THE PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCES OF INTERNATIONAL COUNSELING GRADUATES UPON RETURNING TO THEIR HOME COUNTRY

A dissertation submitted to the Kent State University College of Education, Health, and Human Services in partial fulfillment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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This study investigated the first-person accounts of eight international counseling graduates (ICGs) upon re-entry to their home country to work after earning a university counseling degree from a program accredited by the Counsel for Accreditation and Counseling Related Educational Programs (CACREP) in the United States. An assumption of the researcher was that the CACREP-accredited counselor education programs can do more to meet the unique needs of international counseling students while studying in the United States to prepare them for work in their home country. The study was guided by the following research question: “What are the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates who completed a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States and have returned to their home country?”

The researcher contacted key informants in order to access potential participants. Eight participants, all female, were selected to participate in this study. Data were collected through Skype interviews and analyzed by a process consistent with phenomenological research. The researcher identified six Composite Textural Themes and three Composite Structural Themes that comprise the experience of professional adjustment. The six Composite Textural Themes were: (a) I Decided to Return Home; (b)
I am Navigating My Professional Development; (c) How I Applied My Western Counselor Education Across Cultures; (d) My Beliefs About My Individual Characteristics; (e) My Identified Coping Strategies and Supports; and (f) My Ongoing Professional Identity Development. The three Composite Structural Themes were: (a) Self in Relation to Others; (b) Self in Relation to Environment; and (c) Self in Relation to Work.
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY AND REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Counseling in the United States meets the requirements of a well-defined profession, including having professional associations, a code of ethics and standards of practice, accreditation board, and licensure (Stanard, 2013). The 20/20: A Vision for the Future of Counseling is an initiative of the American Counseling Association (ACA) designed to unify the profession across state lines by the year 2020. During the 2010 ACA conference, 29 of the 30 professional counseling associations represented agreed on a unified definition of counseling: “Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals” (Kaplan, Tarvydas, & Gladding, 2014, p. 368). The Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Education Programs (CACREP) is an accrediting body, incorporated in 1981, which provides instructional standards for counselor education programs. Agreement on a standard definition of counseling and instructional standards provides unity and a clear purpose for professional counselors in the United States.

As counseling has become a distinct profession in the United States, advances in global communication, travel, medicine, and business have all contributed to the growth of professional counseling worldwide (Astramovich & Pehrsson, 2009; Hohenshil, Amundson, & Niles, 2013; C. C. Lee, 1997). Many professional counselors work in countries where the profession of counseling may be in different stages of development (Hohenshil et al., 2013). Similar to the development of counseling as a profession in the
United States, countries outside the United States are merging their own unique histories, cultural norms, values, and beliefs into their counseling practices. For example, counseling in the United States has grown out of a predominantly individualistic culture, which often places a high value on personal independence. However, counseling in a culture that is predominantly collectivist may place greater value on an individual’s responsibilities to his or her family. The definition of counseling in various countries around the world will depend on the customs and needs of that culture.

Professional associations that have invested in the growth of counseling as a global profession include the International Counseling Association (ICA), the National Board of Certified Counselors International (NBCC-I), and more recently, the American Counseling Association (ACA) and the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES). In 2009, CACREP announced the International Registry of Counselor Education Programs (IRCEP) designed to provide a quality assurance process for counselor education programs outside the United States (Stanard, 2013). With this growing momentum to prepare professional counselors to work worldwide, counselor education programs in the United States may need to internationalize their curriculum or face the consequence of becoming outdated (Astramovich & Pehrsson, 2009; C. C. Lee, 1997).

One population that has the ability to assist counselor education programs in the preparation of professional counselors worldwide includes international counseling graduates (ICGs) who have completed a degree in counseling in the United States and then returned to their home countries to work. In the 2012–2013 academic year, the
number of international students in the United States increased to a record high of 250,920, a 9.8% increase from the previous year (Institute for International Education, 2013). The field of social sciences in particular is continuing to draw international students. Although Lau and Ng (2012) did not provide specific numerical data, they did report that counseling and related professions in the United States have attracted many international students. International students in CACREP-accredited counseling programs receive an education based on curriculum standards designed to meet the needs of the counseling profession in the United States. However, many of these standards appear to be culturally bound and may not be applicable across cultures. For example, what constitutes a “professional relationship” may be defined differently in other cultures (Stanard, 2013).

Models of counselor development commonly used in supervision have been developed using Western ideology and therefore may not apply to international counseling students. For example, the Rønnestad and Skovholt Model (2013) of counselor development was based on interviews with 100 American counselors and therapists from various professions, at different levels of experience. This socio-cultural disconnect may be a disadvantage to international counseling students who are planning on returning to their home country to work, as their development could be uniquely different from that of an American student planning to practice in the United States. The professional adjustment of ICGs may be influenced by the state of counseling as a profession in their home country (Stanard, 2013). In other words, ICGs may not have a culturally-relevant model of counselor development that applies to them in their home
country and consequently may have to adjust their Western counselor training to meet the needs of their culture when they return home to work.

Reflections on the phenomenon of professional adjustment after re-entry to their home country to work may help to inform counselor education programs seeking to meet the emerging needs of a growing international student community in the United States. How ICGs are adapting their CACREP-accredited education to their professional adjustment upon returning to their home country can provide valuable insight to counselor education programming, curriculum, and related professional literature. It was the purpose of this phenomenological study to understand the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates (ICGs), from CACREP-accredited counseling programs in the United States, who had returned to their home country to work.

**Research Question**

This study investigated the first-person accounts of eight ICGs upon re-entry to their home country to work after earning a counseling degree from a CACREP-accredited program in the United States. Using a phenomenological research design, the readjustment of ICGs to counseling work in their home country was the focus or phenomenon under investigation. The study was guided by the following research question: “What are the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates (ICGs) who completed a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States and have returned to their home country?”
**Definition of Terms**

Currently, there is limited literature across disciplines or in the counseling profession pertaining to this research topic. Therefore, definition of terms is thought to be important in this study for common understanding.

**Counseling:** In the United States, “Counseling is a professional relationship that empowers diverse individuals, families, and groups to accomplish mental health, wellness, education, and career goals” (Kaplan et al., 2014, p. 368).

**International student:** An international student is one whose home country is not the United States and who had specifically traveled to the United States on a student visa to attend a university.

**International counseling graduate (ICG):** An international counseling graduate is a former international student in the United States who completed a CACREP-accredited graduate degree in counseling.

**Professional experience:** Professional experience refers to contact with students/clients related to the work of counseling in settings such as schools, agencies, universities, or private settings.

