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# International Students who Became U.S. Counseling Psychology Faculty Members: A Collaborative Autoethnography

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## Abstract

International students have a considerable presence in U.S. counseling psychology programs; what happens when they pursue academic counseling psychology positions in U.S. institutions? Seven counseling psychology faculty who started as international students in the United States used collaborative autoethnography to examine this matter. We found that our identification with counseling psychology philosophy and our lifelong, self-reflective process

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as cultural insiders/outsideers have proven crucial. Likewise, we found that our academic career development has been shaped by extra challenges encountered when dealing with ethnocentric aspects of U.S. psychology and by unique opportunities generated by our multinational professional identities and multilingual abilities. Three themes recurred across our reflections: Overcoming Linguistic Differences, Learning to Thrive Across Cultures, and Mentoring as a Valued Experience. We offer advice for international counseling students considering careers in U.S. academia and discuss the implications of our findings for research, training, and advocacy.

### **Keywords**

international graduate students, academia, international faculty, early career faculty, linguistic differences, mentoring, autoethnography

#### **Significance of the Scholarship to the Public:**

*This study documents the challenges encountered by international graduate students and faculty members in counseling psychology, and the unique contributions they make through their multinational professional identities and multilingual abilities. The study underscores the importance of diversifying counseling psychology academia in the United States by welcoming international graduate students and faculty members. It also highlights the important role of multipronged mentoring in the professional development of international graduate students and faculty.*

In the last two decades, there have been increasing calls and actions by U.S.-based counseling psychologists to expand international engagement as reflected in major contributions focused on international issues published in *The Counseling Psychologist* (e.g., [Leong & Blustein, 2000](#)), international handbooks (e.g., [Gerstein et al., 2009](#)), and the articulation of international professional competencies (e.g., [Ægisdóttir & Gerstein, 2010](#)). Counseling psychologists have also called for the internationalization of training programs, including integrating international content into the curriculum and international immersion experiences, expanding practica and internship sites to international settings, increasing opportunities for cross-cultural and cross-national research collaborations, conducting research outside the United States, engaging in bidirectional exchanges and cross-national consultations, and attending to the counseling supervision needs of international students (e.g., [Canetto, 2019](#); [Consoli et al., 2017](#); [Heppner et al., 2008](#); [Marsella &](#)

Pedersen, 2004; Reid & Dixon, 2012; Turner-Essel & Waehler, 2009; Wang & Çiftçi, 2019). Furthermore, several presidents of the Society of Counseling Psychology (SCP), including Douce in 2003, Heppner in 2005, Forrest in 2008, and Chung in 2011, focused on international issues. Finally, SCP has taken steps toward internationalization, including developing two international strategic plans, establishing an International Section, organizing an International Counseling Psychology Conference in 2008, and instituting a Vice Presidency for International Affairs (an elected position on the SCP Executive Board) in 2017. These organizational actions are examples of the growing attention to international issues within U.S. counseling psychology. An international initiative that has not been sufficiently pursued is research on international graduate students who become international faculty members in U.S. counseling psychology programs.

International students have a considerable presence in U.S. graduate psychology programs, including counseling psychology. Between 2008 and 2013, counseling psychology programs had the highest percentage (7.22%–8.34%) of international students, relative to other American Psychological Association (APA) accredited programs in professional psychology (i.e., clinical: 3.95%–5.04%; school: 3.21%–4.59%; APA, n.d.). A survey of counseling psychology doctoral programs found that the majority (51 of the 66 that responded) had international students, with percentages ranging from 0.4% to 29% (Sayette & Norcross, 2018).

There is a growing literature on international students in colleges and universities. This literature has documented how international students contribute (e.g., economically, culturally, professionally, scientifically) to their programs and to the countries where they study (Peterson et al., 1999). International psychology students bring much needed international perspectives to their training, which can foster the development of cultural competency of their U.S. peers, faculty, and programs (Institute of International Education, 2019). International students who pursue a professional path in the United States directly contribute to the U.S. workforce and society. The scientific productivity of foreign-born academic scientists and engineers is similar to, or higher than that of their U.S.-born colleagues, even when their salary and work-satisfaction are lower (Corley & Sabharwal, 2007). In psychology, foreign-born and raised academics can be critical to the transformation of U.S. science and practice, away from U.S.-centrism (Thalmayer et al., 2021), and toward transnational perspectives (Canetto, 2019).

The social science literature has documented the challenges experienced by international students (for review, see Human et al., 2011; Lee, 2013). A most pervasive challenge for international students studying in countries where the dominant language is different than their native language is acquiring oral and written fluency in the new language. Additional challenges include social stressors (e.g., culture shock, acculturative stress, social isolation, homesickness, loss of social support, discrimination, prejudice), financial stressors

(e.g., higher tuition rates than U.S. students), education, and work stressors (e.g., being unfamiliar with the educational system and expectations, uncertainties in career development), and legal stressors (e.g., being required to maintain a high number of credit hours in order to maintain legal status, fear of loss of legal status; Curtin et al., 2013; Sullivan & Kashubeck-West, 2015). Despite these challenges, international students are quite resilient, at least as measured by degree completion. According to the Council of Graduate Schools (2008), international students in the United States complete graduate school faster and at higher rates than U.S. students.

Unique stressors for international students in applied mental health specialties such as counseling psychology include the necessity to have advanced oral and written language-proficiency and the pressure to quickly learn and perform the locally-appropriate interpersonal skills that are necessary to work effectively with the public in professional settings (Ilhan et al., 2012; Lee, 2013; Ng & Smith, 2012). In the United States, complexities for applied mental-health students also arise as a result of immigration-related work-permit restrictions, with impact on practica placement and internship eligibility. Yet another major challenge for these students is the lack of awareness on the part of many U.S. faculty and supervisors of how U.S.-centered mental health curricula and training are in the United States (e.g., Mittal & Wieling, 2006; Smith & Ng, 2009).

To date, the number of publications about international students who became counseling psychology faculty is limited to three. In the first one, Canetto & Borrayo, 2003 described the challenges and costs of teaching with an accent as immigrant, non-Anglophone female professors in a program dominated by U.S.-born and -raised, Anglophone, White male faculty. The challenges and costs included their expertise and authority being questioned by students and peers, their research being undervalued, and their being judged by higher performance standards. The challenges were described as especially intense when they were teaching about politically and personally sensitive topics like privilege and oppression. The second publication was by Chung (2013) and featured his SCP Presidential Address. Chung informally reported on the personal experiences of five female and five male counseling psychology professors from China, Hong Kong, Iceland, India, Japan, Taiwan, and Turkey. Chung highlighted the cultural and linguistic barriers these international professors faced as well as the resources and coping strategies they relied on in their path to becoming counseling psychology professors. Finally, the third publication, by Kim et al. (2014)-, documented the experiences of 11 China- and South Korea-born and -raised, U.S. doctorate, female counseling professors in the United States. These international female counseling professors described many stressful work experiences, including their expertise and authority being questioned, their international research being undervalued, having high service responsibilities, and students being disrespectful of their authority. These three studies focus on the experiences of being an international faculty member in U.S.

counseling psychology programs. However, none links the experiences of being an international faculty member to experiences as graduate students.

