistance or whether it is going to trigger their resistance.

Sub-theme 2.2: Anxiety towards seeing clients. International students experience many of the same anxieties about seeing clients during practicum and internship as U.S.-born counseling students. The anxiety included feeling a sense of pressure in seeing real life clients, fear of not being able to connect with clients, lack of experiences, cultural differences between them and clients, and previous unpleasant experiences with clients during a practicum or internship. Gamma, said, "I think it's a sense of pressure that your seeing real clients and they are no longer your classmates and

they are real clients. There is a sense of pressure and responsibility that comes along with that.”

Sigma described her minimal clinical experiences of working with adults as a factor that provokes anxiety:

I don't know if I need to go to the clinic. If I need to go that will be a concern because I never work in a clinic so. To work with adults in the clinic I don't have experience so it is hard for me, I don't know what to expect, I don't know what to do. I have not done assessment before, but working with children is different from adult.

In addition to sharing common experiences with U.S. counseling students, another participant, Omega, described a critical moment with a client that is directly related to being an international student:

I had one very critical moment with my client during my practicum, and the client at that time she said, in middle of our session, she said I feel like you don't understand what I am talking about, and she asked to have a different counselor, because my language . . . because counseling is implemented in culture, we cannot work with clients without understanding where they come from, but for me, culture background is very challenging for me, because I need to be very cautious about what I say. When I work with clients, they have a different culture background, and I need to pay attention to what I say, is it culturally appropriate, and also I want them to understand that I come from a different background . . .

Sub-theme 2.3: Internship concerns. As with many counseling students, internship and supervision concerns were commonly seen across the group. Reasons for concern included both those that are common to U.S. students and those that are specific

to international students. For instance, participants were worried about finding appropriate internship sites, but that concern was heightened by worry that they would not be accepted because they were international students. They also worried about being discriminated against at internship sites and understanding the insurance and managed care policies and documentation. They were concerned about either finding a good supervisor or in the case of doctoral students, about not knowing how to conduct supervision. In some cases, participants seemed to be unaware that their U.S.-born counterparts share anxiety and lack of knowledge about similar things. For instance, Delta shared her concerns about lacking understanding of billing and managed care:

I have visited so many sites. Most of them were really welcoming me and encouraging me to go their place and do the internship and they offer me a volunteer time. I feel like have a concern about the billing, like the managed care because the insurance companies and all the staff are in the procedures of like the managed care. I have a concern about that because I am not really familiar about it even though I have taken so many classes defining and determining managed care, but I feel like it's going to be a concern because I am not familiar with it because I am an international.

Omega described her worries of not knowing the system in her internship site. In internship I feel such a difficult time because I didn't have experience as a middle school student in U.S. I had middle school in China and, which is very different. So I didn't have the experience and now I am working there to help students there, so that is very challenging. I don't know how the system works; I don't know how their teacher and children relationship, because in my culture, our teacher and student boundary is very clear. Teachers are authority and

students are students and you don't have any overlap, umm, but here it is different.

Chi discussed her frustration about having a supervisor who was not as available as she expected.

My supervisor barely has time to meet me, so it is a very big struggle to meet with him or to get my progress notes back from him . . . So if my professors knew how to manage time as well as I did, it would have been much better. So time management of professors, if they can meet with their supervisee and get how they feel, their emotions in the moment out there, it will be so much better, but sometimes it just doesn't happen.

Theme 3: Academics

Academics emerged as a broad theme where participants discussed aspects that were related to an academic domain. One of the foremost features of this theme was experiencing problems with understanding classroom assignments and/or pedagogical format. Participants expressed difficulty participating in the classroom, giving presentations, doing group work, reading comprehensive texts, and writing lengthy research papers. Challenges with these academic requirements became manifold due to language difficulty. Some of the participants also voiced their struggles with being able to complete things on time. Participants emphasized differences in teacher student relationship in the East as opposed to the West as an issue that contributed to international students' experiences.

Gamma discussed her concerns when giving presentations in the classroom:

When I do presentation, I would be really, really nervous and I have to, I have to lay out the point(s) that I have to talk beforehand and sometimes to this degree

what I have to talk (about) sentence by sentence to make sure I don't forget the points. And, yeah I have to prepare a lot of things beforehand when it comes to presentation. Umm, other than that I everything is OK, when it comes to talking that is the more difficult one.

In addition to presenting in class, participants also shared concerns with writing lengthy research papers. Sigma best illustrated challenges of writing by stating:

I think the most difficult thing for me is to write 20 or 30 pages in English. Right now it's kind of my concern because I know that I can do it in Portuguese, but in English it is different and it is quite difficult for me to do big papers. I did already my dissertation in Portugal, because in master's program I need to do dissertation and research study. Also that, dissertation we are going to do here after the program it's difficult, it's difficult. Writing in English so long papers it really difficult. The amount is my major problem, the amount.

Working in groups has also been a challenge for these participants as they were worried about not knowing accurate enough English while working with their English speaking U.S.-born counterparts. Sigma asserted:

I think also working in groups sometimes it's not so easy . . . It was a challenge because sometimes it was also an international student so he has his own native language, I have mine and between we have the English, so sometimes it's kind of hard to communicate because, we know what we want to say and what we think and what we feel, but sometimes to express it is not so easy because we don't have the proper words to apply, I think that is pretty much the only thing.

Delta added her concerns about working in a group setting and stated:

I have difficulties during the group studies like sometimes because they are owned by group members, whose English is the first language and I am second language. Sometimes I feel like I don't want to talk with them to not say something wrong and sometimes I feel like oh my god if I am going to talk now I am going to make it slow and sometimes I feel like I lose my self-esteem in front of those people because they are having the first language. But most of the time I try to strengthen myself and not think about the effect of my second language. Like I am doing better than so many of them because they have only one language and I am so fortunate that I have two languages comparing to people who are having no languages expect one. So I talk to myself about how to strengthen myself in front of the group studies, but at the same time so many times I have these feelings, do not talk and be quiet, do not share my ideas. I feel that's wrong, like I have to share my ideas with the group studies and I do share my ideas, but it is really embarrassing me to do mistakes.

Alpha discussed the need for more time to complete assignments as compared to her local American friends:

It's hard! This is my main experience because I feel this requires a lot of study since I am an international student. It takes longer for me to read exactly the same amount of material compared to the resident American student because like besides the academic word I still have a lot of words I don't know the meanings and if I try to understand a sentence it takes longer, especially some sentences that are comprehensive and not that easy to understand . . . It requires a lot of read, a lot of research, and write a lot of paper so I feel it hard . . . because it a can take a

lot of time for me to write, like without grammar problem and everything . . . I write a lot and I read a lot so it really take a lot of time.

In addition to the academic challenges of presenting in front of the whole class and working in big groups, some participants also suggested that working in smaller group initially was less threatening than presenting in front of large audiences. For instance Gamma explained that smaller groups made her feel less intimidated and she was thus able to participate in such groups:

I think working in smaller group like instead of presentation in front of a big class, it is really helpful to break the class into a small group of four or five and it makes the environment less threatening and you will be more able to share something that is more intimate to you and you wouldn't feel like as embarrassed as you would feel in the big class and fear is not that intense either.

A number of participants spoke about the difference between East and West in the professor-student relationship. For instance, Alpha said:

The relationship between the professor and the student here in America is really different from the relationship in Chinese students and their professor. Because the professor is most likely an authority model in China. We just ask questions and we just receive information, but here interaction more like, the professors here to help you study rather than some authority waiting here to judge you, so I think it's different. After I came here I go through a period of time because it hard for me to really relate to professor as a friendly way.

Gamma also noted the differences in relating with professors in the United States, though her comparison was with Malaysia.

The biggest difference I see here is that, you know the students over here do challenge their professor. Like let say that the professor say something that they don't, they hold opinion otherwise, they would just talk like that, 'oh this is how I feel' or 'this is what I think.' But in Malaysia we don't challenge our professors and we don't challenge our parents . . .

Theme 4: Multiculturalism and Diversity Issues

Participants in this study addressed their struggles with understanding multicultural concepts and feeling a sense of disconnection with some of the materials discussed in multicultural counseling class. In addition, they also commented on the lack of diversity within classroom environment that limited their socialization. Some participants also reported being subjected to being stereotyped and racially discriminated against in classrooms or social places. Omega described experiencing difficulties in her multicultural counseling class:

I remember that in the multicultural class . . . we talk about different races, how as counselor we need to develop our own awareness things like that . . . But for me I . . . am not ready to see the differences between the races because I have been here just about a year at that time . . . I don't quite understand what other people of color experience in U.S. . . . some of the readings, what they talk about, people of colors experience, I don't understand that.

Gamma discussed experiencing disconnect to the subject matter taught in her multicultural counseling class:

Also in our multicultural counseling class when we talk about the black history when we talk about the privileges and oppression they would relate it to the black history, like it starts with K . . . I don't know . . . and when they talk about

oppression, sometimes like black being the minority for something to share you can't relate to that . . . a lot of white history too and what happened between the whites and the black, the slavery history, I have no idea of all of that . . . I don't have a personal connect to that . . . when they talk about American history I don't feel a personal connection to that.

Chi shared her frustrations with lack of diversity in classroom along with her disappointment with the multicultural counseling class, saying:

My program is very as I would like to believe it is culturally diverse and we do talk about culture and diversity a lot, but 90% of the class is white . . . It's just I didn't expect that to be the case, I thought it will be very diverse. It's me and one other international student in most of my classes usually . . . when we talk about multicultural counseling I feel like it is so focused on only race, why is not focused on nationality, why is it not focused on homosexuality, why is not focused on gender, be more focused on other things. I feel like when we focus on multicultural people automatically focus on race . . .

In order to cope with the challenges of understanding the multicultural concepts, participants suggested that helping them learn about American history and culture would be beneficial. Additionally, participants believed it to be helpful for professors to be aware of international students' cultural background and how multiculturalism could impact them. For instance, Gamma suggested:

Maybe a class for American culture because . . . sometimes when I go to the multicultural classes it's actually designed for American students to understand about other cultures . . . specifically for the White students to understand about minority groups, but sometimes it will be great if there is a course for

international students to understand about the American culture, and for that class you could include the History or maybe the way they talk, language, just everything about American . . . so maybe we will have more understanding about how it works for Americans . . .

In addition to complexities with the multicultural counseling class, two participants also shared their experiences of being stereotyped and often discriminated against at universities, the clinical workplace, and in social environments. While not rising to the level of a theme, one participant also wondered if a faculty member was being racially discriminating; however, any other participant did not mention this. Chi described her thoughts and experiences of being stereotyped:

So when I first came here, people wouldn't believe that I am an Indian, so it was kind of weird. People asked, are you sure your Indian? I am like what do you mean, are you sure? I know I am Indian. You sound kind of Spanish? and I am like, no that's wrong . . . You know they are getting your identity wrong. I have got multiple things, I have got Persian, Iranian, Arabic, Spanish, Russian and I was just like NO, I am none of those. So first my biggest frustration was people not knowing who I am and then second frustration was, people saying, 'how do you speak such good English?' I am like, 'English is my first language.' It's like I speak better English than I speak better Hindi so. When people ask you how do you speak such good English, your reaction is like, I don't know any other language . . . I think the stereotype is that Indians don't speak good English, because a lot of the Indians come to [university name omitted] not from like a city like Mumbai. Even if they are, certain schools are more proficient in English than other schools. So their accent is quite visible, compared to our accent. Like I feel

like you and I have a very different accent than a lot of other Indian would have here. And, a lot of the Indian, they don't think of us as, like light skin people to be Indian.