**Re-entry:** Re-entry is the transition from the host culture back into one’s home culture where the person experiences familiar surroundings after living in a different culture for a significant period of time (Adler, 1981; Thompson & Christofi, 2006).

**Professional adjustment experience:** Professional adjustment experience refers to adaptation to the work of counseling during an ICGs re-entry to their home country after completing a counseling degree in the United States.
Review of the Literature

According to Gergen (1994), “The terms and forms by which we achieve understanding of the world and ourselves are social artifacts, products of historically and culturally situated interchanges among people” (p. 49). For example, counseling is a recognized profession in the United States that considers the concerns of the society. However, “an American model, based on an assumption of freedom of choice and self-determination of one’s destiny, does not fit the prevailing ethos in many other countries” (Hershenson, Power, & Waldo, 1996, p. 327). Thus, international counseling graduates have to adapt their Western counseling skills and knowledge to meet the “reality” of their home culture.

Given the significance of understanding ICGs’ professional adjustment experiences, the remainder of this chapter explores scholarly literature relevant to the research question. Literature reviewing the development of counseling as a global profession as it relates to ICGs’ experiences of professional adjustment is included. Specifically, this includes reviewing the impact of counseling’s historical development, potential language barriers, lack of professional support experienced by some ICGs, and differences in education and accreditation among various countries. Furthermore, a review of literature examining the professional adjustment of ICGs upon returning to their home country is provided, including a discussion of acculturation, re-entry culture shock, coping styles, individual characteristics of ICGs, situational variables, and effectiveness and relevance of counselor education in the United States.
The Development of Counseling as a Global Profession

Healing, as a profession, has existed for centuries in countless forms and settings. In the current era, professional counseling has just started to gain international recognition as a valuable form of aid for those in need. ICGs have the unique professional opportunity to integrate their Western education and standards for counseling practice with their own cultural beliefs, values, and environment. Often ICGs are returning to a country that may be in the process of developing counseling as a profession and does not yet meet the necessary criteria for a well-defined profession.

Hohenshil et al. (2013) described a number of factors important for understanding the status of counseling in individual countries/regions of the world. These factors include the country’s historical development of counseling services, the current status of the profession, the kinds of counseling theories and techniques that seem to work best in the country, how diversity issues are handled, and how counselors are educated. These factors may also be a significant part of ICGs’ professional adjustment, as they will be working in a country that may be distinctly different in history, language, presence of professional organizations, and education and accreditation, than is the case in the United States.

Historical development. The unique historical development of an ICG’s home country may impact his or her professional adjustment experiences (Alvarez & Lee, 2012; Hohenshil et al., 2013). For example, in Hong Kong, cultural understanding of counseling as a profession is still being developed (Yuen, Leung, & Chan, 2014). Social workers have a long history in Hong Kong and are widely recognized for providing social
services, which include counseling. Additionally, the government in Hong Kong has not sought to increase spending or expansion of its social service programs for the past 30 years. Thus, ICGs returning to Hong Kong may have to find employment under the auspices of the current system. This could impact an ICGs’ professional identity development, as there is no clear developmental model for the counseling profession in Hong Kong. As a result, ICGs returning to Hong Kong, may feel frustrated without a clear professional trajectory or a clear cultural understanding of their professional role(s) as different from that of a professional social worker.

In Latin American countries, such as Ecuador, ICGs may have to inform the public of their professional practices as opposed to those of a traditional healer (i.e., shaman or folk healer). In the Republic of Ecuador, shamans are sought by a large portion of the population, especially those living in rural areas, to heal illnesses occurring at the marital, spiritual, and psychological levels (Smith & Valarezo, 2013).

Conversely, in South Korea, counseling is one of the fastest growing professions (S. M. Lee, Suh, Yang, & Jang, 2012). The profession of counseling evolved from school based guidance counseling in the 1950s to a distinct profession practiced across various mental health settings. Lee et al. stated that to be seen as competent, counselors in South Korea will need to: (a) practice culturally-specific interventions; (b) serve as advocates for promoting the counseling profession; (c) have in-depth knowledge surrounding addictions, career, and crisis counseling; (d) obtain advanced technology training; (e) demonstrate English language proficiency; (f) have clearly defined professional identity, distinct from social workers and psychologists; (g) and develop
systematic university-based counselor education programs. ICGs returning to South Korea may have to gain additional certifications and/or training to meet the professional counselor requirements in their country.

**Language.** Similar to history, language differences among various countries may have a significant impact on an ICG’s professional adjustment. For example, the word counseling (spelled with two “ll”s in many other countries), may not be a part of the local lexicon, but counseling-related education and services may be present (Stanard, 2013). In Japan there is not a unified definition of counseling and it is often used synonymously with clinical psychology and psychotherapy (Watanabe-Muraoka, 2007). The English translation of the Japanese word closest to the term counseling, *Sodan*, is consulting and guidance (Grabosky, Ishii, & Mase, 2012).

Many Japanese students earn a degree in counseling abroad and return to Japan to work (Grabosky et al., 2012). These counseling professionals may find work in educational institutions, community agencies, and private or group practices (Grabosky et al., 2012). As there are no licensure laws or regulatory bodies for the practice of counseling, anyone can start a counseling practice in Japan. The lack of professional recognition in Japan may create numerous professional barriers for ICGs when seeking employment. Citizens of the country may not trust the “legitimacy” of counseling as a profession, where the terms “counseling” or “counselor” are not well defined.

Similar to Japan, ICGs returning to Brazil may have professional adjustment difficulties. The word for counseling in Brazil is *aconselhamento* (which translated in English means “to give advice”). Although there is a word related to the practice of
counseling, there is no distinct definition for a “counselor” (or those who practice counseling) and professionals who engage in counseling are referred to as psychologists (Hutz-Midgett & Hutz, 2012). Language differences may impact an ICG’s ability to find employment as hiring agencies may not be aware of counseling as an independent profession in Brazil.

**Professional organization/s.** There are distinct differences in the United States between a licensed professional counselor, psychologist, and social worker. These titles are legally protected and cannot be used by just anyone. Each of these distinct professions may encourage membership in different professional organizations such as the American Psychological Association (APA) or the American Counseling Association (ACA). Doctoral degree graduates of counselor education programs in the United States may be encouraged to join the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision (ACES), a division of ACA.

Professionals in numerous countries have developed their own counselor-related professional organizations, similar to ACA, but representative of their own unique cultural heritage. For example, these organizations include the Botswana Counseling Association, the Korean Counseling Association, and the Argentinian Association of Counselors. Access to the region’s established counseling association may ease ICGs’ transition to work by providing access to culturally specific education, research, and collegial support.