Although the literature on international students who became counseling psychology faculty is limited in the number of publications and scope of analysis, there is significant literature on the paths to, and the experiences in academia of individuals from groups who are underrepresented among tenured faculty, including women (e.g., Basow, 2018; Niemann et al., 2020), first-generation individuals, and some U.S. ethnic minorities (e.g., Espino et al., 2010; Gay, 2004; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 2008; McCormick & Wilcox, 2020; Turner et al., 2011). This literature highlights the shared and unique challenges these individuals experience, based on the specific dimensions (e.g., sex, ethnicity, culture, social class) of their underrepresentation in academia, and the social meanings and implications of those dimensions in terms of being a professor. Shared negative experiences by female and U.S. ethnic minority (e.g., African-descent) professors in U.S. colleges and universities included: being presumed incompetent by colleagues and students; having lower status, authority, and respect from peers and students; invisibility; hypervisibility; exclusion from critical networks and resources; lower salary; slow or stalled progress through the ranks; one's scholarship being devalued in terms of significance, originality, quality, impact, and/or eligibility for internal and external funding support or award nominations; disproportionate and unrewarded service work; expectations of higher standards of performance (e.g., number of publications) for merit raises, promotion and tenure; and discrimination, hostility, harassment, and bullying by colleagues and students, with no effective institutional recourse.

Although lacking attention to international experiences, the literature on the transition from graduate student to psychology faculty member (e.g., Busler et al., 2014) offers insights for our study. Transitioning from graduate student to faculty member is difficult, challenging, and sometimes intimidating; it is a process that requires assuming roles and responsibilities that can be difficult to manage. The transition from graduate school, an environment characterized by substantial structure, clear expectations, and relatively constant feedback from faculty and supervisors, to academia, an environment of significant independence and major responsibility, but with infrequent or delayed feedback or evaluation, can be daunting (Henslee, 2014; Smitherman, 2014). Common in the graduate student to professor transition literature is the description of the difficulty of managing multiple tasks and responsibilities (e.g., research, publishing, teaching, service, family; e.g., Good, 2014; Stiegler-Balfour, 2014). Based on new faculty member's accounts, preparing for professor roles and responsibilities often does not receive much attention during graduate training, resulting in unexpected challenges (Stiegler-Balfour, 2014). Smooth transitions depend, to a great degree, upon the amount of attention graduate programs give to preparation and socialization for becoming a faculty member (Henslee, 2014). Many faculty mention finding mentors inside and outside their

department as well as establishing networks of peer mentors as important for success in academia (Henslee, 2014). Although the literature on the transition from student to professor addresses common graduate students' experiences, it does not attend to the experiences of international students making this transition in the country of their graduate studies.

The present study contributes to the very limited literature on international students who become counseling psychology faculty in U.S. universities by bringing attention to and generating specific information about this understudied but important population. Counseling psychology has much to gain from a deeper understanding of the experiences of the individuals who, most likely, are at the forefront of the internationalization of counseling psychology, that is, international students who became counseling psychology faculty in U.S. universities. In fact, between 2013 and 2019, counseling psychology programs had the highest percentage (5.48%–6.28%) of international faculty, when compared to clinical (2.81%–4.22%), and school (3.62%–5.00%; J. Meyers, APA Assistant Director of Research Office of Program Consultation and Accreditation, personal communication, August 10, 2020).

This study builds on the insights generated by the limited literature on international students who become counseling psychology faculty in U.S. universities. It also draws on theory and findings from the large literature about the student and faculty experiences of U.S.-born and raised individuals from groups who are underrepresented as tenured faculty in academia. Based on these literatures, our expectation was that as international students who became counseling psychology faculty in U.S. universities, we had experiences (e.g., feeling like we did not belong; being presumed incompetent) that were similar to those U.S.-born and raised from groups who are underrepresented as tenured faculty in academia, as well as different experiences, as related to unique issues (e.g., having to function in a new language) associated with being foreign nationals.

After a careful review of the limited literature available and the literature we considered closely related (i.e., on groups underrepresented in academia, on the transition from graduate student to faculty member), we developed the following guiding questions: What happens when international students pursue academic counseling psychology positions in U.S. institutions? What is their path to the professoriate? What are their experiences as immigrant counseling psychology professors? We operationalized the procurement of possible answers into six specific questions (see [Appendix A](#)). Developed collectively, these six questions sought information about influential (i.e., facilitative and impeding) matters in the transition from graduate school to the professoriate that were directly related to being an international graduate student. Considering the central role that mentoring occupies in graduate studies in the U.S. and in one's career development, we examined mentoring as well. Finally, based on our experiences of having successfully gone from international graduate students to

faculty members in counseling psychology in the United States, we offer some insights and advice to international graduate students with professoriate aspirations.

## Method

We explored our journey from international students in U.S. graduate schools to U.S. counseling psychology faculty using collaborative autoethnography (Adams et al., 2015; Chang et al., 2012; Ellis & Adams, 2014; Hargons et al., 2017; Hernandez et al., 2015). This method involves context-based analyses of experiences and of the meanings ascribed to those experiences by the individuals who went through them. Autoethnography is used to collect “specific knowledge about particular lives, experiences, and relationships rather than general information about large groups of people” (Adams et al., 2015, p. 21). A unique feature of collaborative autoethnography is that researchers are participants and authors (Chang et al., 2012). It is a viable method to study individuals who are underrepresented in the literature, in the field, and/or in positions of power in society. To the relative extent that there is no external gaze (the researcher and researched are one and the same), autoethnography may be particularly useful for the study of populations (e.g., foreign nationals, women, ethnic minorities) that may be misunderstood, misrepresented, and otherized by so-called mainstream researchers. Via autoethnography, the underrepresented and misrepresented people themselves may generate counter-narratives, which may provide some correction to master narratives and master-centered science.

## Participants

Congruent with a collaborative autoethnography, the seven faculty who participated in this study were both, the participants as well as the researchers. We began our undergraduate or graduate education as international students, and earned a doctoral degree in psychology in the United States. Six earned a doctorate in counseling psychology and one completed graduate degrees in experimental and general psychology in non-Anglophone countries, and then in clinical psychology in the United States. Although this individual does not have a doctoral degree in counseling psychology, this participant has served as a tenure-track/tenured core faculty in an APA-accredited counseling psychology program for over 30 years, and was elected Fellow of SCP. Thus, all participants hold a strong professional identity as counseling psychologists. Prior to conducting this study, we presented together on international faculty in the United States at a national psychology conference (Çiftçi & Forrest, 2015). For these reasons, this study’s sample is both a purposeful one and one of convenience.



At the time of data collection, we ranged in age from 44 to 64 years ( $M_{\text{age}} = 52.14$ ,  $SD = 7.31$ ), with five self-identified as female and two as male. In response to an open-ended question about gender, “female” was indicated by three individuals, “cisgender women” by one, “cisgender men” by two, and “no answer” by one person. When presented with the race/ethnicity options from the 2010 United States Census, responses included: non-Hispanic White ( $n = 1$ ), Asian/Asian American ( $n = 2$ ), Hispanic/Latinx ( $n = 1$ ), other ( $n = 1$ ; White race, Kurdish ethnicity). Two declined to endorse a race/ethnicity option; one of these two wrote about the racist assumptions embedded in U.S. census categories. All participants spoke more than one language: five were bilingual, one was trilingual, and one spoke seven languages. The immigration status of the seven international faculty varied. Six began their education as international students (two as undergraduates, one at the master’s level, and three at the doctoral level) whereas one other faculty obtained a permanent residency right before starting a doctoral education. Two were originally from Europe (Italy, Norway), two from the Middle East (Turkey), two from Asia (Japan, Taiwan), and one from South America (Argentina). At the time of the study, five held U.S. citizenship and two had permanent residency. The number of years as faculty members ranged from 9.5 to 35 years ( $M = 21.07$ ,  $SD = 9.51$ ). All except one were tenured at a U.S. academic institution. With respect to rank, one was an assistant professor, four associate professors, and two full professors. At the time of the study, all served as faculty in psychology, counseling psychology, and counseling psychology/education academic programs and/or departments. The number of international students we mentored over the course of our careers up to the point of the study ranged from 6 to 35. With respect to number of international faculty mentored by participants, two reported not having mentored any, three participants mentored two each, one mentored four, and another one six.