Delta discussed her experience of being discriminated against at a potential internship site:

Sometimes I have the concern about the discrimination and the racism and because I live in a small town, they don't have a lot of diversity . . . we were a group of four students who went to a site visit for community orientation. One of the counselors didn't look at me at all; she didn't involve me at all in the conversation. Even though I was trying to talk once and she just shut me down. I was really mad inside myself, but I didn't do anything and I feel so much right now because I didn't say anything. But I felt like she is representing herself, she was representing her disrespect to other diverse populations or maybe from Muslim identity because I was the only one wearing scarf . . . I am not even going to put an option for me to do my practicum over there.

Delta further added an instance where she felt racially discriminated against at a coffee shop and indicated:

I face racism and discrimination in coffee shop with my American friends, my American friend is really nice and we were enjoying our time listening to a musician band and a man who was sitting with wife was sitting next to us and he was rolling his eyes and he was like complaining to his wife about me indirectly and after minutes my friend went to the bathroom he came behind my back and he spat, not on me, but the table behind me . . .

Theme 5: Social Connectedness

The need to connect socially was acknowledged by this group. All participants experienced social isolation; however, isolation was more with participants who didn't have family members in the United States or friends from their country of origin. Participants shared their desire to connect with people after they came to the United States and while they were in the counseling program and also discussed their difficulties in doing so. They suggested their thoughts on possible ways to help them in improving social connectedness. Omega succinctly described the experience of feeling socially secluded in her classroom when she said:

I don't know how to speak with my colleagues because I don't know how to speak. There are lot of times in class, I just sit and nobody talks to me because, I don't know why because I feel nobody likes to talk to me because I have a bad English . . . umm, and I feel isolating and I am not a part of this class, nobody cares.

Chi talked about feeling isolated with students from her home country who belonged to different academic program:

I couldn't relate to the Indians on campus, they always excluded me, I was never a part, because they all studied together, see each other all the time. Like I was never a part of anything, I was never invited to anything; I was never part of anything. I didn't know about events, so I felt very, I had to go out of my way and make an effort to know things, OK so Diwali is happening so I have to like call someone up ask someone, plead beg someone to like invite me to things. So I really like felt excluded by them . . . they have their own community . . . all the engineering students and I am not part of that . . .

Omega described how social support from a friend helped her cope with a difficult period during which she considered quitting. She said:

My family was pretty supportive and they said if it is too hard for you just come back home, we can figure out other ways. But, I had a friend and he encouraged me to stay, he said you spend so much time to pass the exam, to prepare the visa, you shouldn't just give up . . .

Omega suggested ways to improve social connectedness and states:

Have a more open environment and help us to have our own organization maybe, like they can facilitate us to have a group program. We can share our experiences, we can learn from each other, we can feel the bond, we probably have a better understanding of each other and we can study together, to face the challenges together, we don't need to feel alone and need to do all the things alone, that's a big pressure.

Alpha shared activities implemented in her university to enhance social connectedness. She indicated:

We have activity likes Thanksgiving, Halloween, or different kind of thing, it is really different kind of activity, but it gives us more time to know each other and know our program more because as a master's degree students, go to the class and go home, go to the class and go home, so didn't really socialize that much so different kind of activity like a game play or little this kind of thing really helps us to know each other better . . .

Theme 6: Impact of the Counselor Training Program

Being a part of the counseling program had a profound impact on the participants in different ways. While participants found personal growth and development and gained

clarity in their goals, they also had moments where they questioned their self-esteem. Each of these subthemes is further discussed in the sections below.

Sub-theme 6.1: Personal growth and development. Participants expressed experiencing personal growth and development while in the counseling program. They voiced that certain courses shaped their personality as a human being, molded them as counselor, and motivated them to fight against life hurdles. They also believed that education in the United States was unique and helped them gain new perspectives. Delta talked about obtaining self-growth after taking certain courses in the program and best explained this sub-theme when she said:

Most of the assignments are good and they are teaching me a lot. Like I have totally changed after taking the courses. I feel like I grow up in the program, I grow with each course I take, like for the human relation class, I guess the course was human relations a year ago, it was a challenge, but I gained a lot. And, course makes me feel I grow up with the program. I grow up with my age and my maturity and my respect to others.

Sub-theme 6.2: Clarity in goals and expectations. Many participants argued that when they entered the program they had no clarity in their goals or what they expected from the program. However, as they progressed, their goals and expectations about self and the program became clearer. Participants indicated they had a clearer vision of their future and how they wanted to contribute to society. Gamma's comments were illustrative of the movement toward clarity. She indicated:

I didn't really have a lot of clear expectations about this program because I was very blur at that time; I didn't know exactly what was counseling about. All I knew just you know was maybe you see your client and you talk and it is a talk

therapy and that's it, that's all I knew. So when I first entered the counseling program I didn't really have a lot of expectations, but I just seeing what I can get from this and see how is it going to go in the long run . . . have expectation for myself that I didn't have when I first entered the counseling program. I really want to be a muticulturally competent counselor and I really want to able to help people who are really in need of help and I really want to be a good counselor . . . a valuable influence in other people's life.

Delta shared her thoughts on how the program influenced her to become an advocate and work for her country:

My expectation that I will take course and go back to my country and do the work the other people have done. That was my expectation from the school of course and the program itself. But now after taking the courses and everything I feel like my expectations have been changed . . . I am planning to be active advocate in my country . . . So I am preparing myself for the issues I face. Before I came, I was accepting of some issues in the country, but now I feel like no, I am not accepting these issues anymore and people to know that.

Sub-theme 6.3: Questioning self-esteem. In addition to growth and obtaining clearer vision for their future, participants discussed doubting themselves at different points in time. As international counseling students they often questioned their ability to become a good counselor or being able to survive in the program. Participants often felt inferior, incompetent, and incapable while in the program. Omega narrated her experiences of self-doubt:

Oh I feel sad, my mind went blank. I feel being hurt, I questioned myself a lot, yeah I did question myself a lot, a lot . . . I will not finish this, I cannot do

research, I cannot do counseling because I don't speak such and such, yeah I questioned myself a lot in terms of being able to do well.

Gamma described not feeling competent and avoiding interactions in class:

For me I think when I am not able to do so I feel I am not competent, yeah inferior and so in the class I wouldn't want to stand out, maybe there is a fear of embarrassment too. So in order to avoid that from happening I would just rather just not stand out at all, or not talk at all to avoid any such thing from happening.

While not rising to the level of a theme, two participants made comments about their perceptions of counseling in the United States. These perceptions, while not common to the group, may have importance for counselor educators and thus are included here. Chi shared her views about the counseling program and counselors in the United States:

The biggest flaw that I see of the program is that I had a certain idea of what counseling is and how it should be and you know how I believe that America is definitely better, stuff like that. So that's why I applied here because I really thought it would be very different, but I have seen that not a lot of counselors are very efficient, not a lot of counselors are very caring and place the client first.

You know that is my biggest frustration

Sigma discussed her frustrations in differentiating between counseling and psychology:

The main thing that sometimes bothers me is that the difference between counseling and psychology. In Portugal, that thing does not exist, it's all the same. Here, they really do like different, psychology, psychology, psychology and counseling is the main thing. I do not like that. I am a psychologist, why are you

talking about a psychologist that way? Please do not differentiate because in Portugal, it is all the same; we do not have counseling, we only have psychology. I think that is one of the things that could help a lot because I am doing a Ph.D. in counselor education, but back home in Portugal, if I have that degree it's exactly the same as psychology education degree. I do not really see the difference in counseling and psychology

Theme 7: Role of Counseling Faculty and Department

Faculty members played a significant role in the participant's experiences as international students. Faculty was viewed as a support system wherein participants expected faculty members to reach out to them, understand them, encourage them, be aware of their presence, and be supportive. Participants also provided specific suggestions for the department that will facilitate their experiences of being an international counseling student and make adapting easier.

Sub-theme 7.1: Reaching out. Participants indicated that fear of embarrassment and the language barrier contributed to their resistance to speaking in class and expressed a desire that faculty members reach out so that they don't feel isolated and feel a part of the classroom environment. Alpha stated:

I am not like willing to talk or really willing to join the class, like I am just ready to wait here and listen, this is the motivation of me . . . what I think is important to me is they address me in the class.

Resistance to asking for help often left participants with unanswered questions or no clarity about the subject matter. Delta described her difficulty in asking for help:

I had that conflict at the beginning of the program, I didn't go and ask about the requirement of the class, they have it on the syllabus. Sometimes I misunderstand

the syllabus, so it delays me if I do that and don't go and ask. And they the professors need to insist for the international students to go and ask. Like they didn't insist in me in the beginning to go and ask and share our opinion with them and ask them about directs and guidelines on the assignments. I was working on my own. Like I told you I wasn't asking for help in the beginning because for the Middle Eastern culture sometimes it is difficult to ask for help.

Alpha also described the need to be addressed and questioned in class as a way of reaching out to her and stated:

So whenever my professor is making these examples, they may say, 'Ok for examples Alpha is doing something or like Amanda is doing something' so only for examples they address me that is really like make me happy, make me attention about what are they teaching, make me happy and more motivation to join the class. And, the other one is when they ask questions, like they will say, 'What do you think about such thing' so this kind of addressing really helps me to join the class and to join my classmate my cohort. So I think that is one of the important things.

Sub-theme 7.2: Understanding, encouraging, and being aware. Participants desired their professors to be understanding, encouraging, and aware of their presence in classroom. They believed that encouragement and understanding from their professors would foster growth and help them cope with the prolonged challenges of adjusting to the United States and the counseling program. Gamma talked about how understanding from the professors will help her in the process:

I think the first is language too and also how difficult it can be for them to open up sometimes like if they don't talk in class or they don't express, like they don't

express a lot of opinions or engage in discussions it's not because they don't want to, but because they feel afraid of doing that yeah just too, understand the presence of fear and where it is coming from and also to provide the understanding . . . I think it is the kind of umm support and understanding from the professor that can make the international student more at ease, confident, supportive and able to move in a slowly, but eventually move in a direction that they can engage in more discussion, able to express more opinions when environment is safe or perceived to be safe.

Alpha shared what she would like from her professor as encouragement:

So what I mean encouraging is like, the professor should encourage us to think more openly and deeply about our profession rather than restricted to and oh my gosh I am from another culture or I will not have the ability to understand my client . . . the professor should encourage students to think there is something outside of that fear. There is some way to solve the problem we are afraid of rather than like yeah the problem exist, the problem exist, you only need to increase your study or the language ability or you just need to know more or you can't handle it, it not like that. Even if you don't know that much you still can do it.

Sigma described the desire that professors be more aware of international students and their backgrounds:

So the only thing that I could say is not about counseling program, but about a faculty member; that sometimes they do not know enough about international students, sometimes they need to research on the internet if they are right about what they are telling me. Right now I feel only one person in the university knows

almost everything about international students, so that does not apply for counseling, but all international students.