Some returnees may have a professional organization that includes counselors, but that organization may not be specific to counselors. Examples include the Mexican
Association of Psychological Counseling and Psychotherapy (AMOPP) and the Turkish Psychological Counseling and Guidance Association (TPCGA). These associations aid professional counselors in addition to other helping professionals. Thus, ICGs may have to work harder to find support specific to the profession of counseling in their country. Furthermore, many ICGs are returning to countries that have no relevant professional association (e.g., Zimbabwe, Kyrgyz Republic, Thailand). Professional adjustment for ICGs returning to a country with either limited or no professional organization may be difficult due to a lack of cultural and professional support for their adjustment to work.

**Education and accreditation.** In addition to diverse histories and languages, the professional adjustment of ICGs may include differences in education and accreditation between the United States and their home country. Counselor preparation differs around the world ranging from accredited graduate programs in counselor education (e.g., Australia, Canada, Mexico) to not having any post-secondary training programs or accreditation (Stanard, 2013). Similar to language barriers, differences in counselor preparation and education standards have an impact on ICGs’ professional adjustment as they may have to adjust their U.S. education to meet the current educational requirements or standards for working in their country.

The counseling profession in Russia, for example, has emerged under The Ministry of Education and Science, as a branch of social work. The directive for the Ministry is to provide *social psychological help*, which can be considered the equivalent of counseling in the United States. There are no distinct university training programs for counselors and professional organizations are in the early stages of development (Currie,
Kuzmina, & Nadyuk, 2012). ICGs returning to Russia may have to adjust their Western counselor education to meet the emerging needs of the helping profession in Russia. For instance, clients in Russia may have different issues regarding access to healthcare as their system is different from that of the United States, and ICGs returning to work in Russia may also have adjustment issues finding continuing education opportunities.

In Taiwan, similar to the United States, a master’s degree in counseling or a related field must be earned in order to apply for licensure. However, doctoral degrees are offered in counseling psychology, not counselor education (Guo, Wang, Combs, Lin, & Johnson, 2013). Furthermore, counseling curriculum in Taiwan does not conform to the 2009 CACREP standards with differences in the required credit hours (30 to 42 hours in Taiwan vs. 48 to 60 in the United States), the absence of mandated content domains (Research and Program Evaluation is the only one of the eight CACREP domains universally mandated across programs in Taiwan), and differences regarding licensure examination content. ICGs may have to inform licensing boards and employment agencies about the differences between their education and that of a domestic graduate.

The profession of counseling in Taiwan was largely developed based on Western philosophies of mental health care. Today, Taiwanese society strives to find a balance between Western and indigenous values that will better reflect their culture (Guo et al., 2013). ICGs returning to Taiwan may have to professionally adjust by incorporating more indigenous techniques into their practice. Considering the numerous factors potentially affecting the professional adjustment of ICGs in different countries/regions of
the world, it is no surprise that ICGs returning to their home country often experience what is commonly referred to as “re-entry culture shock.”

**Professional Adjustment Upon Returning to One's Home Country**

Prior to re-entry in their home country, ICGs to some degree, experienced acculturation in their host country. ICGs acculturation experiences will have an influence on their reacculturation when they return home. Acculturation and re-entry culture shock are explored throughout the remainder of this chapter.

**Acculturation.** The term “acculturation” originated in anthropology when individuals from different cultural backgrounds are in direct contact with each other and changes arise to either or both cultural groups (Redfield, Linton, & Herskovits, 1936). International students are by definition in direct contact with individuals from different cultural backgrounds. The challenges of international students surrounding acculturation in their host country have been well researched over the past few decades in numerous fields of study (Brabant, Palmer, & Gramling, 1990; Hyun, Quinn, Madon, & Lustig, 2007; Olivas & Li, 2006; Sandhu, 1994; Thompson & Christofi, 2006).

In the past few years there has been increased attention to issues specific to counselor education and acculturation while studying in the United States. This literature has focused on international students’ level of acculturation and the supervisory relationship (Mori, Inman, & Caskie, 2009; Nilsson & Anderson, 2004), cultural and language obstacles while working with clients (Lau & Ng, 2012; Ng, 2006), relevance of training and its applicability to the student’s culture of origin (Lau & Ng, 2012; Ng, 2006), and struggles with Western theories and techniques for mental health treatment
(Ng, 2006). However, there has been little exploration of how the readjustment or reacculturation process directly impacts professional adjustment upon returning home (Jung, Lee & Morales, 2012; Szkudlarek, 2010).

**Re-entry culture shock.** Re-entry culture shock can be described as the process of reacculturation and readjustment to home after a sojourn (Jung et al., 2012; Thompson & Christofi, 2006). In the past few decades a number of theories and models related to re-entry culture shock have been developed across numerous disciplines that highlight the potential complexities of this transition (Adler, 1981; Brabant et al., 1990; Chur-Hansen, 2004; Jung et al., 2012; Lau & Ng, 2012; Pritchard, 2011; Szkudlarek, 2010; Thompson & Christofi, 2006; Westwood, Lawrence, & Paul, 1986). According to Westwood et al. (1986), “The return to one’s home culture demands a type and degree of reorganization of cognitive, affective, and behavioral patterns similar to those required by the initial departure and acculturation of the sojourn” (p. 223). Professionals in fields such as medicine (Chur-Hanson, 2004), business, education (Pritchard, 2011), and counseling (Jung et al., 2012; Lau & Ng, 2012) have all discussed re-entry culture shock. However, it is important to note that the terminology used to describe this phenomenon is without uniformity across and within many professional fields.

The cross-cultural transition can often be challenging and there are many different parts of the human experience that have been recognized as important. In a literature review by Szkudlarek (2010), re-entry was understood using a framework suggested by Martin and Harrell (2004) that focused on the affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of re-entry.
Affective aspects of re-entry theories are those that look at the psychological health of the returnee (Szkudlarek, 2010). For example, the W-Curve, also referred to as “reverse culture shock” (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963), has been one of the most influential theories of re-entry. The W-Curve is an extension of the U-Curve model (Lysgaard, 1955). The U-Curve model describes four phases of intercultural adjustment to a host country: euphoria, culture shock, acculturation, and a stable state. The W-curve model describes the four phases of adjustment returnees will go through upon returning to their home country: return home, reverse culture shock, reacculturation, and stable state (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Szkudlarek, 2010). Although the W-curve has been widely discussed and debated, there is little evidence to support this hypothesis (Szkudlarek, 2010).