### *Measures and Procedure*

Three researchers generated open-ended questions regarding personal experiences as international students, as faculty members in counseling psychology, and as mentors for counseling-psychology international students and faculty. These questions were shared with the other researchers for input. After extensive email communication, six questions were finalized (see [Appendix A](#)). Next, a researcher filed an application and received approval from the institutional review board of their university for this study to be conducted. All researchers were listed as coinvestigators and participants. Upon providing consent, participants completed the demographic questionnaire, responded in writing to the six questions, and sent their answers to a researcher who removed identifying information. Another researcher with no access to identifying information collated the responses.

The anonymization of the data prior to coding was previously agreed upon to encourage candid responses among a group of faculty members who are at different stages of professional development and to limit the possible influence of power differences. No monetary incentive was provided for participation.

## *Data Analyses*

Responses were analyzed following [Braun and Clarke's \(2006\)](#) thematic analysis method, as well as guidelines developed by three researchers (i.e., the three lead authors). To start with, Andrés J. Consoli, Ayşe Çiftçi, and Şenel Poyrazlı analyzed all responses to the first question (see [Appendix A](#)), generated themes independently from one another, and identified supporting quotes. Subsequently, they shared with each other their work and met via videoconferencing to develop a single document based on consensus. This approach was used as a template to analyze the responses to the rest of the questions. To accomplish the latter, six researchers broke into dyads, and each dyad took on different questions. The dyad's work was then collated and discussed by these six researchers. Once all these steps had been completed, a new dyad (i.e., the second and sixth author) identified overarching themes and presented them to all six researchers for input and feedback. Finally, a seventh researcher who had not engaged in coding up to that point, reviewed and revised the process as an auditor and provided feedback on all themes and quotes while having access to the entire anonymized data set. The last author of this article is not an international faculty and did not participate in the study nor in the analyses, yet contributed to the development of the article, the writing of the literature review, and the discussion.

## **Findings**

We first present the findings related to each of the six questions. Next, we report on three overarching themes. For a list of themes and overarching themes please refer to [Appendix B](#).

### *Question 1: Experiences While a Doctoral Student That Led Us to an Academic Career in Counseling Psychology*

*Identification with Counseling Psychology's Philosophy.* We indicated being attracted to counseling psychology because of its affirmation of the importance of context; its lifespan perspective; its embracing of feminism and its challenging of patriarchy; its commitment to valuing diversity across all of its

dimensions, including its attention to racial, ethnic, and cultural experiences and identities; and its primary prevention, social justice, and strength-based approach. A representative participant quote follows:

Counseling psychology in the United States was at the forefront of the discipline in its attention to bias and discrimination against women... [and] in its integration of feminist principles in training and practice... I sought to join a counseling psychology program as a faculty... because I wanted to have colleagues who had my same values and commitment to framing people's difficulties as problems in living rather than psychopathology, and to building on strengths.

*Mentoring From Advisors and Other Faculty Members.* The mentoring most of us received while international doctoral students had profound and long-lasting impacts on our professional choices and trajectory. Noted as valuable were mentors' empathic understanding of our personal lives, including personal insecurities, family responsibilities, and issues related to English as a foreign language (e.g., speaking, writing). Furthermore, advisors showed commitment to help us overcome difficulties by, for example, providing extensive feedback on our writings or through their appreciation of our class contributions, demonstrating eagerness to learn about our country of origin, sharing their sizable professional network and contacts with us in a way that gave us access to opportunities for professional development, and their encouragement to consider academia as a meaningful career path. A similar attitude by other faculty members and the extent to which the program was experienced as supportive toward diversity and inclusion of international students facilitated our sense of belonging, a desire to contribute, and, ultimately, a wish to become an academic. The following participant quote represents this theme:

More than anything, they believed in me and encouraged me in areas I felt insecure as an international student, particularly in terms of my writing. They let me know why they liked my papers—in spite the blobs of red corrections on them. They did not lower their standards, but were understanding and willing to push me. They helped me believe in myself—and they served as examples, human beings, and heroes I wanted to be like.

*Inspiration From Peers.* For some of us succeeding in our doctoral studies and pursuing a faculty position in the United States was made possible by peers and their support. These peers became an inspiring peer network made of not only international students but also U.S.-born and -raised, student-peer allies who had experience with international engagement. The following two participant quotes illustrate this theme: “Having peer mentors/older

international students who showed me it was possible to succeed in both securing an academic job and to become good at it... These slightly advanced students showed me the way.” “Many of my graduate student peers had participated in Education Abroad Programs or were returning from Peace Corps or the like. I was eager to learn from their experiences and they were eager to learn about mine.”

*Self-Reflective Process as Cultural Outsiders.* We all reflected on how the journey to become counseling psychology faculty required humility, and contending with our outsider status and different cultural perspectives—as a challenge first, and then mostly as a resource. Especially during our student years, we all had to cope with being unaware of information and practices that were obvious to most U.S. students. For example, one of us reflected on this process, stating:

It was very embarrassing for me to accept that I did not know. The more I tried to learn and pretend I understand, the more exhausting it did get. It took me years to learn to say “I am not understanding this or I did not go to high school in this country... so, I am not sure what you mean.”

We also had to question our cultural assumptions, including our cultural norms about mental health. One of us articulated this poignantly: “My American classmates were very open to share their personal and familial experiences with mental illnesses and psychological problems. I was shocked by their ‘openness’ because people in my country would try very hard to conceal such experiences.”

With time, our outsider status and foreign cultural perspectives also became assets. We brought unique worldviews into the classroom and the academy. Additionally, our work ethic built stamina: “Because of the language barrier, I studied 2–3 times harder than others, at least that’s how I felt. My hard work and perseverance paid off.”

*Professional Decisions Shaped by Challenges and Uncertainties.* Much like our U.S. colleagues, our educational and career decisions were impacted by personal life-circumstances (e.g., family responsibilities). These ordinary-life complexities were compounded by immigration issues as well as by vicissitudes in our countries of origin (e.g., turmoil in our home country making return neither feasible nor advisable). The following participant quote illustrates this theme: “I was supposed to go back to my home country after completing my graduate training. However, some political changes and my home government cutting my scholarship off due to political reasons made me feel unsafe to go back.”

Several of us described how the challenge of the U.S. academic environment and culture influenced our efforts to obtain employment and fair wages. For example, one of us stated:

As an international student, I did not know... that there are different types of universities... I had no idea you apply to jobs individually, you interview and you negotiate for each position... In my home country, there is a central exam and central committee that appoints faculty members to different institutions.