Sub-theme 7.3: Providing support. Support from faculty was acknowledged as a critical factor for this group. While many participants shared receiving great support from their faculty, some participants also expressed having faculty that were not supportive. Participants provided suggestions about ways in which faculty could provide support for this group of students.

Beta shared how his faculty played a significant role in supporting him and stated: Dr. [name omitted], she helped me a lot, she is not my advisor, but she encouraged me to get graduate assistant position. She is like my family member and . . . she helped me to write a letter to the counseling program to get scholarship too. Her husband is also a professor and he is advisor and he helped me a lot like how to graduate soon and how to get good grades and everything being as advisor.

Sigma talked about a professor who also provided support:

I needed to talk to the professor . . . And I talked to her and she was amazing, she was amazing, amazing, amazing . . . she was open for me to talk, just to talk, she almost did like a counseling session because I was obviously bothered with the topic so I think that relationship is really, really good because you establish a relationship more than professor student. You have a connection and when you have a connection learning is much more easier.

Not all faculty members were described as supportive, however, Delta described her experiences with a non-supportive faculty member while in the program, indicating:

Professors and the dean are really supportive and understandable and they are thinking about each student individually. But only one professor that I don't like because I feel like sometimes not all the time I am not sure if she is racist, but I am not making my assumptions so I am not going to say that she is racist, but its only assumptions, as I told you it only small incidences that make me feel that way and one time she made me cry that was because of my assignments because she gave me a paper to redo it and that made me have a conflict about other assignments. And, so I was late in one assignment and she said you have to really work on your timeline and she was really rude to me. I felt she that because of my limitations and she didn't consider my limitations as English as a second language.

Chi also shared her experience with both supportive and non-supportive faculty members:

I know like two or three professors are so caring and so like all about you know helping their students, helping like their professional development will be like prompt with emails, would reply and then there are other professors you would email them email them email them and you will not hear back, so you're like, and that person is your supervisor and your pouring your heart out and saying you this is what I think I did wrong, I need feedback and they will just not reply to your email, so you know, you're kind of like stuck.

Participants identified ways in which programs could enhance their support of international students. Gamma discussed the support program implemented in her university department and stated:

My department they have come up with the international student support group that meets on a weekly basis and so it is under supervision of one of the counseling professors. So when we meet we meet with the Ph.D. students the doctoral students in the counseling program and we will talk about difficulties our challenges here being in the counseling program as an international counseling student and it's a support group for international counseling students. So I think that would be helpful yeah because it doesn't only involve the Ph.D. students, but it's also under the supervision of [university name omitted] counseling professor. It makes it more; I think the sense of support is stronger in that case.

Chi expressed her desire for programs to foster a supportive environment when she said:

I just, I don't know how to do this, but just creating an environment, which is, you know like, creating a sense of belonging, but I don't know how you can do that. Like making them involved in more activities, making them feel a part of more activities on campus, more things on campus, more things in the department. Make them feel like they belong and that they have a purpose and like they are doing something. Otherwise, they feel excluded, especially first year first semester you are not really a part of many clubs, activities nothing, you know. If you don't have friends, you just going to stay at-home and not do much like it is very depressing the first year the first few months. Like try to do a healthy transition . . .

Sub-theme 7.4: Specific suggestions. Participants provided specific suggestions for counseling departments that may facilitate participants' ability to cope with the varied

challenges of being in the counseling program. Beta provided suggestions, for example, to help students deal with initial challenges.

When the new student comes here taking them around at first you know, make them well known with the university. Try to get them to their advisor and the advisor will get familiar with the student and after that trying to tell what's the culture and give them some orientation about the culture and the programs in the university. It helps a lot to develop the student when they come for the first time.

Delta suggested various ideas for counseling department to consider that she believed may help students:

I wish they have more comprehensive knowledge about our needs, limitations, about our conflicts and issues of working in the counseling department . . . If they have tutoring, like somebody tutoring the students in the counseling program . . . It's basically I want someone to hold my hand. I just want someone to hold my hand. I couldn't find any one . . . Like not only tutoring and holding hands, having conferences in the department, like involve the students with the faculty, having conferences in the program.

Chi shared information about a program that was implemented in her university department that she believed was beneficial to her:

What our department did was, we got assigned a mentor, but that was not only international students that was each and every student who came into our department was assigned a mentor. We had a mentor-mentee program, so now I am the mentor for two new mentees, so I think it is beneficial to match them based on tracks and international status or nationality. I have a mentee who is an international student and when I give her advice or whenever she finds it

beneficial, she is very grateful and I know it is beneficial compared to my experience with my mentor.

Additional Finding

While not rising to the level of a theme, some participants indicated they had no knowledge of CACREP or what it means to attend a CACREP-accredited program prior to coming to the United States. Alpha best illustrated this lack of information when she said:

I don't know anything about CACREP accreditation and this kind of thing when I joined the program. So I am just lucky, OK I just picked this program and I just joined the program. So I can't imagine if a student from another country just join a program and when they are in the middle of the program suddenly recognize, oh my god our university is not CACREP accredited, oh my god the new insurance policies like this when I am not CACREP accredited I can't find a job, I can't imagine how hard it going to be.

Exemplary Portraits

Through the analysis of individual and then group data, heuristic inquiry eventually results in the creation of two or three exemplary portraits. Exemplary portraits are “profiles that are unique to the individuals yet characterize the group as a whole” (Moustakas, 1990, p.50). Two exemplary portraits of participants that best illustrated the core themes as related to the group as a whole are presented below:

Gamma

I think [university name deleted] counseling program is actually very supportive . . . it is very strong, they know what they are doing and they provide a really strong support system to the international counseling students, that's what I

experience . . . So far I think there are all positive experiences because I remember there was one time I had a really terrible period pain and I was in the class, but I just couldn't concentrate as much as I usually would . . . So I was just, at the end of the class, another international student and I, we went to the professor and we just expressed our concerns regarding, not assignment, but the exam. I remember we were having a DSM class and so we were going to have an exam regarding the case study . . . were just telling our professor because usually in case study when they describe their clients they use a really American English and sometimes as an international student we don't know what that means and that might hinder our efforts in finishing that exam . . . I think at the same time there was an assignment due too. So she knew that I wasn't feeling too well and she asked me like, do you want to extend the due date because you're not feeling really well so you can extend the due date if you want. So I just told her, it's OK I can manage, but I think it is the thought that counts, they really care for you as a student regardless of where you come from and usually when we go to the professors and express our needs due to language barrier and all that, they are very understanding, they always help us to be at the most comfortable level, when in class, when we present, like they are always encouraging and all that.

So far it is all positive experiences, but I do feel like it is really challenging to be in counseling program because our first language is not English. It's one of the languages I speak in my country, but it is not my first language and so when I need to describe something or when I need to explain something in detail Mandarin works better for me instead of English. But in counseling, presentation is not the only thing you do. You have to communicate, you have to see clients,

you have to talk a lot in class so that's really challenging for me . . . I think it's the environment. I feel like I stand out in that class because of my physical appearance . . . because like in Malaysia everyone looks just the same, we have three races and we are so used to seeing like different, like three races together so in those class you don't feel like you're different, you just naturally blend in, but in the United States, I feel like I stand out even though I dress like really normal . . . Ummm, I feel distant too in a way because like some can blend just naturally, like with the local students, but for me, as much as we talk or all that, but I don't feel like we are really like close friends. So I feel distance, so we are just classmates and we are not like how I would feel to people from similar culture or same culture as mine . . .

I think one of the biggest difference I see here is that, you know the students over here do challenge their professor, like let's say that the professor say something that they don't, they hold opinion otherwise, they would just talk like that, 'oh this is how I feel' or 'this is what I think.' But in Malaysia we don't challenge our professors and we don't challenge our parents. Yeah we don't challenge people who are older than us and it's considered as disrespectful and when we confront what we say, in my advanced counseling class, sometimes in supervision we do things like, give feedback and all that and it's very common and very acceptable of us giving all the feedback to each other without feeling like, without feeling offended . . . I think it's good in a way because I think I have learned how to be more directive, not extremely directive, but at-least I will say the truth if I have to and I will stand up for what I really want and I think it does makes communication easier in a way . . .

I think I am lucky because before I entered the counseling program, I have a couple of friends, when I first came here, I knew a friend like he just migrated here like seven years ago so basically he is very, he is a Asian, but he has adopted many of the typical American characteristics and so I have a very close relationship with him and in the process of that we communicate a lot and I think he was the first person who taught me the value of honesty, the value of confrontation and all that. So when I entered the counseling program it wasn't something like freshly new to me . . .

I think it is very thought provoking and scary and life changing at times because a lot of things I think is unconscious, but when you pick that class that teaches you about multicultural competency, when you take that class that teaches you about LGBT population or when you take that class that teaches you about crises, trauma, it increases your awareness about something you were unconscious before and now it became more conscious to you . . .

Sometimes I just feel like I am scared to go to school because I have to be in that classroom where I feel really different for three hours and four days a week, something like that. I do feel scared and sometimes I feel the time does not pass fast, like this is only week eight, how long more does it take to go to the end of the semester. And, all this, I won't be experiencing in Malaysia because I would be so comfortable to go to that class and sit there and talk if I have too, but no here, yeah sometimes I feel, I think fear, fear is the emotion behind . . . when you say that the word inferiority came to my mind. I think the main reason is because English is not my first language and sometimes when I am in supervision group and when I look at my classmates, they are all very good people, you know, I

have two people in my supervision group and when I look at them speaking, I would just look at them in awe, like you know can you speak English without stopping and just continue without stopping and explain in detail and explain in a very articulate manner and everything is seems so simple, for them. You don't have to process the thoughts, you don't have to translate it and you just have to talk whatever is in your mind, yeah you just have to say whatever is in your mind, and for me I think when I am not able to do so I feel I am not competent, yeah inferior and so in the class I wouldn't want to stand out, maybe there is a fear of embarrassment too. So in order to avoid that from happening I would just rather just not stand out at all, or not talk at all to avoid any such thing from happening . . .

When I have to connect I will with the American students, yeah, but after that we wouldn't keep in touch anymore, but for other international students we do keep in touch outside of the classroom, so we hang out every once in a while . . . for local students like when we have to do group presentation, group projects together, we will meet up like on weekly basis, work together to meet this goal of finishing this project, after that, that's it we wouldn't be contacting each other consistent basis all that . . .

When counseling clients I have the fear of not being able to connect with the clients because of the language too and because you know they have cultural implication, for their language I am not familiar with that because I didn't grow up here and so I am afraid that I might interpret wrongly about what they say and they might interpret wrongly about what I say. Because I don't know what it means in this culture. If my ability to speak English is better, let's say in Malaysia

my first language is English I think it should be fine yeah, it should be better than I expected, but because my first language is not English and so I will take a longer time to get familiarize with this language and vocabulary . . .

I think it's a sense of pressure that you're seeing real clients and they are no longer your classmates and they are real clients. There is a sense of pressure and responsibility that comes along with that. And, language . . . I can do like communication one-on-one or in a small group setting, like supervision group that is OK. I am only not OK with communication in big group setting or big class and all that and I think it's even more beneficial or effective for me if I do it one-on-one, yeah . . .