Psychological effects and challenges related to re-entry have been widely documented, including not anticipating or being fully prepared for difficulties encountered upon returning to one’s home country and feelings of loss and grief associated with the sojourn life (Szkudlarek, 2010). Counselor education programs in the United States may better serve ICGs by helping them to prepare for the potential psychological consequences prior to returning to their country.

Cognitive aspects of re-entry theories are split into sub-theme categories of expectations and cultural identity (Szkudlarek, 2010). First, the Expectations Models include studies that focus on the individual’s expectations of his or her return and how that compares to what actually happens when he or she returns. Thompson and Christofí (2006) conducted an existential-phenomenological investigation on the experience of
Cypriot participants who graduated with at least a bachelor’s degree and had studied in America, England, Australia, Zimbabwe, and Greece. The participants ranged from 24 to 50 years of age with six identifying as female and two as male. Three major themes under the umbrella of cultural comparison were identified: shock/adjustment, freedom/restriction, and changing/static.

The theme of shock/adjustment in Thompson and Christofi’s study (2006) highlighted participants’ initial return to their country after being abroad for an extended period of time and re-adjusting to their home. The second theme, freedom/restriction, identified participants’ struggles with a loss of freedoms they enjoyed while abroad and different restrictions of their home country. The final theme of changing/static had two sub-themes: external and internal change. External change identified what participants perceived as having changed in their home country while they were abroad (felt as if their home was not as they had left it), and internal change acknowledged what participants viewed as changing within themselves due to their travel abroad. These themes highlighted common struggles for international graduates as they adjust to returning home.

Thompson and Christofi (2006) explored the phenomenon of returning home without a specific focus on participants’ academic major or host country. Their focus was on the general experience of returning home after studying overseas for three or more years. Participants were solely Cypriot students and therefore results cannot be generalized to other countries or cultures. Nevertheless, the results do contribute to understanding the experiences of ICGs after graduating and returning home from an
extended stay abroad. For example, ICGs may have expectations about what their professional experiences will be when they return and have to adjust to anticipations not matching their actual experiences. They may have to adjust to situations including limited professional recognition, language barriers, little to no ethical regulations or oversight, gender biases, and so forth. Thompson and Christofís (2006) study is an example of the Expectations Model (Adler, 1981) under the category of cognitive re-entry.

The second Cognitive re-entry model, the Cultural Identity Model, examines identity changes that occur while abroad and after the ICG returns home. Sussman (2000) analyzed theoretical and empirical literature related to cultural transitions. After synthesizing the material, four types of identity shifts were classified: subtractive, additive, affirmative, and intercultural. These identity transformations were thought to occur as a result of sojourners’ experiences abroad where they had to make social and behavioral adjustments, which became more apparent on return to their country (Sussman, 2000; Szkudlarek, 2010). Based on different types of identity change, ICGs may report different levels of reentry distress and adjustment in regards to their overall reacculturation and their specific professional experiences.

Jung et al. (2012) conducted a phenomenological investigation examining the common experiences of South Korean counseling professionals who obtained their doctoral degree in the United States and returned to South Korea to work. Participants were doctoral graduates working at universities in South Korea as counseling faculty members. Of the 10 participants, five were female and five were male. The participants’
length of time after returning to South Korea ranged from 1 to 17.5 years. Seven major themes emerged: reminiscence, differences and comparisons, benefits, challenges, coping, application and modification, and meaning. The theme of benefits, for example, referred to participants’ direct and indirect benefits from studying in the United States, such as having an education that was considered valuable, ongoing collaboration with American scholars, and experiential benefits associated with being a minority student (i.e., increased awareness and understanding of living in a multicultural and multi-religious society, different gender norms, and/or dress), which broadened their perspectives.

The theme of application and modification in Jung et al.’s (2012) study captured participants’ realization that they would have to modify their Western training to meet the needs of the South Korean educational system. Returning ICGs may have to modify their education to meet the needs of their home country as part of their professional adjustment experience whether they are working in higher education, primary schools, agencies, or other settings. A third theme, coping, referred to how the participants adjusted to returning home. Techniques participants used included “accepting reality, having patience, not being in a hurry to change quickly, and trying to do the best in any given situation” (Jung et al., 2012, p. 11). The counseling environment in other countries is different from that of the United States, and ICGs may use various coping strategies to adjust to their professional environment upon returning home to work.

The Jung et al. (2012) study adds to the counseling literature as all participants were counseling professionals in South Korea and experienced re-entry to their home
country from a sojourn abroad. The study was limited in that it only investigated South Korean counseling professionals who received their doctorate in the United States and were working in university settings in South Korea. Jung et al. did not specify if graduates received a doctorate from a CACREP-accredited counseling program, minimizing the trustworthiness of the study’s results as participants may not have experienced the same curriculum standards in their counselor education programs.

The current study differs from the one conducted by Jung et al. (2012) in that it examined the professional adjustment experiences of ICGs from various countries/regions of the world, who received a CACREP-accredited counseling degree at the masters or doctoral level. By engaging participants from various countries with CACREP-accredited educational standards this research can help to inform counselor education programing and curriculum intended to prepare professional counselors for returning home to work.

**Coping mode.** Other characteristics that could affect the professional experience of ICGs after returning to their home country include their coping mode. Adler (1981) studied 200 corporate and government employees returning to Canada after working overseas on assignments in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean for an average of two years. In the aforementioned study, “coping mode” was defined as the returnee’s “attitude with which he or she approaches re-entry and attempts to fit back into a formerly familiar situation” (p. 353). Results identify two critical dimensions of returnees: an overall attitude (identified as optimistic or pessimistic), and a specific attitude (identified as active or passive). These dimensions when placed in a two-by-two
grid identify four coping modes of returnees: re-socialized (optimistic-passive), proactive (optimistic-active), alienated (passive-pessimism), and rebellious (active-pessimism).

Adler’s (1981) study classified 51% of the returnees as re-socialized, 25% as proactive, 12% as alienated, and 12% as rebellious. Participants in the re-socialized category were less likely to be aware of cross-cultural changes and tended to remove themselves from their experience abroad once they had returned home. Proactive re-enterers were more likely to integrate their cross-culturally acquired skills and learning after returning to their home country. Alienated returnees were passive regarding their cross-culturally acquired skills and ranked low on external validation from colleagues. External validation was described as perceived recognition from colleagues of their new or enhanced skills after returning home to work. Finally, participants classified as rebellious applied their cross-cultural training in their work environment, even though they did not receive external validation for its application from their colleagues.