### *Question 2: Challenges and Opportunities as International Academics in the United States*

*Language and Cultural Challenges Generated Opportunities.* We all identified challenges trying to advance with limited English-language proficiency in a profession where high-level communication skills are critical for success. We all reported feelings of cultural disconnect and isolation. These language and cultural barriers eventually also generated professional resources. For example, knowing several languages provided us with multiple frames of references, which was invaluable in our work. The cultural isolation we experienced pushed us to develop new networks, which ultimately enriched our professional and personal life. The following two quotes illustrate this experience: “Developing a team of allies has been the most empowering aspect of my career,” and “It is very hard for me to call one place, one country as my home. I have multiple... There is a certain liberation and freedom for me when I can think and look beyond the borders.” Moreover, the discrimination or hostile attitudes many of us experienced, although painful, led to the development of critical perspectives and a deeper understanding of ourselves, the United States, and our own countries of origin.

*Extra Challenges in the Tenure and Promotion Process.* Our challenges as international faculty multiplied at critical academic transitions, particularly at tenure and promotion time. Many of us described feeling overloaded with service related to our “diversity” (i.e., “diversity tax”), without concomitant professional recognition. For example, “Being asked to provide a larger amount of service compared to my White colleagues and male colleagues... It seemed that the administration wanted to form a diverse committee every time they needed to form [a committee].” We also were not sure how to document this unacknowledged workload. A participant stated that one of their greatest challenges was to know “how to document the sizable hidden workload of an international faculty member and how to narrate it in a persuasive way when the powers that be are not internationally savvy let alone bilingual or international professionals.”

Other challenges included grappling with “impostor syndrome” and battling through cultural misunderstandings while “being at the receiving end of stereotypes.” Overcoming these challenges also required extra time, energy, and commitment including seeking support and mentoring from senior colleagues and administrators:

The school director (dean) that was there when I started my job... acted as a mentor to me. He met with all tenure-track faculty. He also met with me individually to provide additional guidance. Having a clear idea from the beginning about the tenure expectations helped me to take the right steps to achieve tenure.

Our responses underscored how professional advancement required having extensive networks. For example, one of us stated: “Two colleagues that started a tenure-track job at the same time as I did... We formed a research group and peer mentoring.” Another noted: “My village of allies/mentor/sponsors. Developing a team of allies has been the most empowering aspect of my career. I met some extraordinary people who did step up and reach out in the most unexpected moments... [and] changed my life.”

### *Question 3: Career Development*

*Career Development as an Ongoing Process.* The journey to counseling psychology was characterized by us all as a long one. Most of us came from countries where counseling psychology had limited to nonexistent visibility. It took a deliberate effort to discover and make sense of counseling psychology: “I had to develop as a counseling psychologist and that meant I had to learn the field existed. Coming from a country without counseling psychology—that took me several years.”

Adjusting to different career stages came with multiple and steep learning curves throughout our professional development. Some of these challenges were unique to us as international faculty. For example, one of us stated:

I was one of the rare students from my university who made it to a doctoral program in the U.S. And then I moved to the U.S. as a graduate student and I was at the bottom of the ladder. I did not know anything about the system here... It took me years to learn, gain confidence and apply for faculty positions. I certainly did well... And then I moved to my first position as a faculty member and I was at the bottom of the ladder in academia. I did not know how to navigate the academic system as an international faculty.

A common pattern when we became more established was that we could use our position to advocate against sexism, racism, and xenophobia: “developmentally, learning the impact of my cultural background, gender roles,

my professional growth and learning to use my power to push the system has been a critical part of [my] career.”

*Ethnocentrism in U.S. Psychology.* Ethnocentrism in U.S. counseling psychology training, including in multiculturalism and diversity courses, was an issue we all grappled with. We experienced a lack of interest on the part of our U.S. colleagues and students in the international issues and perspectives, research findings, and resources we brought to our classes, research, and committee work. Some of us experienced explicit resistance to incorporating international perspectives and content in our courses:

My critique of U.S. cultural frameworks, and my internationalizing of the lifespan and diversity core course were not appreciated... My department chair warned me in writing that I had been hired to teach “American diversity” not “cross-cultural psychology.”

*Our Multinational Identity.* As international students and then faculty, we had to develop a multinational identity. We recognized that our U.S. training had strengths and shortcomings, and drew on our multinational background and experiences for a broader and stronger professional and social justice stance. This process was described as ongoing:

My training, like almost all training programs, was very Anglo, U.S. centric including the literature we learned and the research we have done. It was a challenging process to understanding the impact of my colonial training on my professional identity and what it means as an international faculty in a very Anglo, patriarchal, sexist, racist, xenophobic system. I needed to learn (and still learning) to be an advocate and push for change in the system using my power.

Several of us also discussed how crucial to sustaining our multinational identity and perspective was to remain connected to our own cultures, and to international colleagues and organizations that operate for and from a more culturally curious perspective. The following two quotes reflect this experience: “Remaining in touch both personally and professionally with my country of origin has also been invaluable,” and “After I got tenured, I increased my international counseling psychology work. I started providing professional service through APA Division 17 and 52 and to [international] scholars, journals, professional organizations.”

#### **Question 4: Mentoring International Students and International Academics in the United States**

*Sharing a Common Bond With International Individuals.* We wrote about feeling a special affinity with, and empathy toward international individuals because, as international students and faculty, we have had to deal with some of the same challenges. One of us wrote: “I am very familiar with international [students’] sense of displacement. Their concerns about competence. Their ambivalence about the culture they have left, and the culture they live in. Their difficulties [involve] figuring out what locals take for granted.” Another participant wrote:

Perhaps the biggest [difference] is an instant bond that I will always have with any international student or fellow faculty member. We have some things in common that is very unique and that most of us just “know.” It can be the knowing look when people talk about Thanksgiving plans, or the instant in person or texted check ins with each other when something happens in our various home countries.

*Educate International Individuals About U.S. Academic and Cultural Practices.* We found ourselves needing to discuss with international students and international junior faculty the differences between the U.S. educational system and its expectations, and those of their country of origin, particularly in terms of interactions between student and faculty, authorship, and research practices. The following quote illustrates how we addressed these challenges with international mentees:

Being a bilingual, bicultural, and binational scientist–practitioner comes particularly handy when interpreting (not translating!) the similarities and differences in degrees, educational and licensing requirements, scope of practice, and scope of competence. Accompanying people in their predictable frustration, confusion, even bewilderment while resorting to my professional skills is particularly rewarding.

*Address International Individuals’ Displacement and Acculturation.* Other issues we identified in reference to mentoring international individuals had to do with mentees’ experiences of displacement and acculturation, and the impact of the displacement and acculturation on their educational, professional, and life experiences. One of us stated:

I also talk to them about things unique to being international or to their development like social support outside of the department; social support and professional support inside of our department; connection with other internationals; family support from their own countries; academic and professional



connection to their homeland; plans to stay or go home following their studies or in future jobs; experiences with immigration; experiences with discrimination inside or outside academia.

We also described the importance of being understanding, available, and empowering of mentees as they encounter cultural and immigration difficulties and discrimination. One of us stated: “I feel that I am responsible to empower minority students... I also make sure that they have a place to go to for holidays... I found myself more sensitive to subtle issues which non-international faculty members often overlook.” Another indicated:

I do more intentional self-disclosures. I understand each experience is very different... However, I believe there is a need for international students to hear that their experience is not isolated—whatever they are going thru. So, I try my best to connect and to normalize that process for them. I also try to move from being a mentor to being an ally as well.