I think in United States it more like a mutual relationship [with the instructor], more like, well with the presence of respect of course, but it more like friends for me . . . But in my country it is more like higher level and lower level it's more, there is still a authority and so when talk to them we still have to respect there is a stronger presence of respect there. Yeah so maybe it's rare that we see our teachers as friends in Malaysia . . . I thinks it is still very different for me, I am still taking my time to deal with that and now when I talk to my professor I feel that is so different from the local students the way they talk to the professors . . . Sometimes I feel really awkward when I have to meet the professor one-on-one for the first time . . . I don't know what to talk about. I need some time to get used to that one-on-one environment and to feel comfortable enough . . . I guess sometimes when I think . . . I am not like it is difficult for me to approach my professor, it is not because of the reality, it is because my personality, that's why it's like that . . .

another thing is when I do presentation, I would be really nervous and I have to, I have to lay out the point that I have to talk [about] beforehand and sometimes to this degree . . . sentence by sentence to make sure I don't forget the points. And, yeah I have to prepare a lot of things beforehand when it comes to presentation. Umm other than that I, everything is OK, when it comes to talking that is the more difficult one. When it comes to writing it is OK, especially if it is like reflection paper because I feel more comfortable, I think I am better at writing reflection paper rather than theory paper, so when it comes to reflection paper it is ok. But I do feel that I need a longer time to do that probably compared to local students and I need more time to make sure that I am delivering my message accurately and they understand what I am writing, because you know the way we write our sentence it is different too yeah so I have to make sure it is understandable to them and there were times that I felt I didn't know the exact word that I wanted to talk about.

I didn't really have a lot of clear expectations about this program because I was very blur at that time; I didn't know exactly what was counseling about. All I knew just you know was maybe you see your client and you talk and it is a talk therapy and that's it, that's all I knew. So when I first entered the counseling program I didn't really have a lot of expectations, but I just seeing what I can get from this and see how is it going to go in the long run and all that, let's try how is the first class going to be . . .

Before I came to the United States, I was already living away from home. I think I started living on campus in 2006, so when I first did my undergraduate degree in Malaysia, it's like the distance [cities deleted], so I was living close to my campus

and I had a very difficult time at that point. Even though I went back to my home like every week, I still went through a very difficult time because I was first time living away from home, so I think use like two semesters to get used to that feelings, so having that experiences made it so much easier for me to get used to life in the United States and plus I came with a friend, so I wasn't really alone. I have a friend with me and so I still got really homesick sometimes, when I first came here, especially during the beginning of year when us as Malaysians Chinese, we celebrate Chinese New Year and our Facebook will be bombarded with all sorts of Chinese New Year post and pictures and I am not there and so that will be the most difficult time for me to deal with, and I get really homesick really . . . I still don't have expectations about my program and my professors . . . but I have expectation for myself that I didn't have when I first entered the counseling program. I really want to be a muticulturally competent counselor and I really want to able to help people who are really in need of help and I really want to be a good counselor like to really be a valuable influence in other people's life. So the goal kind of became clearer to me now. I have a goal that I didn't have when I first entered the counseling program.

I think the first is language too and also how difficult it can be for them to open up sometimes like if they don't talk in class or they don't express, like they don't express a lot of opinions or engage in discussions it's not because they don't want to, but because they feel afraid of doing that . . . understand the presence of fear and where it is coming from and also to provide the understanding, understanding is really important, and yeah support is really important too . . . I think it is the kind of support and understanding from the professor that can make the

international student more at ease, confident, supportive and able to move in a slowly, but eventually move in a direction that they can engage in more discussion, able to express more opinions when environment is safe or perceived to be safe . . .

I think working in smaller group like instead of presentation in front of a big class, it is really helpful to break the class into a small group of four or five and it makes the environment, less threatening and you will be more able to share something that is more intimate to you and you wouldn't feel like as embarrassed as you would feel in the big class and not fear is not that intense either, yeah because that's how we did for our multicultural class and I think it really worked . . . and also in our multicultural counseling class when we talk about the black history when we talk about the privileges and oppression they would relate it to the black history, like it starts with K-it's something regarding black history . . . I don't know, but a lot of back history and when they talk about oppression, sometimes like black being the minority for something to share you can't relate to that. And, you know when they talk about U.S. President Kennedy and list of President and their history and that's why he got shot and something like that and a lot of white history too and what happened between the whites and the black, the slavery history, I have no idea of all of that. Yeah so I will just hear, but I don't have a personal connect to that. Yeah I did study American history in my undergraduate . . . I just forgot everything after that class . . . So when they talk about American history I don't feel a personal connection to that . . . Maybe they could explain a little bit more like when they talk about let's say slavery history, generally what happened between that time instead of talking to

the class as if we know it and sometimes it's just an exchange in class, it's not really a topic, but there is just you know having some casual conversations umm regarding this histories, it's not really a discussion but they are just exchanging conversations like how, you know usually, like sometimes you would talk with friends in class, so just make jokes about it. But as an international student I don't understand the inside joke about that joke, yeah so . . . Just to be more aware of our presence sometimes, so maybe explain a little about that joke or explain a little bit about what they are saying. Maybe a class for American culture because as I say sometimes when I go to the multicultural classes it's actually designed for American students to understand about other cultures. Yeah it's designed specifically for the White students to understand about minority groups, but sometimes it will be great if there is a course for international students to understand about the American culture and for that class you could include the history or maybe the way they talk, language, just everything about American, maybe from ancient time to now and so maybe we will have more understanding about how it works for Americans in terms of way we speak, the way we behave and their history too . . .

My department, they have come up with the international student support group that meets on a weekly basis and so it is under supervision of one of the counseling professors. So when we meet we meet with the Ph.D. students . . . in the counseling program and we will talk about difficulties our challenges here being in the counseling program as an international counseling student and it's a support group for international counseling students. So I think that would be helpful yeah because it doesn't only involve the Ph.D. students, but it's also under

the supervision of [university name omitted] counseling professor . . . I think the sense of support is stronger in that case . . . I think maybe we can have like, a supervision session for international students or a class for that or something like. Where we can talk about our concerns, our difficulties we encounter as a counselor coming from different culture than my client and to have like, may to make sure I am understanding what they are saying correctly because what I interpret may be different from what they really mean and it's culturally different. So maybe I can consult my professors about that. Or have an advisor or something . . . I think just have a class to study about American culture, the race and the language will be so helpful . . .

Omega

I will start from the first time I came here, yeah the first time I came here, it was quite scary, I come here by myself, I don't have any family member here, I don't know anyone, but the first think which was very good was my advisor, he picked me up in the airport . . . he brought his wife, his children and his dog at that time to pick me up, so I get a chance to know an American family. They are very welcoming and warm that was my first thing in U.S., so that's very positive . . . As soon as the semester starts, I realize oh my god, as an international student, I think I am the only one in my program who is weak, in my master's program as English is not my native language, so that is very challenging for me. I remember in the orientation activity, I did not understand anything. I feel so confused because of language barrier I couldn't speak myself, couldn't understand what they are talking about and that is quite scary. And, yeah after the orientation, out school not started yet, it's Monday when we were having out first class, Friday

before the Monday we had the orientation, after the orientation I called my family and I said that I cannot stand, I cannot be here because I couldn't understand anything. I could not sleep and my family was pretty supportive and they said if it is too hard for you just come back home, we can figure out other ways. But, I had a friend and he encouraged me to stay . . .

So the first week, it's confusing, in class I had never any preparation classes. The first class in U.S. is the masters level class, where I have a bad language barrier, so that's that is very challenging to me. So I have read all day in English, write in English I mean professional writing, participate in class, I mean I didn't do class discussion for whole first semester because I just cannot follow up, umm, it's a struggle, it's quite a struggle and the other good thing is I leave in the dorm . . . I leave in the dorm, so I have, the guys who leave in the same dorm are very nice. They often invite me to eat with them or having fun or watching TV with them, so that is very helpful for me to adjust to the culture, for language too. I made a very good friend, in the dorm, umm yeah that help me a lot . . .

In the first semester I constantly struggle with language barrier, but I read a lot and finish all my assignments, but class participation is very challenging for me. The second semester I started to discuss more in class, it was big progress for me and umm yeah I think program did not judge me, overall they support me. My advisor as person is very supportive, encourage me to share more in class, sometimes if I was in his class he would ask me for my opinion instead of just letting other people keep talking, sometimes he will invite me to the conversations and I feel like I am important . . . yes that shows he trust me and he think I am capable, that's important . . .

I remember that in the multicultural class, I only had one multicultural class, but the multicultural ideas is always in every class, but we have only one class and I certainly think we need to have more class because I think it is the foundation. In that class we talk about different races, how as counselor we need to develop our own awareness things like that . . . But for me I, I am not ready to see the differences between the races because I have been here just about a year at that time umm I don't quite understand what other people of color experience in U.S., so for me, I just was here for a quite a short time, some of the readings, what they talk about, people of colors experience, I don't understand that. But as I stay here longer . . . I hear about different races and experiences change over time . . .

When I work with clients, they have a different culture background, and I need to pay attentions to what I say, is it culturally appropriate, and also I want them to understand that I come from a different background and yeah it's, I am not sure how to say, how the culture background affect me negatively or positively, but I think it is a mix, even though English is not my first language and I don't originally come from U.S., I think there is positive and negative aspect to that, because as a English learner, when I work with my client tend to not view me as a authority or person who has power, so we tend to have a mutual power . . .

I do have language barrier, I also have lot of assignment, writing, and reading. Using another language doing that is very time-consuming, it is very stressful, yeah sometimes I feel like my life is all about studies, I don't have much other going on because, yeah I need to finish my homework, do this and do that, and my families are all far away, it is quite a bored. It is very boring here . . .

Sometimes, in the beginning, I don't know how to speak with my colleagues because I don't know how to speak. There are lot of times in class, I just sit and nobody talks to me . . . because I don't know why because I feel nobody likes to talk to me because I have a bad English umm and I feel isolating and I am not a part of this class, nobody cares . . .

I took internship in a middle school as a school counselor and I am lucky to have a good supervisor over there, but as international student in the beginning, I was questioned by a lot of teachers in the school, they questioned me, they didn't confronted me, but they questioned about me and brought up the concern to my supervisor. They asked her, 'I don't even speak English, how can I work here? How can I help other students?' That is their concerns, in the beginning. I did not know that until I finished. But I kind of feel that some people have opinion about me, but I am not letting that influence me because I have my own judgments about how I am doing and yeah and I work hard . . .

I worked as a graduate assistant position for a year and a half and at the beginning of the third semester of working there my professor had a conversation with me, she said about ten things that she thinks I did wrong umm one, I don't remember exactly which, what she said, but I remember one thing what she said that I shouldn't say 'what's up' to her, she said 'it is offensive.' I mean as an international student I learn language from here, I don't quite know what is right and what is wrong. I just take to risk to learning English, and I don't think 'what's up' is offensive because I see some other friends say to each other, use the same thing. And, so she told me many other things, which I don't think I did wrong, but she didn't give me chance to, she just said you did things wrong, this wrong this

wrong, she didn't give me follow up suggestions what I should do, it's bad, and also she did not give me a chance to explain myself. Why I did this, and she said and then she jumped ahead and said, I understand you come from a different country, but since you work here, this is what you will not do. And, I just feel like, how can you say you can understand me, without even asking where I come from and why I did this. And, I feel so being judged and that's a painful experience for me and sooner after that, I just quit my job as a GA . . .