Similar to Adler’s (1981) results, Thompson and Christofi’s (2006) study discussed earlier applied Alder’s coping modes to their phenomenological investigation of Cypriot students who returned home after studying abroad. They found that of the eight participants, two were proactive and six were re-socialized. The two who were proactive made more positive comments about Cypress, focused less on adjustment difficulties, and focused more on integration of their experiences abroad with their home culture. The other six participants, identified as re-socialized, focused more on the adjustment to Cypress than on growth from their foreign experience.
ICGs’ coping styles might have an influence on their professional adjustment upon returning home. For instance, ICGs who appear to have a proactive coping style may report an easier transition home by actively integrating their Western counselor education with the professional environment of their home country. On the other hand, ICGs identified as having an alienated coping mode may find it difficult to adjust professionally if they are not attempting to merge their cross-culturally acquired counseling skills and experiences. Depending on the state of counseling as a profession in their home country, ICGs’ coping styles may impact the rate at which they adjust to professional differences in their home country (e.g., professional language barriers, access to professional organizations, availability of continuing education). Support for these thoughts will require well-developed research.

**Individual characteristics.** In addition to coping modes, individual characteristics (e.g., gender, age, religion, marital status, socioeconomic status, prior intercultural experience) have all been identified as factors relevant to individuals’ experiences of re-entry (Szkudlarek, 2010). Brabant et al. (1990) studied the re-acculturation to family and friends of students after returning home from studying in the United States. Participants were former international students from the University of Southwestern Louisiana who had valid mailing addresses generated by the university alumni office. Results of the study indicated that sex of the returnee was the single most important variable in adjustment upon returning to their home country (Brabant et al., 1990). ICGs returning to countries that have different gender norms or roles than the
United States can experience gender as having a significant effect on adjustment, as they may be treated negatively in their work environment.

Jung et al. (2012), discussed earlier in this chapter, stated that the theme, Differences and Comparisons, referred to South Korean female participants’ perceptions of their profession in an academic setting as “male-favored.” This finding was captured as both male and female participants discussed the disproportionate number of male to female members in academia and the disadvantages females face in gaining employment. The studies conducted by Brabant et al. (1990) and Jung et al. (2012) call attention to how individual differences, such as gender, can impact one’s professional adjustment based on diverse cultural factors and societal norms.

**Situational variables.** Although this has not been identified in other studies, situational variables such as the existence of a counseling degree program and professional counseling association in an ICG’s home country may have an influence on professional adjustment. In the current study, counselor preparation programs and professional counseling associations were viewed as indicators that, to some degree, counseling is a growing or recognized profession in participants’ home country.

Other situational variables might include length of intercultural sojourn, cultural differences (e.g., individualistic vs. collectivistic), and length of time in home country since returning from the United States (Szkudlarek, 2010). Another situational variable may be the amount of preparation sojourners had undertaken while preparing for re-entry. Westwood et al. (1986) stated that a range of areas including social, cultural, political,
educational, and professional influences could have an effect on an individual’s re-entry shock and re-entry shock may have an impact on their professional adjustment.

Westwood et al. (1986) recommended using a group educational program for international students to help them prepare for returning home. Techniques such as relaxation and guided imagery, and helping students anticipate areas of difficulty before leaving the host country (e.g., their ability to obtain licensure or certification in their home country, types of employment opportunities for professional counselors, and/or the existence of ethical/legal guidelines for practice and supervision in their country) were recommended. Students who participated in the educational program reported that it was helpful to bring potential difficulties into the foreground and to plan ahead for those challenges. Findings from Westwood et al. (1986) suggested that ICGs may find counselor education programming addressing re-entry shock helpful to their professional adjustment.

**Effectiveness and relevance of counselor education.** ICGs’ perceptions of the relevance of their education can impact their professional adjustment upon returning to their country. For instance, multiculturalism in counselor education programs has been discussed in the past few decades (Hill, 2003; McDowell, Storm, & York, 2007; Ponterotto & Casas, 1987; Sue, Arrendondo, & McDavis, 1992), but the focus has been primarily on majority and minority racial/ethnic students in the United States (Ng & Smith, 2009). ICGs may believe their Western education is a benefit to broadening their knowledge of counseling theories, but that this education does not by itself provide the cross-cultural preparation they need to work in their home country.
Part of one’s professional adjustment can be directly related to his or her counselor education program. Lau and Ng (2012) studied the relevance and effectiveness of counselor preparation in the United States for international counseling students who had graduated from counseling programs and returned to their country to work. Qualitative methods were employed utilizing open coding procedures for data analysis. Data collection was conducted electronically via emails and telephone/Internet-based phoning. Nine participants were interviewed, six of whom graduated from a CACREP-accredited program, one from an APA-accredited program, and two from programs that did not have professional counseling accreditation. Participants’ home countries were identified as Taiwan, Malaysia, South Korea, Singapore, Botswana, and Venezuela.

Eight themes emerged from Lau and Ng’s (2012) qualitative interviews: (a) pioneering and leadership, (b) American-centric training, (c) sojourner and returnee adjustment distress, (d) personal investment from trainers, (e) student-centered training, (f) time and financial constraints, (g) independent learning, and (h) engagement in research studies. The first theme of pioneering and leadership, suggested that participants were often regarded as experts in their communities upon returning home. The second theme, American-centric training, highlighted ICGs’ perceptions that their education did not include enough cross-cultural material and was often focused on Western or American issues.

Sojourner and returnee adjustment distress, the third theme, highlighted participants’ struggles with initial acculturation to their host culture and their
reacculturation experience upon returning home. The fourth theme, personal investment from trainers, identified a split in participants’ experiences where some felt their experiences were enhanced by involved faculty members, whereas others felt faculty members were not invested in effectively mentoring them.

Lau and Ng’s (2012) fifth theme, student-centered training, described participants’ concern that their unique goals upon entering their counseling program were not recognized. Time and financial constraints emerged as the sixth theme, capturing participants’ feelings of stress and anxiety associated with the additional costs and time constraints of being an international student. The seventh theme, independent learning, suggested that many of the participants felt their counselor preparation provided a good foundation for them, but did not inform them about how to apply knowledge and skills in their home country. Lau and Ng’s (2012) final theme, engagement in research studies, was identified as an area that participants would have liked more experience with while in the United States.