*Be an Advocate and a Role Model.* We described a pull to advocate for international mentees because of shared experience. We also thought of ourselves as modeling the possibility of success in academia by immigrants. To support their confidence and tenacity, we encouraged mentees to view their international background and perspectives as resources to other students, colleagues, and to academia broadly. We also advocated for international students and faculty when we noticed that the criteria used to evaluate them were U.S.-biased. For example, one of us stated:

I also think I get pulled in to work with internationals just because I am international and sometimes it is my job to educate my colleagues on how that is and is not professionally ok. For example, I am happy to work with a young faculty member who, due to her own culture, may currently be struggling in an American classroom, but I am not happy to do so if others are not willing to give her time to learn.

And another wrote:

I am using my voice much louder and directly to mentor and support them even when they are not in the room. For example, I am at an institution with a significant number of international students. So, we have a lot of issues related to international students and many times, they are pointed at as the reason for those issues. They are not. So, I take my stance much more directly and advocate for a more inclusive and just system for them. I don't think my mentoring is limited to discussions in my office. I go to DMV with them when they experience racism and xenophobia in their interactions and have challenges with getting a driving license.

*Offer Practical and Social Support Outside “the Classroom”.* As immigrants, we indicated knowing first-hand what it is like not to be near family during times of sickness or on important holidays. The following two quotes illustrate how we found ourselves stepping in to provide support for our international mentees: “I don’t think my mentoring is limited to discussions in my office... I don’t mind going to their apartment with food when they are going through a significant life event while being away from their family,” and

I tend to offer international students and faculty some form of social support... I may host international and U.S. students without close families for a super bowl party or Thanksgiving dinner. I will get invites to and attend Chinese New Year celebrations. I still keep appropriate boundaries, but I am not afraid for us to do some non-academic activities together.

### ***Question 5: Recommendations for Mentors of International Individuals***

*Learn About International Mentees’ Cultures and Strive to Build Personal Connections.* A recurring recommendation to faculty interested in international mentoring was that they acquire, at a minimum, a basic knowledge of the international mentees’ home countries and cultural backgrounds, as a way to develop a personal connection with them, and then taking “cultural factors into consideration when working with them.” One of us wrote:

Get to know them—which means you will need to also ask them about where they are from... Invest a little in their lives outside of academia... Help them bring their own cultures into their professional skills and identity... Stay in touch with them! Go to a conference in their home countries/areas of the world. Introduce them to fellow internationals from their own and other countries.

*Engage in Sustained Learning About Yourself and in International Work.* Another recommendation for effective international mentoring was to consistently engage in international research, training, and/or professional activities. For example, one of us wrote: “it is critical for those who are mentoring international graduate students or junior faculty to model a high level of open-mindedness and active engagement in international activities and issues.”

We also described the need to get out of one’s own comfort zone and to “have some fun with the mistakes you and they will make and recover from as we work across cultures.” One of us wrote:

If you are mentoring an international student or international faculty, you have to first learn to get out of your own comfort zones. One way of doing this is to travel to a place where you don’t speak the language and where you need to

function in the community... If you are mentoring international student and faculty, you need to be curious and read more globally and learn what's happening outside of the U.S.

*Cultivate Cultural Self-Awareness, Curiosity, and Humility.* A last recommendation for effective international mentoring was to be aware of one's cultural values, to be curious and open-minded, and most of all, to avoid assuming that U.S. ways are always best. For example, one of us stated: "Please do not mentor any international student or faculty if you think your job is to help them adjust to the U.S. system. It really is not about 'adjusting' to this system. [There is a] need for open-mindedness, patience, and curiosity." Another wrote:

What I worry most about is mentoring that assumes that we know best about what is right for any individual. Sometimes I hear my peers suggesting strategies that will help international faculty be successful under current circumstances (focus on publishing, publish in the best journals, be careful not to spend too much time on teaching or service)—that makes me worried that we will not necessarily be improving universities.

*Normalize Ambivalence, Doubts, and Uncertainties.* A cross-cutting recommendation for mentors aspiring to work with international students and colleagues was that they normalize (and not pathologize) their mentees' mixed feelings, doubts, and uncertainties. We considered it critical that mentees understand as normal their ambivalence about their country of origin and about their country of adoption; and that they view their lack of certainties as realistic, given their immigration experience. International mentors should also seek to support their international mentees valorizing and using their mixed, and therefore nuanced, feelings and views as resource for more complex understanding not only of the international experience, but of the human condition. A representative statement from a participant reads: "Normalize ambivalence (e.g., love and hate for the country of adoption, and the countries we left). Normalize doubt. Normalize uncertainty. And instead of trying to fit, valorize what makes us different."

### ***Question 6: Recommendations for International Graduate Students Interested in Academia in the United States***

*Develop Academic-Career Skills That Embraces Your International Identity.* A theme in response to this question was a recommendation to acquire, as early as possible, the skills and credentials required in academia, specifically teaching and research skills. Illustrative quotes include: "Actively pursue extra research training and teaching experiences to develop a solid foundation for future faculty functioning (e.g., taking extra stats courses, requesting to

participate in research teams)” and “Pursue ways to prepare yourself to become a good candidate for faculty positions while you are a grad student (e.g., present at conferences, get involved in APA as a student).”

Several recommendations were made about student evaluations of teaching effectiveness, given their widespread use, their poor validity, and their biases in assessing international faculty teaching competence:

Don't rely exclusively on student evaluations of teaching effectiveness (some of those anonymous evaluations can be vicious, even mocking one's accent and the like). Spend time training on becoming a competent instructor. Experience is not enough; receiving pedagogical training is a must. Many universities have a center for instructors' development; take advantage of it.

Many recommendations were also made about growing writing, presenting, and publishing skills. This is in recognition of the fact that international students and faculty from non-Anglophone countries have enormous challenges in achieving the level of communication proficiency expected of scholars in the United States. Representative quotes include: “Have writing days set aside every week. Have a good support group who can motivate you to write and publish.” “Keep working on your writing even when you don't want to. Find good editors. Don't let discouragement and how difficult it is slow you down. Just write!”

Finally, there were recommendations to build academia skills and credentials in ways that capitalized on international expertise. A representative quote reads:

Engage in transnational or cross-cultural research involving your host country and your country of origin. Keep up with scientific and professional literature from both countries and include that literature in the papers you will be writing while in graduate school. If bilingual, publish in both languages.

*Expand Your Professional Networks and Put Them Into Action.* There was consensus regarding the benefits of joining professional associations and attending national and international conferences while treating the expenses as an investment in one's career; of volunteering at conferences to defray costs; and of joining leadership development programs (e.g., SCP's Leadership Collaborative; the Council of National Psychological Associations for the Advancement of Ethnic Minority Interests' Leadership Development Institute; the Society for the Psychology of Women's Feminist Leadership Institute). We viewed expanding professional networks as crucial for advancement in academia (e.g., external reviews in tenure and promotion). National and international research and teaching consultants and collaborators

were considered invaluable resources because “becoming an international faculty member is a complicated process.” One of us stated:

It helps to have a village of people who are diverse in their experiences and perspectives. They can help you learn how to step up, how to advocate for yourself, how to find language for certain discussions, and how to navigate the system.

*Seek Mentoring and Guidance About the Diversity of Academia Paths.* Specific recommendations were offered on seeking guidance about the diversity of U.S. academia paths and what it takes to enter and succeed in each. We underscored the importance of getting input on resumes, cover letters, and on pedagogical, research, and professional statements that are inclusive of one’s international identity all the while framing the international experiences as a strength and a contribution. A representative quote follows: “Ask for advice, don’t be afraid. Asking for advice doesn’t mean that you have to take the advice. But, ask for it. It will open up new horizons for you.”