I had a one very critical moment with my client during my practicum and the client at that time she said, in middle of our session, she said I feel like you don't understand what I am talking about and she asked to have a different counselor because my language, so that's another moment. I mean I tried my best, that's all I can tell and in internship, it's in internship I feel such a difficult time because I didn't have experience as a middle school student in U.S. I had middle school in China and, which is very different. So I didn't have the experience and now I am working there to help students there, so that is very challenging. I don't know how the system works I don't know how their teacher and children's relationship because in my culture, our teacher and student boundary is very clear. Teachers are authority and students are students and you don't have any overlap, umm, but here it is different. I need to work with parents, principals, secretaries to make arrangements to, to enroll new students to transfer old students out. All these things need a lot of documents and these documents procedure is very challenging for me. Umm yeah it's a lot, it's a lot every day is so stressful, because, I am learning, but I have certain standards I need to meet I need to accomplish something, but I am still learning yeah that's a hard time for me, but it is

beneficial I wanted to say, but it is very difficult as an international student, it is really difficult . . . I questioned myself a lot, yeah I did question myself a lot, a lot . . . I will not finish this, I cannot do research, I cannot do counseling because I don't speak such and such, yeah I questioned myself a lot in terms of being able to do well . . .

Yes I didn't have any expectations because you know in my country we don't have counselor master's degree, we don't train counselors in academic program . . . yeah, so I don't know, what I am looking forward to . . . as I learned more, I feel like being able to do counseling is very useful and my country needs, needs professional like us, but like I said we don't have academic training for those counselors and I see a big gap in there, so I tell myself I need to gather a counseling supervision and education degree so I was able to train professional counselors in my country when I come home. That's how I decided to stay further in the Ph.D. . . .

Sometimes I had difficult time to express myself, it's very difficult for sharing and me to express. Other people are capable of sharing as comfortable as they can and that is very unfair for me. And, sometimes when I say something other people don't understand and they don't ask me follow up questions, they just leave that alone. That means, what is that, I am unimportant? So I do have a lot of these experiences in class . . .

I also want them to actually see that how much effort, maybe how much more effort I put, even though, let's see if my classmate write a ten pages paper, but I only write five pages paper that doesn't mean I work less harder as her because that probably take longer time for me to come out with the five pages. And

whenever I share something in class I want them to feel my patience and want them to feel I am learning and I work hard. I just want them to, even though sometimes because language was there, I cannot totally fully express myself using advance language, but whenever I say something, I take a lot of courage to do because it is a second language, it's continuously a problem. I just want to let them know that . . .

Have a more open environment and help us to have our own organization may be, like they can facilitate us to have a group program. We can share our experiences; we can learn from each other, we can feel the bond, we probably have a better understanding of each other and we can study together, to face the challenges together, we don't need to feel alone and need to do all the things alone, that's a big pressure . . . yeah we need to have at-least one professor to come and help us and reach out more because I have a personality who will not ask help so if a professor reaching out, very proactive can save some of my time and energy more and make my life easier, if he can reach out for me and ask if, do you need help and such and such . . .

With internship I search, the online to find the internship, but when I have difficulties I tend to process within my head, instead of telling my supervisor. Internship is very challenging for me, I hope, sometimes I wish I can speak English absolutely, like other, but I am not and that's a struggles and you are being evaluate . . . my supervisor did a good job, he always asked me, like if he give me some suggestions he always ask me is there, is there anything I missed in your culture that I could have bias, please let me know if you don't agree with these suggestions or something like that. So he is pretty open about receiving

feedback from me as her supervisee. He is happy to learn to my culture background yeah it is important. If professor show interest in my culture, like if they say I have questions about China, could you give me the answers that shows me that, he or she is interested in my culture and that give me a lot of credit. I want to be asked about my culture. That shows respect-that shows interest. I mean interpersonally relationship is based on this interest. If you are not interested in other person, then how come we build the relationship . . .

I would like some professional writing and reading classes to help us have a basic idea of where to start, because each person have a different language level, like for people like me, I almost studies from level zero. I never wrote a professional English paper, and English readings are also overwhelming. I don't know how I can finish this writing . . .

Creative Synthesis

Moustakas (1990) considers creative synthesis to be the last stage of the data analysis process. In this stage the researcher integrates original material that reflects his or her intuition, imagination, and personal knowledge of the meaning and essences of the experiences (Moustakas, 1990). The synthesis can take the form of lyrics, a poem, a song, narrative description, a story, or a metaphoric tale. I chose to compose a narrative description of my experiences as an international student in the counseling program as well as my experiences throughout the research process.

Coming to the United States to pursue further education was not a matter of choice, but a matter of chance for me. It was the year 2009, when I got engaged and my fiancé had made a choice to further continue his education in America. He was very fascinated about the idea of going to the United States and living the American dream.

His decision of coming to the United States changed my life forever. Being the girl from contemporary modern India, I was clear that if I choose to go to the United States it would be on an independent and not on a dependent visa status. We had two long years before we got married and thus I made the choice to continue my studies further in America.

After my fiancé's departure to the United States, I too got engaged in the preparations for leaving for the United States. Coming to America had now become a drive, but within I had huge resistance and a sense of insecurity of leaving my country and family. Now that I think back, it seemed like fear of an uncertain future. Since I had made the decision of going to the U.S., there was no looking back, and so I began the preparation in full swing. From getting my passport to Graduate Record Examination (GRE), TOEFL, university applications, paper formalities, bank loans, visa process, shopping, tickets – I had to do it all. Completing each stage one after the other, it was just a few days before I had to leave my country and family. I still remember that day distinctly when I was packing my luggage and all my relatives and friends had come home to meet me. As much as all were excited and happy that I had gotten this opportunity to go to a U.S. university, everyone had a heavy heart to let me go. It was a feeling of bittersweet, but I had to be strong and only focus on my goal. So with great difficulty I bid goodbye to all my family and friends and stepped towards a new beginning.

Throughout my travel, I experienced a lot of anxiety and had no idea of what I was heading to. I had some perception about America, American people, and the lifestyle, but they were all based on movies and the internet. I just chose to keep myself open to everything that may come my way. January 10th, 2010, I landed in Houston,

Texas, where my fiancé had come to receive me. It was the most amazing feeling; I was thrilled to see him and had a sense of accomplishment. Everything around me was so new: the roads, people, vehicles, weather, and infrastructure. It just seemed like another world to me. After spending two days with my fiancé, and experiencing severe jet lag, we headed to my university at Corpus Christi. It was a beautiful little city and I was eagerly looking forward to all my experiences.

Before I had left India, I had spoken to few Indian girls from the computer science department about sharing an apartment during my stay in the United States as a student. I found these roommates from the Indian Student Association page on the university website. I had only interacted with them over the phone and so was curious to know who they were. I had some preconceived notion about how they may look or their traits, but on meeting them it was a total surprise. All my roommates were from the southern part of India and looked totally different than I did. They all spoke the same language and came from conservative families unlike mine. They had a very different lifestyle and ate extremely spicy food. The house I was living in was not as tidy as I may keep and this was a huge shift. I was too lost but hoped that things would get better from here.

The next day my fiancé left to go back to his university, which is when I had a moment of realization that I am now all alone. The initial days were very challenging as I felt lonely because I had no friends here and was not able to connect with my Indian roommates. I missed my family and friends and often felt homesick. The first few months, regular difficulties such as transportation, food, cultural and structural differences, and limited friends, had become a part of my living. With these preoccupations, it was arduous to maintain focus on the real goal, which was academics. I

think it was not difficult to find my way out of my initial problems; however, this process was time-consuming and emotionally strenuous.

Academic life in the master's program had also become overwhelming because I was unable to understand professors' accents, and was not able to get used to their style of teaching or the way students related with their professors. I think just the way educational system is setup in the west is so different from the east. The east focuses on the traditional teaching methodology, while the western teaching enhances critical or creative thinking. Orienting oneself to a new educational system, without support, makes the process overwhelming. In addition, I constantly struggled with high tuition fee concerns and the requirement to go to conferences while in the program.

With differences in culture and difficulty coping with the environmental challenges, I often felt depressed about my situation, confused about my life, anxious and remained under constant pressure. Since I was the only student from India in the counseling program, I always felt a sense of pressure to represent my country and to know everything about my country. As much as this feeling was elating, it constantly made me realize that I was an outsider in the program and that my country was judged based on my actions and behaviors. I almost felt that I had to stand on behalf of my entire nation, which is so diverse.

In spite of all this there was something that kept me going. I think it was the 'don't give up attitude' and the belief of my family that I could do it. After the initial few months, I started realizing that I began unfolding some of my biases and opinions about America. I had begun learning new perspectives. I not only discovered things about myself, but also about my country. With coursework and assignments, I gained some insight about life and the counseling program. People in my department were

encouraging and I believe it is that encouragement which kept me motivated. A huge example of motivation was when my department chair asked me to consider the Ph.D. program in their department. The thought that I, as a student was capable of completing a Ph.D. program was very motivating and inspiring. Since I had completed my masters in India, I thought it would nice to consider doing a Ph.D. Thus after taking few leveling courses and completing the application and interview process, I was admitted to the Ph.D. program. The Ph.D. program was a huge achievement and a big step in my life. With my background in clinical psychology, I was now stepping into a counselor education program.

With six months of being in the United States and doing few courses at graduate level, I was now quite well versed with the teaching system here and also acquainted with the culture. However, a Ph.D. program was another world together. The whole concept of teaching at the Ph.D. level was one of being a facilitator and we as students had to learn things on our own and teach to the class, which was extremely challenging. We had a cohort system that was very different from master's level. At the doctoral level, the biggest challenge for me was to survive in the program being an international student.

As much as I enjoyed being in class, I had many difficulties throughout the program. I think what bothered me most was that I had no Indian student in my program and that I had to work with this diverse group of people from different backgrounds, unlike my other Indian friends on campus. In addition, the teaching format and the kinds of assignments that I had to do were challenging. I never understood APA format, statistics went beyond my understanding, and I always feared talking to some professors. When it came to practicum and internship, I was put in a work place with adjudicated children, who were highly resistant and culturally very different from me. With

background in clinical psychology, I had to now learn to change my entire orientation to the counseling field. The field of counseling was post-modernistic, where psychology in India still follows and practices the traditional theories and approaches. Approaching counseling from a non-directive stance unlike the traditional directive style was a huge clinical shift.

With no association to U.S. history, the class on multicultural counseling had become extremely challenging. I never understood a lot of things that were spoken or discussed in class. Topics discussed in this class seemed like a language that I never spoke. Everything that was discussed in class, I had to learn to make sense of the material, go back and read through the history, and attempt to understand what people with different colors experienced. Without the contextual understanding of American history, I think I had a hard time considering the experiences of people who belonged to privileged or underprivileged groups.