Understanding the relevance and effectiveness of their education is an essential component of the ICGs’ overall professional adjustment upon returning to their country. In Lau and Ng’s study, ICGs perceived their Western education to be relevant to their work in their home country. And the relevance and applicability of ICGs’ education for professional adjustment in their home country, was in part, a focus of the current study. The current investigation focused specifically on graduates of CACREP-accredited programs in order to ensure uniformity of curriculum across participants.
Professional adjustment was the focus of the current study, in order to aid counselor education programs in the United States to more effectively prepare ICGs, through programming and curriculum, for returning to their country to work. Inclusion criteria for the study required participants to have both a professional counseling association and a graduate-level counselor education program in their home country to ensure counseling was present in the participant’s home country and to help provide a more common groundwork for discussion about professional adjustment.

**Summary of Chapter I**

ICGs are in a unique position to provide insight into the preparation of professional counselors worldwide as they are by nature merging a Western educational program with their own cultural beliefs, values, and norms. This chapter introduced the current research study. The purpose of the current study was to better understand the professional adjustment of eight ICGs who completed a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States, and returned to their home country to work. The guiding research question was, “What are the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates who completed a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States and have returned to their home country?” The goal of the study was to explore the phenomenon of professional adjustment of ICGs after returning home to work, in order to add their voices to counselor education. Definitions of terms were introduced and relevant literature regarding the development of counseling as a global profession and experiences of re-entry were reviewed to provide context for the study.
Chapter II presents the phenomenological research design and methodology for the current study. Methodological processes explained include a description of participant recruitment, data collection, measures used to establish trustworthiness, and data analysis.
CHAPTER II
METHODOLOGY

A review of the literature suggests that issues associated with both the status of counseling in one’s home country and reacculturation may influence the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to understand the professional adjustment experiences of ICGs who studied in the United States and have since returned to their home country to work. The guiding research question was: “What are the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates who completed a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States and have returned to their home country?” A phenomenological approach was selected as most appropriate for this research question.

Phenomenological Research

There are numerous types of qualitative research approaches. These include grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative, ethnography, and case study (Merriam, 2002). Although each qualitative approach focuses on the richness of human experience, there are differences in purpose and methodology (Baker, Wuest, & Stern, 1992). The purpose of phenomenological research is to discover the essence of a given phenomenon through detailed descriptions of participants’ lived experiences of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). In contrast, the goal of a grounded theory is to identify a theory in a given social situation (Baker et al., 1992). The grounded theory method generates a theory to explain social and psychosocial processes, whereas phenomenological research discovers the core meaning of an experience shared by an identified group to help make a
previously invisible (or unstudied) phenomenon visible (Laverty, 2003; Moustakas, 1994).

The focus of phenomenological research is to understand the essence of a lived experience (Creswell, 2007), and in the current study, the essence of the experience of professional adjustment for ICGs was investigated. This research examined the “core truths” or “essential meanings” that participants experienced in relation to the phenomenon in order to gain awareness about what it is like to professionally adjust in their home country. Therefore, the choice of Moustakas’ (1994) descriptive phenomenological approach was deemed the most appropriate. Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) is often credited as the father of phenomenology (Cohen, 1987; Laverty, 2003; Lopez & Willis, 2004; McLeod, 2001). Husserl was a philosopher who believed that “experience as perceived by human consciousness has value and should be an object of scientific study” (Lopez & Willis, 2004, p. 727).

Moustakas (1994) suggested that all aspects of a phenomenon must be examined through the researcher’s “intuition and reflection on conscious acts of experience” in order to arrive at the essence (p. 58). A phenomenological investigation respects individual viewpoints and acknowledges multiple perspectives on a given phenomenon, which can provide culturally critical information (Wertz, 2005). Phenomenological research can provide a picture of different cultural dynamics (e.g., expression of emotion, relationships with colleagues, clients, students or supervisors) that may support the phenomenon of professional adjustment for ICGs.
Description of the Researcher

In a phenomenological study it is essential for the researcher to set aside personal experiences, assumptions, and prejudgments in regards to the phenomenon being studied. In phenomenological research this process is referred to as *epoché* (or bracketing).

*Epoché* helped the researcher identify her own viewpoints and prejudices so that the results of the study (also referred to as the essence of the phenomenon) remained as unbiased as possible (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). In other words, prior to data collection, the current researcher “bracketed” her biases about the phenomenon of ICGs’ professional adjustment, in order to minimize the effect of these preconceptions on the research process. This allowed the researcher to begin the study as free as possible of preconceptions from prior experiences. The researcher engaged in *epoché* by documenting a list of her assumptions (found later in this chapter) from, in part, experiences with international counseling students’ (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher is a White woman who was raised in the Western culture of the United States. I am currently a doctoral candidate in the Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) program at Kent State University. Interest in international students has developed over the past decade through personal experiences working internationally, discussions with international students in counseling programs, and reading relevant professional literature.

Prior to beginning coursework in counseling, I lived for one year in Osaka, Japan as an English language instructor. Although I experienced professional adjustment, I transitioned from teaching elementary aged children raised in the United States to
teaching students of all ages the English language in Japan. Teaching English in Japan differed from the phenomenon under investigation in the current study because the academic field of education, specifically English language instruction, is different from that of counseling. I was not focused on the mental health of clients or teaching counseling skills to students, but rather teaching students the English language. Additionally, I was not returning to my country of origin to work, but rather working in a foreign country. While abroad I became familiar with different cultural norms and beliefs related to professionalism and sociopolitical struggles, and developed a stronger sense of ethnocultural empathy.

As a doctoral student, I developed a support group focused on meeting the unique needs of international counseling students. Through discussions with students I became more aware of issues they anticipated regarding their professional adjustment after graduation and returning to their home country. I became invested in the topic and read professional literature that would help these students in their professional adjustment, but found a dearth of resources specific to their struggles. These experiences guided my interest in this topic.

The following is a list of assumptions, prejudgments, and biases I have held regarding ICGs who spend time studying in the United States. The list was identified through discussions with international counseling students and from relevant literature.

1. It was thought that CACREP-accredited counselor education programs can do more to meet the unique needs of international counseling students while
studying in the United States and to prepare them for work in their home country (Ng, 2006).

2. It was thought that counseling as a distinct profession is still developing globally and that many former international students will return to a country where they will be involved in paving their own professional paths with limited awareness of how others have done this before them.

3. It was thought that ICGs are most likely to not have received counseling instruction or education, specific to their home country, while in the United States.

4. It was thought that ICGs may have been frustrated by a predominantly Euro-American worldview and teaching methodology while they were in a counselor education program.

5. It was thought that ICGs may not have received cross-culturally competent teaching or supervision and therefore may not have felt prepared upon returning to their home country to work.

6. It was thought that counselor educators in the United States may not know what is involved in ICGs’ professional experiences upon returning to their country.