*Be Aware of Your Value and Resilience.* A final set of recommendations was to advise international students and junior faculty to recognize their value and resilience. As one of us put it:

In many ways, as foreign-national professors, we have lots of practice in taking chances, being different, and being lonely; in not understanding and not being understood; in not having role models, support, a community. These disadvantages contribute stamina and resilience—perhaps more than we realize.

## **Overarching Themes**

As detailed in the Method section, additional steps were taken to identify overarching themes. Three overarching themes emerged as a result of this process (see [Appendix B](#)).

*Overcoming Linguistic Differences.* This overarching theme captures the enormous challenges we all experienced as a result of having to excel educationally and professionally in a foreign language. Language difficulties triggered internal criticism including self-doubt, such as impostor syndrome, as well as external criticisms in the form of microaggressions, and just plain aggressions. Several of us related stories of being humiliated, derided, or presumed incompetent because of the ways we express ourselves, or just our accent.

This theme also captures the sizable impact such experiences had on us. They affected our self-talk, our belief in our ability to succeed, and our sense of

connection or belonging where we studied or worked. In time, language is also where we learned to express ourselves, and experienced success. For some of us, finding peers and mentors who were struggling with language issues or were willing to invest in us, help us, and work through it with us was critical to our persistence and success in academia. It also resulted in life-long mentors and cross-cultural friendships that, in some ways, gave us a home away from home. Mastering multiple languages eventually became a resource and a point of strength in our work. In fact, speaking multiple languages was identified as a catalyst to multiple viewpoints and an advantage in a profession dominated by language. Some of us reported using language examples to educate students about culture, and to illustrate how culture is embedded in, and expressed via language. Ultimately, having lived through language struggles and the hard work it took to survive them also increased our resilience.

*Learning to Thrive Across Cultures.* This overarching theme is about the personal change process that we, as international students and faculty, engaged in. This change was multifaceted and multidetermined. Specifically, it was forced on us by immigration circumstances, centered on learning through cultures and professional boundaries. At times, however, the change was intentional. It involved exploring personal strengths, understanding the impact of changing personal and contextual factors (e.g., divorce, immigration, turmoil in country of origin), and aligning personal and professional values. This self-reflection was particularly demanding because it took place in a foreign country and culture. We had to learn to succeed in U.S. academic culture, while also holding on to our own values and perspective on success.

The theme captures a shared sense that as foreign-national faculty we were more likely to be misunderstood or judged negatively for behaviors that are expected and valued in our country of origin. For some of us, the collectivist values that we had been socialized in in our country of origin led, at best, to our being perceived as too quiet, without ambition, or disinterested in leadership. For others of us, our country of origin's directedness or candor came to be viewed as bluntness. At its worst, our cultural differences contributed to serious challenges, including for one of us, being accused of academic dishonesty for collaborating "too much" with peers and colleagues. The theme also captured the tall order of learning to promote ourselves, our projects, and, for some of us, grappling with individualistic or other new cultural values while still honoring our own. Many of us now use our multicultural experiences to challenge our U.S. colleagues and institutions to examine and question U.S. hegemonic norms and practices. Finally, patterns in responses within this overarching theme indicate that we have continued to learn that the initially unfamiliar, and at times treacherous cultural landscapes our lives unfolded in revealed more of their beauty when we forged our own paths rather than following the (dominant cultural) highway.

*Mentoring as a Valued Experience.* Mentoring as a tool for success in academia recurred in most of our responses. Those of us who were lucky to have positive faculty mentors mentioned empathy, curiosity, and openness to learning from us as characteristics of our strong mentors. These mentors who, ultimately, served as role models, took an interest in us as whole cultural beings, and invested in us not only as students in need of cultural and personal support in a foreign country, but as people with things to offer to them, their departments, and their families. Positive mentoring from advisors and other faculty members was identified as critical to thriving in academia. Moreover, for some of us, peer mentors, particularly other international students, provided a much needed, supportive safe space. At the same time, positive mentoring was not a universal experience even in our small group. The overall sentiment was that there is much room for growth in counseling psychology in terms of nurturing its international students and faculty.

By commission or omission, we learned what good mentoring is like, and therefore how one ought to mentor international students and faculty. Effective international mentoring requires going beyond academic support. It demands engaging with the mentee's personal life issues (e.g., immigration, cultural challenges, homesickness, and foreign-language development).

## **Discussion**

This study sought to identify themes in the path to academia of current counseling psychology faculty working at universities in the United States who started as international graduate students. Primary themes and three overarching themes emerged from the analysis of our responses. Figuring prominently among markers that shaped that path were our identification with U.S. counseling psychology's philosophy; our embracing of a self-reflective process and appreciation of our identity as outsiders; and an accepting attitude that career decisions may be shaped by challenges and uncertainties. Guidance and mentoring from advisors and other faculty members and inspiration from peers were also important. These findings resemble those reported by other international U.S. professors (e.g., [Alexander & Mohanty, 1997](#); [Ayala-López, 2018](#); [Hernandez et al., 2015](#)).

The challenges we identified were quite numerous. They include having to function professionally in a foreign language, limited support, feelings of isolation, being burdened with extra service workload, and facing bias and discrimination during the tenure and promotion process. These findings are in line with those by others (e.g., [Canetto & Borrayo, 2003](#); [Chung, 2013](#); [Hernandez et al., 2015](#); [Kim et al., 2014](#)). Particularly noteworthy among our findings is that we were able to turn some of the challenges into opportunities by engaging in active reflection, developing relevant skills, and receiving help and support from "a village of allies and mentors."

Congruent with the literature on international faculty in the United States, we experienced becoming an international faculty to require continuous development, extending well beyond securing a faculty position. An important career development involved embracing a multinational identity. [Hernandez et al. \(2015\)](#) described their multinational identity process as “a continual reconfiguration of our dominant identities” and constantly “scrutiniz[ing] who we *are becoming*” (p. 542).

In addition to the usual challenges of becoming a faculty member, we had to contend with international-faculty specific adversities. U.S. ethnocentrism was a major adversity and manifested itself in many ways, including as hostility on the part of students and colleagues to internationalizing the courses we taught and the training we provided—as reported, also, by [Canetto & Borrayo, 2003](#). Furthermore, the U.S. census categories were incongruent with how we describe ourselves. Consistent with this experience, [Hernandez et al. \(2015\)](#) reflected on their experiences of being “ascribed racialized [U.S. labels and] identities that do not quite fit.” Two of us declined to self-describe based on U.S. census race/ethnicity categories. This prompted further conversations among us that were emancipatory as we too “readily discard [U.S. census race/ethnicity categories] in private settings” ([Hernandez et al., 2015](#), p. 542).

With respect to our identity as mentors of international students and faculty members in counseling psychology, we noticed that, having gone through international dislocation experiences, we tended to respond with special empathy to international mentees. We are cognizant that the breadth of involvement we have been willing to undertake to support international mentees’ needs to be balanced with consideration of personal, professional, and legal boundaries, and to be consistent with professional codes, including the [Universal Declaration of Ethical Principles for Psychologists \(2008\)](#), and the Ethical Principles and Code of Conduct ([APA, 2017](#)).