Being a part of the counseling program has definitely influenced me as a potential counselor and has shaped me as a human being. I came into the program with many strong beliefs and questions, and as I progressed, I gained insight into many dimensions of the counseling profession and my life. The facilitative, teaching approach enabled me to think and bring my experiences to the table. My colleagues sharing their perspectives gave a new dimension to my thinking. The teaching procedure did definitely tap my critical thinking ability, as now I was able to question and think about things I never noticed. To me it was a different form of learning that enhanced my overall development.

So being an international student had become a part of my identity and had become a topic, which was very close to my heart. So at the time of dissertation, I chose to examine experiences of other international students who were currently in the

counseling program like me. I chose a qualitative study as I thought this approach would best elicit responses to research questions I was exploring. I was anxious to begin the research study, as it was something I had never done before; however, with the support of my dissertation chair I began this research.

The whole dissertation to me seemed like reaching the tip of the mountain. Little did I know how the journey was going to look or things I would discover in the process. All I could do was to stay committed and trust my chair and begin climbing the mountain. Since the design and methodology of the research was well laid out I could begin participant recruitment. I was very curious to know who my participants would be. I also wondered if I would find the number of participants I needed. But to my surprise after sending out the survey, I was amazed to see the kind of responses. Many students had shown interest in my study by taking the survey and that was really motivating. After recruiting my participants, I had scheduled Skype interviews with them, which I was looking forward to. Initially I was nervous to begin the interview, as I was not sure if I would conduct the interview correctly and I was also unaware of how my participants' would respond. But as I began meeting with each participant and interacting with them, each participant's story seemed like a different world, with new challenges and experiences. I could relate to, many of them, as I had similar experiences. Overall the whole interview process was interesting and as I heard through participants' experiences, made me feel that my study was worthwhile.

After conducting the interviews with all participants, it was time to transcribe them. Transcribing was a painstaking process and I spent days transcribing the data and reliving those experiences. Once all the data were transcribed, I began with analysis of data. Although I had the heuristic guidelines for analysis and help of my dissertation

chair, analyzing the data was overwhelming. I was concerned about whether or not I was interpreting the data accurately and capturing the essence of participants' experiences. Ultimately, with an elaborate analysis procedure, I was able to arrive at the core themes that represented the findings of this study. Arriving at the core themes was a thrilling experience.

The whole experience of working with many other international counseling students was fascinating. This topic was so close to my heart as I lived each day each moment as an international counseling student. I was now eager to hear experiences of other students. I could relate with many of the students I spoke to, but specifically the girl from India was the one I could relate the most. She and I were from the same city and had almost similar challenges. One of the issues that we had in common was that we both had difficulty interacting with people from our own country. She like me was also the only Indian student in her program and often felt banished from the Indian students who belonged to other academic programs. The participant from Saudi Arabia really touched my heart with her experiences. Her experiences of being discriminated against and having no social support system made me realize that my study was worthwhile and may have great benefits to other international students who may not have the space to voice their opinions.

During the entire dissertation process, I learned and discovered many things about myself as well as about qualitative research. Being a student from India, I always thought that language was never a concern for me. However, during the process of my research and dissertation writing, I recognized that even though I believed I spoke fluent English, writing English was not that easy. Often, as I was writing, I intended one thing, only to find that, in English, what I wrote meant something entirely different. I was never as

aware of language as a barrier as I was by the end of this process. Sometimes, the only way to arrive at written language that accurately representing my thoughts was to explain what I meant. At these times, the shared experience between participant and my own experiences were very clear.

I recognized that I was able to remain open and was willing to hear experiences of individuals from different cultural background without being judgmental or opinionated. Interacting with participants also taught me a lot about various cultures and how people may perceive situations. My capacity to be patient was also challenged during the dissertation process. For a good dissertation to take shape, you require time, patience, and persistence. I was surprised with my capacity to remain patient with the challenges through the process and yet remain persistent with the goal of completing the dissertation. Overall, this research I believe has helped me grow as a human being and has allowed be to understand the nuances of the life of an international student in the United States.

Conclusion

This chapter provided findings obtained through data analysis. Seven international counseling students who were currently enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling programs and were living in the United States were interviewed. Analysis of data revealed seven primary themes: adapting to a foreign land, clinical concerns, academics, multiculturalism and diversity issues, social connectedness, impact of the counselor training program, and the role of counseling faculty and department. The subsequent chapter focuses on discussion of the findings, along with correlations to present research, limitations, implications for the field of counseling, and recommendations for further research.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Introduction

This study investigated the experiences of seven international student participants in their counseling program and explored ways in which faculty members or their department could facilitate a successful academic experience. Data obtained from seven participants was analyzed to answer two research questions: What are the lived experiences of international students in CACREP-accredited programs? How can counseling programs support international students in graduate counseling programs? A composite depiction represented by seven core themes emerged, and two exemplary portraits were presented that illustrated those themes. Lastly, a creative synthesis was developed that demonstrated the researcher's perceptions and experiences of being an international student in the counseling program.

The seven core themes and sub-themes that characterized participants' experiences as an international counseling student are:

1. Adapting to a foreign land: initial challenges, language impediment, psychosocial and cultural factors, and sense of self as an international student.
2. Clinical concerns: language limitations, anxiety towards seeing clients, and internship concerns.
3. Academics
4. Multiculturalism and diversity issues
5. Social connectedness
6. Impact of the counselor training program: personal growth and development, clarity in goals and expectations, and questioning self-esteem.

7. The role of counseling faculty and department: reaching out; understanding, encouraging and being aware; providing support; and specific suggestions.

Many of the findings were similar to what is described in existing literature concerning international students broadly; however, there were additional findings related to being counseling students as well as to what international counseling students believe to be supportive from faculty members and departments. This chapter includes a reflective summary of my experiences throughout the process as a researcher and discusses the core themes comparing it with the extant literature. Lastly, implications for counseling, limitations to the study, and recommendations for future research are provided.

Reflective Summary

My journey as an international counseling student has been a combination of challenges and beautiful learning experiences. Phases of hardships with limited support motivated me to explore the experiences of other international students who may have had similar experiences. Implementing a heuristic qualitative approach to conduct this research study allowed me as a researcher to be an active participant and come to a deeper understanding of my personal experiences as I explored those of my co-researchers. I began journaling my experiences of being in the counseling program before I started my dissertation and continued noting my thoughts throughout the dissertation process.

Identifying an accurate research question and thinking through the process of the study was quite a challenging period. However, once the study was conceptualized, I was eager to learn about what other students had to share. I had no preconceived notions about my participants and remained open to what might occur during the interview. There

was a sense of excitement as I was going to interact with new people and learn about their experiences; however, I also felt anxious about conducting the interviews correctly. I recognized that building a good rapport with my participants and providing a non-threatening environment during the interview allowed them to fully express themselves and contributed to the rich data. As participants shared some of their experiences, I was able to relate to them as I had experienced similar things. The interview process overall was inspiring and reviving.

After conducting the interviews with all participants, it was time to transcribe them. Transcribing the interviews was a meticulous process and I often found myself losing motivation. However, physically transcribing the data helped me to relive those experiences and further immerse myself in the data. Data transcribing was followed by data analysis. Analyzing the data was an overwhelming experience as I remained concerned about interpreting the data accurately. Reviewing the data line by line, sorting units of meaning into broad categories, then ungrouping them, reforming them into broader categories, and going back to the original transcripts for clarification was all necessary during the illumination phase. In addition, I had to set aside the data from time to time as I worked on other things in order to gain clarity. Taking time away allowed new ideas to arise or material to come together in a new way. Ultimately, I was able to arrive at the core themes that represented the findings of this study, which was a thrilling experience.

A strong internal desire to contribute to this population kept me motivated throughout the process. As a researcher, I had to make sure that I was representing participant experiences and perceptions accurately, while describing and representing my own as well. With English as my second language, I had a difficult time presenting the

themes through written text. Conceptualizing the thought in my mind was not as difficult as writing it out. I spent hours finding the right words or phrases that represented participants' descriptions, and realized that, language had become a potential barrier for me in this process. The phenomenological-heuristic qualitative approach used in this study helped me realize both my strengths and limitations as a researcher.

Discussion of Core Themes Related to Literature

Theme 1: Adapting to the Foreign Land

This theme describes the adjustment difficulties of participants after their arrival to the United States. Four sub-themes were identified, including initial challenges, language impediment, psychosocial and cultural factors, and sense of self as an international student.

Sub-theme 1.1: Initial challenges. Initial challenges for participants referred to adjustments to be made during the first few weeks or months after arrival in the United States. Lack of resources, social or family support, language barriers, and a sense of insecurity about being in a foreign land made participants' transition to the United States challenging. Being disconnected from their home country made them feel homesick and interrupted in their overall adaptation process. These findings are consistent with previous literature that indicates the initial period of first few days, weeks, and months are the most difficult (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). In addition, language barriers or discomfort with speaking English have been found to limit students' ability to adjust or interact with the community to fulfill their initial requirements (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007). Students also feel homesick for their ethnic cuisine and worry about their families in their home country (Lin & Yi, 1997). Other factors such as not being aware of accommodation rules and regulation, lacking information about food

outlets, and dealing with transportation difficulties (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011) were congruent with this study as participants expressed not being familiar to their environment making it difficult for them to cope.

Sub-theme 1.2: Language impediment. The sub-theme language impediment was defined as an overall concern with language that obstructed participants' ability to interact with people, impacted academic learning, and limited the ability to share their feelings or understand instructions in a classroom setting. Limitations with language often caused issues in their interactions with authority figures and led to misunderstandings in relationships. Lack of English language proficiency often interfered in their smooth transitioning to the United States and made surviving in the counseling program very demanding. Findings in this study are consistent with previous research indicating that language has a significant impact on the international student population.

Several researchers have done extensive research in the area of language and how it may impact the international student population. Yeh and Inose (2003) in their study found that English language proficiency may be the single greatest barrier experienced by international students as it affects them from succeeding academically and also impacts their ability to engage in social interactions, which is consistent with this research. Later research confirmed this finding, as it highlighted issues with spoken language, (Sherry, et.al., 2010), which was defined as difficulty in misinterpreting communications by participants. Pedersen (1991) found that language difficulty was listed as a top priority; this lends credence to this study as participants' language issue in this study was seen as broad challenge that interfered in their overall functioning.

Sub-theme 1.3: Psychosocial and cultural factors. Participants described psychosocial and cultural factors that impeded their adaptation to American lifestyle.

Psychosocial factors such as depression, confusion, anxiety, fear, and lack of sleep were seen as an outcome of not being able to adapt to the United States for this group of participants.

Sherry, et al. (2010) identified that cultural differences lead to cultural issues, making it challenging for international students to adapt to their new environment. Cultural differences also inhibited socialization with domestic and other international students (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Such findings are supported via the results of the current study. Studies have also identified psychological stressors such as homesickness, depression, anxiety, lack of motivation, stress and psychosomatic complaints such as sleep disturbances, eating problems, fatigue, stomach ache, or headache that interfered in their overall well-being of international students (Tochkov, et al., 2010; Lin & Yi, 1997).

Sub-theme 1.4: Sense of self as an international student. An additional finding not previously noted in the literature has to do with international counseling students' view of themselves. Some participants of this study often felt the need to represent their country and also felt underprivileged because of their international student status. This made adapting to the counseling program more difficult.