7. It was thought that counselor educators in the United States may not have an understanding of counseling in other countries.
Sampling Procedures and Participants

Participant selection was in accordance with Laverty’s (2003) statement that a phenomenological study needs to “select participants who have lived experience that is the focus of the study, who are willing to talk about their experience, and who are diverse enough from one another to enhance possibilities of rich and unique stories of the particular experience” (p. 29). In other words, participants in the current study had the common experience of professional adjustment, but were also unique individuals (e.g., age and nationality).

More specifically, potential participants who met the study’s inclusion criteria (detailed later in this chapter) were interviewed. After data collection (discussed later in this chapter), the researcher transcribed eight participant interviews. Participants were from five different countries in two different regions of the world. The interviews provided rich and distinct cultural perspectives for individual participants as well as across participants during data collection and analysis. Purposeful sampling of participants was used to ensure that the participants had experienced the phenomenon under investigation and were able to speak to the phenomenon (Starks & Trinidad, 2007).

Phenomenological studies vary in the number of participants needed based on the nature of the study (Laverty, 2003). Participants in phenomenological studies range from 1 to 325 (Creswell, 2007). Starks and Trinidad (2007) stated that a typical sample size of 1 to 10 participants may be enough for phenomenological research. In the current study, eight participants were interviewed from two different regions of the world. After completing two interviews with each participant, no new data were revealed, and data
saturation occurred. All participants completed two interviews. Participants were offered the choice between completing the interviews on two separate dates or on one date. The choice of interview format provided participants the ability to fit the interviews into their schedules. Three of the eight participants chose to complete the two interviews on two separate dates whereas five participants chose to complete two interviews on one date. Information about interview dates and duration is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

*Illustration of Interview Dates and Duration*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Maggie</th>
<th>Thelma</th>
<th>Juliet</th>
<th>Morgan</th>
<th>Carol</th>
<th>Heather</th>
<th>Kate</th>
<th>June</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interview date/s</td>
<td>10/2/15</td>
<td>10/13/15</td>
<td>1/3/16</td>
<td>12.16.16/12.25.16</td>
<td>12.14.15/12.15.15</td>
<td>12/30/15</td>
<td>1/15/16</td>
<td>2.2.16/2.23.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration of Interview</td>
<td>1hr 44m</td>
<td>1hr 25m</td>
<td>1hr 26m</td>
<td>31m/32m (1hr 3m)</td>
<td>42m/49m (1hr 31m)</td>
<td>1hr 27m</td>
<td>1hr 26m</td>
<td>40m/54m (1hr 34m)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After receiving approval from the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A), the researcher contacted key informants and posted an inquiry on CESNET-L with recruitment email (see Appendices B and C), in order to access potential participants. Key informants were identified by and included Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) program faculty members at Kent State University and other counselor education faculty members in CACREP-accredited counseling programs in the United States. In addition to CES faculty, the researcher contacted professional colleagues (i.e., other doctoral students) who might know of persons eligible to
participate in this study, persons who had completed a CACREP-accredited master’s and/or doctoral-level counseling program. Sixty-three emails were sent to the aforementioned key informants.

Thirty potential participants were identified through key informants. Once identified, the researcher emailed potential participants with an official recruitment email (see Appendix D); of the 30 potential participants, eight met the inclusion criteria and volunteered to be interviewed for this study. Participant recruitment and data collection took place from September 2015 through January 2016. The Counselor Education and Supervision Network Listserv (or CESNET-L) was also used to recruit participants. CESNET-L is a self-subscription “professional listserv for counselors, counselor educators, and supervisors” (http://www.cesnet-l.net/). The researcher posted a recruitment script on CESNET-L on three separate dates, between September 2015 and November 2015, but did not secure any participants via this listserv.

Key informants in counselor education programs provided the researcher with information (e.g., contact information) about potential participants who met the following inclusion criteria: (a) self-identified as a former international student, (b) completed a graduate degree (master’s or doctoral degree) from a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States, (c) lived in a country that has a local professional counseling association, (d) lived in a country that has at least one counseling degree program in their local institutions of higher education, and (e) has lived in their home country for a minimum of three months, but no longer than three years since returning from their counseling studies in the United States.
The first inclusion criterion was that the participant identified as an ICG who had traveled to the United States on a student visa specifically to attend a graduate-level counselor education program. The second criterion required the participant to have completed a master’s or doctoral degree from a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States. Programs that are CACREP-accredited adopt standards for the overall quality of education (CACREP, 2009) that students receive. The participants’ educational experiences were aligned through CACREP-accreditation, which reflects a standardized educational experience for all the participants.

The third and fourth criteria identified participants who returned to countries where at least one university based counselor education program is established and where professional counseling associations exist. The third and fourth criteria also suggested that counseling as a profession was developing in the participants’ home country thus laying the groundwork for a discussion of professional adjustment. The presence of counselor education degree programs could influence an ICGs’ professional adjustment in that, at some level, there is a recognized sociopolitical acceptance and/or understanding of the counseling profession in the participant’s home country. A counseling organization (defined in this study by having the word “counseling” in its title) may indicate an established network of professional support and/or services for ICGs in their home country.

The final criterion stated that the graduate had been living in his or her home country for a minimum of three months, but no longer than three years. This allowed participants time to begin their process of professional adjustment, but also placed a limit
on how long they had been home and possibly been working since completing their studies in the United States. A maximum timeframe of three years was thought to support the trustworthiness of this study, as participants’ reflections on their professional adjustment would be relatively recent and easier to recall with accuracy.

Once identified, all potential participants were sent a recruitment email (see Appendix D) containing an informed consent document (see Appendix E), an audio recording consent form (see Appendix F), and a demographic form (see Appendix G). Once documentation was signed and returned to the researcher as an email attachment, data collection was in the form of two in-depth interviews, with the use of web-based cameras through Skype. Of the eight participants who met the inclusion criteria for this study, five completed the two interviews on the same date and three participants completed the two-part interview at two separate dates. Interviews ranged from 1 hour and 3 minutes to 1 hour and 44 minutes total time and were recorded by use of Audacity audio recorder software. All participants were told they could drop out of the study at any time without penalty. To help ensure confidentiality, university affiliations in the United States, places of employment in each participant’s home country, and participants’ names were not attached to transcripts and pseudonyms were used instead. Consent forms and transcripts were kept in a password protected electronic file in the researcher’s home office.

**Data Collection**

Individual interviews were the primary means of data collection. According to Hatch (2002), “Qualitative researchers use interviews to uncover the meaning structures
that participants use to organize their experiences and make sense of their worlds” (p. 91). Interviews can be viewed as extended conversations that are carefully guided by the researcher (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher conducted audio-recorded interviews with each participant serving as the primary source of data collection. Data collection consisted of four stages: (a) demographic information received by email, (b) initial interview, (c) second interview, and (d) member check.