Our findings suggest that mentoring of international students and faculty is similar to the work one does with U.S.-born and raised mentees, and also different. To become effective mentors of any individual, national or international, one needs to learn about, and appreciate the mentee’s culture. This process requires being aware of one’s own culture, including one’s cultural and personal prejudices. Curiosity, openness, and humility were recurring key terms in our reflections on mentoring.

Our findings raise a significant concern about mentors who see their work as helping international mentees to simply “adjust to the U.S. system.” Our findings indicate that mentors of international students and faculty should strive to appreciate the unique and different perspectives contributed by their international mentees. Mentors must also keep in mind the systemic challenges likely to be encountered by international students and colleagues, and strive to equip them with strategies to cope with, confront, and systemically



dismantle ethnocentrism and xenophobia. Our findings are consistent with those emerging from the two, previously cited, bodies of literature, the one on international students, and the other on and by other “outsiders-within” academia (e.g., women, some U.S. ethnic minorities).

Two important recommendations can be made based on our findings. One involves a continuous, personal and professional engagement in international activities on the mentors’ part, as this is likely to further empathic bonds with mentees. The other emphasizes the importance of mentors normalizing the ambivalence, doubts, and uncertainties likely to be experienced by international mentees over time. Taken together, our recommendations are about taking a position that [Hernandez et al. \(2015\)](#) describe as tempered radicalism, which involves both making it in the system and challenging it from within. Hernandez et al. write that “tempered radicals may vacillate amongst... various strategies, moving from more tempered to more radical and back again, depending on the situation at hand and guided by prudence/practical wisdom” (p. 544).

Our recommendations for international students interested in becoming faculty members in the United States clustered around several ideas. The top recommendation is the intentional development of academic–career skills in ways that capitalize on their international identity and expertise. We believe that this can help redress U.S. psychology’s ethnocentrism and U.S. academia’s hegemonic discourse. We also advise that international students build a strong national and international professional network while making use of their multilingual abilities. Moreover, we recommend that they use their network for professional guidance, including on how to pursue the diversity of U.S. academic paths, as these can be significantly different from those in one’s home country. Embedded in these recommendations were many comments about the prejudice and discrimination international students and faculty experience, especially in teaching, and especially if English is not their first language. This major disadvantage (i.e., having a foreign accent in English) is frequently addressed in the literature on international students and faculty; it results in being perceived as less competent and is often responded to with comments and requests for explanations ([Ayala-López, 2018](#); [Canetto & Borrayo, 2003](#); [Hernandez et al., 2015](#)).

The cross-cutting findings were expressed by the overarching themes: Overcoming Linguistic Differences, Learning to Thrive Across Cultures, and Mentoring as a Valued Experience. The challenges of learning English and of excelling in a field, counseling psychology, and in a professional path, academia, that require high-level communication skills, were a refrain in our responses. Eventually, for all of us, having command of multiple languages became a major resource, professionally and personally. The second cross-cutting theme, Learning to Thrive Across Cultures, had to do with the difficulties first, and then the advantages of having multiple cultural

perspectives—or “multifocal lens” as [Hernandez et al. \(2015\)](#) framed it. We agree with Hernandez et al. that foreign-born faculty “leverage their outsider/within positionality in organizations, choosing to view their marginal positions in organizations as a place for advocacy and direct action” (p. 544). Finally, a cross-cutting theme was the positive impact of having mentors and advocates. Those of us who had the fortune of these experiences found positive mentoring critical to our success, yet, in order to be effective, it had to go beyond academic support and include the person of the mentee, all the while respecting professional boundaries.

### *Further Contributions and Recommendations*

An important contribution of this study is its use of a collaborative autoethnographic approach ([Adams et al., 2015](#)). To date, there are few examples of its use by counseling psychologists and in counseling psychology journals (e.g., [Hargons et al., 2017](#)). This approach is particularly suitable to our type of inquiry because it allows for individual explorations and critical reflections on lived experiences, followed by a collaborative data analyses that identifies shared commonalities. Moreover, it is a method that privileges the meanings ascribed to those experiences by the individuals who went through them. Another contribution of this study is that it focuses on those who successfully transitioned from international student to faculty member in a U.S. counseling psychology program. Understanding these stories of resilience and success may provide inspiration and guidance to counseling psychology graduate students interested in pursuing faculty positions, and build on counseling psychology’s philosophical commitment to strength-based approaches.

Among the most likely candidates for U.S. academic positions requiring international psychology expertise are international students trained in the United States. Our findings, among those of others, could serve to generate a blueprint for counseling psychologists to encourage and support international students’ journey to academia. What follows are recommendations inspired by our findings. Although based on what worked for us, they are a start. First, be a positive role model by being constructive and nonjudgmental, and helping international students with their writing skills while building their self-confidence. The process would include mentors showing curiosity and interest in learning more about the international students’ cultural background and country of origin. Recognizing language differences as a resource, not just a limitation, is also critical. Second, commit to increase international students’ sense of belonging to the department and to the field, so their desire to work in the same environment increases. Third, help international students network early on, while learning about academia, what it entails, how to apply or interview for a job, and how to build a professional network that is also

international in nature. Finally, mentor international students in a way that helps them acquire teaching and research skills, publish their work to become competitive for academic positions, and build upon their unique background as international students and scholars where their multilingual abilities and international connections are put to sound use.

Our experiences indicate that it sometimes seems as if international faculty members are expected or assigned to mentor other international colleagues just because we are both internationals. Much like for other minorities who often face the same expectation, it can also lead to burnout, particularly if the mentor has multiple minority statuses and is being sought out as an “expert” representative of their own group in other areas as well, while serving in a range of academic contexts (e.g., working groups, campus surveys, organizational roles, committees).

Although our findings highlight some of the unique ways in which being an international faculty member may help mentor other international students or junior colleagues, it is worth noting that there are also some international colleagues who may not offer as much cultural empathy and support due to their own internalized xenophobia or even animosity toward their countries of origin. In addition, although this study focused on mentoring international students and faculty in general, there are additional levels of specificity that will need to be considered when seeking to match mentors and mentees. In other words, we need to critically consider the diverse experiences of international colleagues and the impact of socio-political, racial, and economic factors on these experiences.

Our findings suggest that mentors working with international graduate students or junior faculty should be genuinely interested in international and cross-cultural issues. For those who grew up in the United States and do not have international backgrounds, it may be a competency that could be acquired through training. Training programs may want to work toward increasing interest, exposure, and experiences of mentors toward international and cross-cultural issues. For example, programs could collectively develop goals and initiatives that focus on increased exposure and inclusion of international issues in the curriculum (e.g., including literature focused on international issues) and extra-curricular activities and discussions (e.g., guest speakers from different international backgrounds, visits to different international events, overseas sabbaticals).

Our findings document our personal experiences of encountering some colleagues in academia that seem to consider having international graduate students or junior faculty as extra work due to language difficulties, socialization needs, or cultural differences, and some others who hold an attitude that they are superior to international students or colleagues. As a profession and as social justice advocates, we need to challenge and problematize such stances. One way to do so is to remind everyone that language differences can be an

important asset for counseling programs, an opportunity to question possible xenophobic attitudes and embrace humility, and a reminder that communication challenges are not unique to international students and faculty. In fact, it is an unjust assumption that it is only international students and faculty who may present with some of these differences. Instead of labeling the problems, programs could use programmatic interventions to increase communication skills for all students and faculty. Supporting international students and faculty's professional development in their first language is an important paradigm shift.