Theme 2: Clinical Concerns

The second theme has to do with clinical worries international counseling students faced or might face in their clinical course work or during their practicum or internship. This theme was comprised of three sub-themes, including language limitations, anxiety about seeing clients, and internship concerns. Some participant concerns are common to most counseling students, whether international or U.S-born; however, some concerns specifically involve being international students.

Sub-theme 2.1: Language limitations. Language limitation stood out as an essential sub-theme. Participants questioned their ability to do counseling with clients as they perceived their English as inadequate. Given that counseling is predominantly based on talk therapy, participants worried about being misunderstood by their clients or misinterpreting their expression, thus hampering the counseling process. They feared being judged by their adult clients because of not being able to use sophisticated English. Because of the importance of language in counseling, it is not surprising that language limitation was a fundamental factor under clinical concerns.

Sub-theme 2.2: Anxiety towards seeing clients. An additional finding was participants concerns about seeing real-life clients. Participants, like U.S.-born counseling students, experienced a sense of pressure when working with real clients. Their anxieties focused on fear of not being able to connect with clients, lack of experience, cultural differences between themselves and clients, and previous unpleasant experiences with clients at practicum or internship sites. Normal counseling student anxiety about beginning work with clients may be exacerbated by concerns about cultural difference.

Sub-theme 2.3: Internship concerns. International students expressed similar internship concerns to those common to U.S.-born counseling students, such as finding appropriate sites and finding good supervisors or, for doctoral students, not knowing how to be a supervisor. However, other concerns were more particular to being international students, including being discriminated against at internship sites, understanding insurance and managed care policies, and documentation. In some cases, participants seemed to be unaware that their U.S.-born counterparts share anxiety or lack of knowledge about things such as insurance policies. While previous research concerning

supervision and supervisory needs of international counselors-in-training has been conducted (Sangganjanavanich & Black, 2009), no literature was found concerning international counseling students and their internship experiences.

Theme 3: Academics

Factors related to academics comprised the third theme. Participating in the classroom, giving presentations, doing group work, reading comprehensive texts, and writing lengthy research papers were all indicated as areas of difficulty for participants. In addition, participants also indicated that language barriers meant that assignments took longer for them. Participants also noted difficulty coping with the differences in relating with professors in the West, as it differed significantly from their cultures. These findings are consistent with previous studies that have identified challenges impeding the academic growth of international students, including unfamiliar teaching styles, interacting with professors, written assignments, group work, and language limitations (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Lin & Yi, 1997).

Theme 4: Multiculturalism and Diversity Issues

A unique finding in this study was participant views about multiculturalism as it is taught in their programs. Multiculturalism is an important aspect of counselor education and training. Understanding cultural differences and not imposing values is emphasized when working with clients. For participants, who came from varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds, understanding multiculturalism from a western framework was challenging. Participants in this study found it difficult to understand some of the nuances of American history and its interrelation with multicultural concepts. The context necessary for understanding readings about multiculturalism and diversity and their intersection with counseling was missing. Participants also highlighted that their

programs stressed cultural diversity within the classroom; however, they indicated that students in classroom did not represent diverse groups.

In addition, participants also faced stereotyping from students, and one participant dealt with what appeared to her to be discrimination by a faculty member, at an internship site, and in a social setting. Findings of this study about stereotyping and discrimination are not unique. Racial discrimination and prejudice experienced by international students were among the common factors that have been stressed in previous findings by multiple researchers (Lin & Yi, 1997; Pedersen, 1995). In addition, Poyrazli and Grahame (2007) have identified that students experienced different forms of racial discrimination outside college campuses. These findings are consistent with those of this study, where participants shared being stereotyped and discriminated both at their universities and at social environments. Chen (1999) indicted that racial prejudice may disrupt healthy acculturation process of international students, leading to low self-esteem and self-confidence in their overall adjustment ability.

Theme 5: Social Connectedness

Participants expressed a persistent need to connect at a social level. Social isolation was experienced subsequent to arrival in the United States by virtually every participant. Participants acknowledged the difficulty in trying to connect with their American counterparts or people from their country of origin because of cultural and contextual differences. Participants believed that university effort to help them connect socially would benefit them to survive not only in the program, but also in the United States.

Findings of this study are consistent with previous studies, which identified social isolation as a prominent experience of international students, particularly when they do

not have relatives or acquaintances in the host nation (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011). Previous research also suggested that international students are unable to form social connections with domestic students and with students from their own country of origin due to cultural and within-group differences respectively (Khawaja & Stallman, 2011; Sodowsky & Plake 1992). Participant suggestions in the current study regarding ways in which departments and faculty members can assist students to be more connected were also recommended by Poyrazli and Grahame (2007), who identified peer mentoring or peer networking as possible means to facilitate social interaction among international students.

Theme 6: Impact of the Counselor Training Program

Being in a counseling program may have an impact on international students because of the emphasis on growth and development. Findings similar to this dimension of the current study were not found in the literature. Personal growth and development, clarity in goals and expectations, and questions about self-esteem were each significant elements that may be unique to counseling students.

Sub-theme 6.1: Personal growth and development. Participants believed that after joining the counseling program, there was tremendous amount of personal growth they saw within themselves both as individuals and as counselors. Certain courses and assignments changed their perceptions about life and helped them develop as individuals.

Sub-theme 6.2: Clarity in goals and expectations. Somewhat surprisingly, participants acknowledged having little clarity in thoughts, goals, or expectations from their programs when they arrived. It might be assumed that if an individual is going to travel to another country to pursue a specific degree, the individual will have been very intentional in selecting that degree; however, participants did not necessarily follow that

path. Most did not realize until they were in their programs the value of a CACREP program in the United States and ended up in those programs by chance. Not all participants were sure what counseling is prior to beginning their programs. However, as they progressed in the program they had a clearer vision of their futures and how they wanted to contribute to humanity. This may be unique to fields such as counseling, which may have no direct parallel in some international students' countries of origin.

Sub-theme 6.3: Questioning self-esteem. Being an international counseling student can be hard on one's evaluation of self. While it may be common for academic difficulties to take a toll on self-esteem, participants noted that the structure and the expectations of their counseling program often made them feel inferior, incompetent, and incapable, particularly when working with clients or grappling with assignments.

Theme 7: Role of Counseling Faculty and Department

Participants' views and expectations about the role of faculty members and the counseling department reflected their significance in participants' lives. Participants expected faculty members to reach out to them; be understanding, encouraging, and aware of their struggles; and provide support. Specific suggestion for both faculty and department were also provided.

Sub-theme 7.1: Reaching out. Participants expressed a desire for faculty members to reach out to them so that they don't feel isolated and feel a part of the classroom. Participants expressed reluctance to speak in class because of fear of embarrassment and language barriers. For these participants, approaching their professors was either intimidating or culturally very unusual. Thus, from the perspective of participants, if faculty members reached out to inquire about a participants' well-being or solicit their input in class, it would help bridge the cultural divide. In addition,

participants viewed such behavior on the part of faculty members as motivating and as an indication of faculty members' interest.

Sub-theme 7.2: Understanding, encouraging, and being aware. Participants expressed the desire to feel understood and be encouraged by their professors. In addition, they wanted to know that professors were aware of their presence in the classroom. They believed that encouragement and understanding by their professors would foster growth and development and motivate them to deal with the difficulties of surviving in the program. These findings are in some ways consistent with previous literature. For instance, Liu (1995) suggested that program advisors and professors who are more aware of psychological and cultural issues of international students may enhance those students' ability to adapt quicker to university life. In addition, Khawaja and Stallman (2011) recommended that professors encourage international students to prepare for lectures and tutorial in advance, manage time, seek help for written assignments, and record classroom lectures as effective ways to help them lead a successful academic life. Specific faculty member behaviors identified by previous researchers may be experienced as encouragement and understanding and would assuredly let students know that faculty members are aware of their presence in the classroom.

Sub-theme 7.3: Providing support. Regular support from faculty members motivated study participants to perform well. Participants who received what they perceived to be adequate support from their professors reported enjoyable experiences, as opposed to students who had non-supportive faculty. Support seemed to be an essential thing participants desired from their professors.

Sub-theme 7.4: Specific suggestions. Specific suggestions such as organizing social events in the department, acquainting students with American culture, providing an English writing course, and tutoring were all suggested by participants as avenues to facilitate their ability to cope with the varied challenges participants faced. Participant suggestions are consistent with previous research that suggested that universities could develop special orientations as well as workshops that teach American idioms and slang and encourage students to utilize university writing support services that would further enhance their writing skills (Lin & Yi, 1997; Poyrazli & Grahame, 2007; Sherry et. al., 2010).

Limitations

Although several methods were implemented to ensure accuracy in design, methodology, and analysis to conduct sound research, there are a few limitations within this study. The sample for this study was restricted to international counseling students enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling programs. Interviews were conducted in English; however, English is not the researcher's or the co-researchers' primary language. Limitations with English fluency may have impacted the way in which participants perceived and responded to the interview questions and the way the results may have been interpreted.

Cultural differences between participants and me were evident in this study. Although I used specific measures such as the core conditions, maintaining sensitivity and awareness, and being genuine and transparent, inter-cultural differences may have affected the findings of this research. Participants who had completed no more than five years in the United States were recruited for this study to ensure they could share rich experiences and were not acculturated to American lifestyle. However, this range

includes sufficient time for participants to be very different developmentally in terms of how they view or recall their experiences and may have impacted their responses.

The subjective nature of heuristic study may enhance the researcher's bias. The synthesis of meaning is based on the researcher's interpretation and since the researcher also has a direct experience of the phenomenon being studied, this may influence the findings and interpretations subjectively (Djuraskovic & Arthur, 2010). Even though a semi-structured interview guide was utilized to give directions, with the nature of heuristic study, it was easy to lose direction when the researcher and the co-researcher shared common experiences. It was natural to digress from the main topic and relive those common memories; however, doing so often complicated the interview process, and could have influenced the results.

Implications

The findings of this study gave voice to international students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs in the United States. Participants described their experiences, identified limitations and struggles, and shared suggestions and preferences about how their experiences might be supported. Counseling programs that accept international students may facilitate a smoother transition for them by ensuring that faculty members are aware of difficulties faced by the international student community and more specifically by international counseling students. Orienting students to the structural, cultural, and academic differences, for example, through programs, workshops, or group organizations could be considered for better adjustment to the new environment. Even if the university offers some programs and services for international students, counseling students would likely benefit from orientation in the department, as well.

Counseling faculty members should be aware of how important they are to international students. Willingness and commitment to reach out to these students may assist students in learning to approach faculty members and others to share their concerns and seek support. Faculty members would do well to recognize the issues concerning social connectedness and department could enhance social support networks by organizing social events within the department. In addition, finding ways to deal with language limitations while still maintaining standards is a challenge that should be addressed.

As counseling programs continue to accept international students and as globalization of counseling is pursued, multicultural counseling education in the United States may need to be examined and expanded beyond a Westernized or distinctly American point of view. As currently taught, multicultural classes may make little sense to international students who have no context for understanding the material. Thus counselor educators should consider expanding multicultural coursework by incorporating historical context of American history for better understanding of the material to these students. In addition, educators may also consider teaching the course keeping in mind the limitations of international students and thereby provide more time in explaining multicultural concepts.