### *Implications for Education, Training, and Advocacy*

In terms of education and training implications, this study's findings highlight the critical role faculty may play in international students' interest, persistence, and success in an academic career in the United States. Specifically, they suggest that international and national counseling psychology faculty who wish to support their international students and junior colleagues consider going beyond the conventional scope of mentoring, which often has a heavy focus on research and professional training issues. Instead, they may take a holistic approach, get to know their international students and colleagues, and engage them in problem solving of issues specific to international individuals. Knowledge coupled with a consistent empathic stance and a personal investment in establishing a long-term connection may result in a sense of empowerment and affirmation in their international students and colleagues.

There are possible implications of this study's findings for internationalizing advocacy work. At the individual level, counseling psychology faculty could consider reaching out to colleagues or offices on campus on behalf of their international mentees to educate and address international-specific microaggressions, biases, and/or unfair treatments. Faculty may want to familiarize themselves with international resources on campus (e.g., the office of international students and scholars, international clubs and houses, or a writing center) or in the community (e.g., local international centers, community-based organizations or nongovernmental organizations committed to international causes) for support to international mentees. Faculty may also express their commitment to internationalization by integrating more international topics or literatures into their courses and/or other training (Canetto, 2019; Consoli et al., 2017; Wang & Çiftçi, 2019). Systems-level internationalization advocacy work may include volunteering at nonprofit organizations that help international students, providing consultation to university offices or committees that serve international students, and pursuing research or service grants about or in support of international students. Counseling psychologists may also seek greater involvement with policy work at the university, professional organization (e.g., International Section of Division 17, APA's Office of International Affairs, and APA's Committee on

International Relations in Psychology), and/or state or federal level, to support an affirmative and inclusive environment for international students and faculty in our profession and in the country.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

A limitation of this study is its sample composition. We are a group of people who succeeded and/or are succeeding in academia. The experiences of those who did not succeed or chose to leave academia for one reason or another may be quite different and equally worth exploring. Future studies could focus on gaining an understanding of international faculty members who exited academia.

This collaborative autoethnography only explored the mentor side of the mentor–mentee relationship. Although mentoring is important, the personal qualities of the mentees are also important for effective mentoring, and so are the mentees perceptions and experiences of a mentor’s abilities or difficulties. Additionally, our responses focused on some aspects of international mentoring, however there are others in some specific mentoring situations that were not addressed (e.g., when historical international animosities or racial and/or ethnic differences might be involved). Moreover, due to anonymization of responses done to maximize participation and self-disclosure, the study did not examine the impact of respondents’ other personal characteristics and experiences, including sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, race, ethnicity, and their intersectionality. Finally, the data collection for the study took place during the last quarter of 2019 and the first quarter of 2020, that is, before the coronavirus pandemic, and the exacerbation of racism and xenophobia in the United States. These phenomena have had a major impact on international students and faculty, including us.

In closing, future studies could identify ways to address xenophobic attitudes and reduce the obstacles faced by international faculty and by international students interested in academic careers in the United States. Similarly, programs could be developed to support international students and faculty, and also educate U.S. students and faculty about the value and contributions this group provides. We urge U.S. counseling psychology, a field committed to social justice, to invest in international students and faculty. We agree with [McKinley \(2019\)](#) that having more international students and faculty in U.S. counseling psychology will support counseling psychology’s goal to decolonize its education, science, and practice.

## **Appendix A**

### *Questions*

1. Please share up to 3 salient aspects of your experience while an international graduate student that were important building blocks to becoming an international counseling psychology faculty member in the U.S.
2. Please identify up to 3 challenges as well as up to 3 positive aspects of your academic career as an international counseling psychology faculty member in the U.S.
3. Taking into consideration a developmental framework, what are some factors that contributed to your career development as an international counseling psychology faculty member in the U.S. over time?
4. Please reflect on your identity as a mentor for international graduate students and international faculty members in counseling psychology. How does it differ from mentoring U.S. students and faculty?
5. What recommendations do you have for those who mentor international graduate students and faculty in counseling psychology?
6. As an international counseling psychology faculty member who knows first-hand the demands of the job, what advice would you give to current international graduate students aspiring to become faculty members in the U.S.?

## **Appendix B**

### *Primary Themes*

1. Experiences as a Doctoral Student that Led Us to an Academic Career in Counseling Psychology
  - a. Identification with counseling psychology's philosophy
  - b. Mentoring from advisors and other faculty members
  - c. Inspiration from peers
  - d. Self-reflective process as cultural outsiders
  - e. Professional decisions shaped by challenges and uncertainties
2. Challenges and Opportunities as International Academics in the United States
  - a. Language and cultural challenges generated opportunities
  - b. Extra challenges in the tenure and promotion process
3. Career Development
  - a. Career development as an ongoing process
  - b. Ethnocentrism in United States psychology
  - c. Our multinational professional identity

4. Mentoring International Students and Faculty Members as International Academics in the United States
  - a. Sharing a common bond with international individuals
  - b. Educate international individuals about United States academic and cultural practices
  - c. Address international individuals' displacement and acculturation
  - d. Be an advocate and a role model
  - e. Offer practical and social support outside "the classroom"
5. Recommendations for Mentors of International Individuals
  - a. Learn about mentees' cultures and strive to build personal connections
  - b. Engage in sustained learning about yourself and in international work
  - c. Cultivate cultural self-awareness, curiosity, and humility
  - d. Normalize ambivalence, doubts, and uncertainties
6. Recommendations for International Graduate Students Interested in Academia in the United States
  - a. Develop academic-career skills that embraces your international identity
  - b. Expand your professional networks and put them into action
  - c. Seek mentoring and guidance about the diversity of academia paths
  - d. Be aware of your value and resilience

### Overarching Themes

1. Overcoming Linguistic Differences
2. Learning to Thrive Across Cultures
3. Mentoring as a Valued Experience

### Author Note

Elin Ovrebo is now at Rhodes College.

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**Şenel Poyrazlı**, PhD, is a professor of counseling psychology and the Chair of the Social Sciences and Psychology Division at Penn State Harrisburg. She is a past president (2014) of APA Division 52 International Psychology. She is an APA Fellow through three divisions: Division 1 General Psychology, Division 17 Society of Counseling Psychology, and Division 52 International Psychology. She is also a Fellow of the Eastern Psychological Association. Her research interests include multicultural competency training and psychosocial and academic adjustment processes of international students and immigrants. Dr. Poyrazlı received a Fulbright Senior Scholar Award to Turkey for the 2022–2023 academic year.

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**Silvia Sara Canetto**, D.Oc PhD, is a bi-national (Italy and United States) psychology and women's and gender studies professor at Colorado State University. She is most well-known for her theory and research on cultural scripts of gender and suicide, her studies of women and men in science and engineering, and her writings and activism on women's human rights. Dr. Canetto is "Fellow" of the American Psychological Association (Divisions 9, 17, 20, 35, 51, 52 and 56); of the Association for Psychological Science; and of the Gerontological Society of America. She is the recipient of the American Psychological Association's Heritage Award for long-standing contributions to women and gender research and education; and of the International Council of Psychologists' Denmark-Gunvald Award for feminist research.

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**Linda Forrest**, PhD, professor emerita, University of Oregon, served as 2007–2008 President of the Society of Counseling Psychology. Among her presidential projects was the 2008 International Counseling Psychology Conference held in Chicago. With Ayşe Çiftçi, she coordinated the International Committee for the 2014 Counseling Psychology Conference in Atlanta, GA. She was the recipient of the 2013 SCP International Section's inaugural Excellent Contribution Award.