The particular difficulties of clinical training and experience that may be present for many international counseling students, especially because of language barriers and cultural differences, should be acknowledged and addressed in counseling programs. Counselor educators and supervisors may need to pay special attention to training and orienting these students and perhaps monitor the kinds of clientele with whom they work.

Working with certain client populations, when working outside of one's culture, maybe overwhelming and thus should be considered.

Furthermore, counselor educators may advocate within their universities for adequate support for international students on their campuses. Specific interventions such as tutoring, writing assistance designed for international students, etc. could be implemented to address some of the academic needs of international students.

Finally, it may be important for CACREP and CACREP-accredited programs to work to ensure that the importance of attending an accredited program in the United States is better understood internationally. This may be especially important for international students who wish to stay and work in this country post-degree. Programs at international counseling conferences as well as information provided to universities in other countries that have had international students come to the United States to study counseling may help potential students make more informed choices.

Recommendations for Future Research

This research concentrated on the experiences of international counseling students and identified strategies recommended by them that would facilitate a supportive educational experience. In view of the current findings and their implications, several recommendations are offered for further research. Future research examining culturally sensitive training methods for international counseling students aspiring to become competent counselors is warranted. Specific attention should be paid to how to incorporate international student needs within counselor education classroom environments. For instance, pedagogical approaches that recognize and include the needs of international student learners should be investigated.

In addition, research needs to be conducted in the area of clinical training. Effectiveness of current pre-practicum and practicum/internship training in terms of international counseling student preparation and competence should be examined. Perceptions of practicum and internship instructors regarding the needs of international counselors-in-training as well as major obstacles in counseling performance could also be examined.

Follow-up research with international counseling graduates, both those who returned to their home countries and those remained in the United States would also be of benefit in determining how counseling programs can best provide education and training for these students. Assessing the impact of CACREP-accredited counseling programs on the post-graduate work life of their international students would provide useful information important in understanding counseling from a global perspective.

Summary and Conclusion

This research project was designed to explore the primary research questions, “what are the lived experiences of international students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs?” and “how can counseling programs support international students enrolled in graduate counseling programs?” To answer these questions, seven international students currently enrolled in CACREP-accredited counseling program were interviewed. A phenomenological-heuristic qualitative approach was implemented to guide the research process. Participants’ responses to the interview questions yielded seven broad themes and fourteen sub-themes that represented the major findings of this study. It is my hope that the findings of this study will extend the existing literature about the experiences of international students and add specific information pertaining to international counseling students.

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Appendix A

Texas A&M University IRB Approval Letter



ERIN L. SHERMAN, MAcc, CRA, CIP
Research Compliance Officer
Division of Research, Commercialization and Outreach

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July 23, 2012

Ms. Sneha S. Nayar
6350 Meadow Vista Drive, Apt.1033
Corpus Christi, TX 78414

Dear Ms. Nayar,

The research project entitled “Perceptions of International Students in CACREP-Accredited Counseling Programs” (IRB# 52-12) has been granted approval through an expedited review under category 7.2.1(9) by the Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi Institutional Review Board (IRB). You are authorized to conduct the project as outlined in the IRB protocol application.

IRB approval is granted for one year from the date approval is granted. You must submit an IRB Continuing Review Application for IRB committee review and approval should the project continue beyond July 23, 2013. Please submit the IRB Continuing Review Application at-least one month prior to the approval expiration date to allow time for IRB review.

Please submit an IRB Amendment Application for ANY modifications to the approved study protocol. Changes to the study may not be initiated before the amendment is approved. Please submit an IRB Completion Report to the Compliance Office upon the conclusion of the project. Both report formats can be downloaded from IRB website.

The researcher must maintain all study records for three years after the completion of the study. Please contact me if you will no longer be affiliated with Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi before the conclusion of the records retention timeframe to discuss retention requirements.

We wish you the best on the project. Please contact me with any questions.

Sincerely,
Erin L. Sherman

Appendix B

Invitation Request to Participants and E-mail Invitation to Department Chair

Invitation Request to Participants

To all International students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs!!!

Hello! My name is Sneha S. Nayar, and I am a doctoral student at Texas A&M University - Corpus Christi. I am currently working towards my Dissertation under the guidance of Dr. Marvarene Oliver. The purpose of this study is to a) explore the lived experiences of international students in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) and b) describe international student perspectives about ways counseling programs and faculty members can facilitate a successful and supportive educational experience.

Your participation is essential to achieving this goal, so I hope that you will take part in this study. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time without any penalty. In order to participate, you must self-identify as an international student currently enrolled in masters or doctoral counseling related program. If you would like to participate in this study please click on the link below and you will be directed to the online survey.

Link: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/Internationalstudentsdemographicsurvey>

Thank you very much in advance for your time! Please feel free to pass on this link to other people who might be eligible. If you have any question about this study, please feel free to contact me at snayar@islander.tamucc.edu

Regards,
Sneha S. Nayar

E-mail Invitation to Department Chair

Dear Sir/Madam,

My name is Sneha S. Nayar, and I am a doctoral student in the Counselor Education program at Texas A&M University – Corpus Christi. I am currently working on my dissertation research project tentatively entitled “Perceptions of International Students in CACREP-accredited Counseling Programs.” International students are a growing population in counseling programs in the United States, and require adequate support to lead successful academic lives. Research has indicated a rapid increase of international students in Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational programs (CACREP) in the past few years. I am researching this topic because I believe there is a lack of information currently in existence regarding international students’ experiences in counseling programs and ways in which counseling programs and faculty members could support them.

I believe that your support could contribute to recruiting participants for the study and completion of my research agenda. If you are willing and interested in supporting me for this purpose, I ask that you forward the research invitation directly to international students studying in your department, post the information to your departmental listserv, or post the research request on the departmental website. Please find below the research invitation for the study that contains an introduction to the research study, a brief demographic survey, and an informed consent.

Your support is crucial and will be an important source of information for my research. I thank you so much in advance for your time and consideration.

Yours Sincerely,
Sneha S. Nayar

Appendix C

Informed Consent & Demographic Survey

Informed Consent via Survey Monkey™

Dear Participant,

I, Sneha Nayar, am conducting a research study exploring the lived experiences of international students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs and their perspectives about how counseling programs and faculty members could support them. With this study, I hope to give voice to international students, who are a growing part of the American university and of counseling programs. Such voice may have the benefit of providing a sense of empowerment to this group of students. In addition, the results of this study may provide information that will contribute to understanding of specific concerns of international students in counseling programs. Thus, the study may provide information that will enhance the ability of counseling programs and faculty members situated in the United States to ensure a successful and beneficial academic experience for these students.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an online demographic survey. If you meet the inclusion criteria for the study, you will be asked to participate in a semi-structured Skype, telephone, or face-to-face interview that is expected to last for approximately 1- 2 hours. During the interview you will be asked about your experiences as an international student enrolled in a CACREP-accredited counseling program, as well as your thoughts about ways in which programs and faculty member's support or could support you. The interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. Once the interviews are transcribed, you will be sent a copy of the transcript so that you may clarify or correct any information provided. You will receive a request for a follow-up interview once initial themes are identified, and will be asked for your thoughts about those themes. The second interview is anticipated to last 45 – 60 minutes. This interview will also be audio-recorded and transcribed.

The risks associated in this study are minimal, and are not greater than risks ordinarily encountered in daily life. Should you experience psychological distress, pressure to conform, or pressure to participate; the researcher will provide you with information about appropriate resources such as counseling services that are available to you. While there is always risk of breach of confidentiality, you will be identified in all transcriptions and any published work only by a pseudonym of your choosing. The university where you study will not be named, though it may be described by size or region of the country. In addition, no one other than the primary researcher will have access to your audio/video-recordings, and only the primary researcher and her dissertation advisor will have access to transcripts.

This study is confidential and the records of this study will be kept private. No identifying information such as your name will be collected. Only demographic data listed in the survey will be collected for the purposes of the study. Research records will

be stored securely and only Sneha S. Nayar will have access to the records except as noted above. Any recordings will be kept for duration of three years from the time of data collection and then erased.

The Research Compliance Office and/or the Institutional Review Board at Texas A&M University-Corpus Christi have reviewed this research study. For research-related problems or questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you can contact Erin Sherman, Research Compliance Officer, at (361) 825-2497 or erin.sherman@tamucc.edu

If you have questions regarding this study, you may contact Sneha S. Nayar by telephone at 708-714-1715 or by e-mail at snayar@islander.tamucc.edu

Completion of the survey will take approximately 10 -15 minutes of your time. Thank you for your support and contribution.

Yours Sincerely,

Sneha S. Nayar

Clicking on “agree” button below indicates:

- You have read the above information
- You voluntarily agree to participate in this study
- You are willing to be interviewed

If you wish to participate in the study please do so by clicking on the agree button

- Agree
- Disagree

Next

Demographic Survey

If you are willing to participate in this study, please complete the demographic information necessary for the purposes of the study. Your information is crucial and will be a major source to inform the study.

1. What is your gender?
 - Male
 - Female
2. What is your age?
 - 18- 29 years
 - 30 – 49 years
 - 50 -64 years
 - 65 years and above
3. What is your level of study?
 - Masters Counseling Student
 - Doctoral Counseling / Counselor Education Student
4. What is your marital status?
 - Now married
 - Widowed
 - Divorced
 - Separated
 - Never married
5. Please specify your ethnicity: _____
6. Please specify your religion: _____
7. What is your country of origin or residency?

8. How long have you been in the United States?
 - Less than 1 year
 - 1 to 3 years
 - 3 to 5 years
 - 5 to 10 years
 - 10 years and above
9. How do you identify yourself as an International student?
 - Nonimmigrant F- 1 Student Visa Status
 - Dependent Status
 - Recent Citizen due to wedlock
 - Other please specify:_____
10. Do you have any relatives or support system available in United States?
 - Parents
 - Siblings
 - Spouse
 - Significant other
 - Other please specify:_____
11. Are there other international students in your counseling program? Estimated number?
12. Are there other students from your home country in your counseling program? Estimated number?
13. Is there a community within the university with which you identify culturally? If so, what is it?
14. Is there a community in the city or town where you live with which you identify culturally? If so, what is it?

Thank you for responding to the above questions. Kindly provide your contact information and email address so that I may contact you to set up an interview. Thank you for your assistance.

Contact Number: _____

Email: _____

Appendix D
Interview Guide

Interview Guide

1. Tell me about your experiences as a student in your counseling program.
2. Tell me about any experiences you may have had in academic classes that are significant to you as an international student.
3. Tell me about any experiences you may have had in clinical coursework such as practicum and internship that are significant to you as an international student. (If a student has not yet had practicum or internship: Tell me about any concerns you may have about practicum and internship that are significant to you as an international student.)
4. Tell me about expectations you had when you first came into the program.
5. Tell me about ways in which expectations of the counseling program or faculty members may have changed during your course of study.
6. Tell me about any interactions with faculty members that have been significant to you as an international student.
7. Tell me about things you wish counseling faculty or department knew about international students who come to the United States to study counseling.