Interviews were completed via Skype and recorded using Audacity. Member checks were completed via email. Skype was selected as the primary source for data collection as it minimized geographical limitations, was cost-effective, and allowed for real-time communication. Interviews were audio recorded by the use of Audacity, a free digital audio recording computer software application. The data from the audio recordings were transferred to a password-protected flash drive, which was kept under lock and key by the researcher completing the interviews. The researcher transcribed all interviews. Documents were kept on personal password protected computer files. To help ensure confidentiality, names of participants, universities, and employers were not attached to documents and pseudonyms were used for participants.

**Demographic Information**

As part of this investigation, participants completed a demographic questionnaire (see Appendix G). The demographic questionnaire provided the researcher with information including participants’ name, address, city, home country, nationality, native language/s, gender, and age. Participants were also asked, “How do you identify culturally, which may include nationality, race, and/or ethnicity (e.g., Australian
Aborigine)” in order to capture participants’ unique cultural background/heritage. To help protect participants’ identity, not all demographic information has been provided in this dissertation.

Participants were asked about their graduate academic degree and year of graduation in order to confirm participants met the inclusion criteria for this study. Finally, participants were asked, “What is your current primary job function?” and “What is your primary work setting?” These questions provided the researcher with information about the participants’ current employment and whether they were working as a counselor, counselor educator, or in a different area of employment. Participants working outside the counseling profession were offered an opportunity to identify their primary job function and primary work setting. Demographic data is illustrated in Table 2.

Initial Interview

Because the research question for this phenomenological study sought to explore participants’ lived experiences of professional adjustment, interviews were the best method for data collection. Semi-structured formal interviews were used. Hatch (2002) explained, “The strength of interviews is that they allow insight into participant perspectives” (p. 97). An opening interview question was designed to provide insight into each participant’s professional experiences in his or her home country: “Tell me about your professional adjustment as a counselor or counselor educator since returning to (insert country).” This question provided context for the remainder of the interview.
The interview time was used to collect as much information as possible about participants’ professional experiences after returning to their home country. In addition to the opening question, the researcher created a series of questions to help participants describe their professional experiences, but also followed up with additional questions to clarify information as necessary.

1. Tell me about your professional adjustment as a counselor or counselor educator since returning to (insert country)? What made you decide to return to your home country?
2. Tell me about your experiences finding employment in (insert country). Has your degree been useful in helping you obtain work?
3. What professional support or supervision have you received from counselor colleagues? How has it helped you cope with the adjustment process?
4. What professional counselor certification and/or licensure are/is available in your home country? Did your degree help you obtain that certification and/or license? Did you obtain any other form of certification that helped in your professional adjustment (e.g., NBCC-I)?
5. What is the name of your professional counseling organization?
6. What has your experience with (insert name of professional counseling organization) been like? How has it helped you cope with the adjustment process?
Table 2  

*Participant Demographics*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Maggie</th>
<th>Thelma</th>
<th>Juliet</th>
<th>Morgan</th>
<th>Carol</th>
<th>Heather</th>
<th>Kate</th>
<th>June</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Counselor Education and Supervision</td>
<td>Counselor Education and Supervision</td>
<td>Counselor Education – School Track</td>
<td>Counselor Education – Clinical Mental Health Track</td>
<td>Counselor Education and Supervision</td>
<td>Counselor Education and Supervision</td>
<td>Counselor Education and Supervision</td>
<td>Counselor Education and Supervision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Function</td>
<td>University Part time Faculty Member &amp; Other</td>
<td>University Full-Time Faculty Member</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>School Counselor</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>University Full-Time Faculty Member</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>University Full-Time Faculty Member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Setting</td>
<td>School and University Part-time</td>
<td>University Full-Time</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>University (Clinical) and Community (Out patient)</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>University Full-Time</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Since returning to (insert country), what professional development opportunities have you experienced? How have these helped you cope with the adjustment process?

8. Since returning to (insert country), has it been difficult to find employment, to receive professional support or supervision from counselor colleagues, to receive certification or licensure as a counselor, to connect with a professional counseling organization, or to experience professional development opportunities? If yes, what coping mechanisms have you used to deal with these challenges?

**Second Interview**

Participants were offered the choice to complete the second interview on the same date as the initial interview or on a separate date depending on their availability. Although the researcher had initially planned to complete the interviews on separate dates, the option was provided after the first participant requested the interviews occur on the same date. The choice was offered to participants as a way to provide flexibility with their schedules. The second interview served to explore new ideas and follow up on events and explanations that were not fully investigated in the initial interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). The researcher provided time for each participant to further elaborate on his or her experiences. The following questions were used as a guideline for the interview:
1. What suggestions, if any, would you have for counselor education programs in the United States regarding preparing international students for professional adjustment upon returning home?

2. What aspects of your counselor education curriculum (e.g., course work, practicum, internship, supervision) were helpful in your professional adjustment in (insert country)?

3. What aspects of counselor education curriculum (e.g., course work, practicum, internship, supervision) do you believe were not helpful in your professional adjustment in (insert country)?

4. What aspects of counselor education programming (e.g., conferences, workshops, cohort support, talking with advisors) were helpful in your professional adjustment in (insert country)?

5. What aspects of counselor education programming (e.g., conferences, workshops, cohort support, talking with advisors) were not helpful in your professional adjustment in (insert country)?

6. Is there anything that we have not discussed in our interviews that is important for me to know about you as a counselor and/or counselor educator?

7. Is there anything that we have not discussed in our interviews that is important for me to know about your professional adjustment in (country)?

After transcribing both the initial and second interview/s, the researcher analyzed the data. As part of data analysis, the researcher developed a textural and structural description for each participant (described in detail in the data analysis section of this
chapter) pertaining to her professional adjustment experiences. Textural and structural descriptions were then emailed to each participant for member checking.

**Member Check**

The member check served to review and verify the textural and structural descriptions of participants’ professional adjustment experiences. Member check was conducted via email and served to provide participants the chance to respond to the information in the individual textural and structural descriptions. It provided the researcher the opportunity to confirm with participants that the researcher had understood the material as each participant had intended and to identify any discrepancies. If any information had been misunderstood, participants had the opportunity to clarify the information. The following question was asked of each participant in an email as part of member checking: “How well do the descriptions represent your professional adjustment experiences?”

Two participants confirmed during member checking that their respective and individual descriptions (i.e., composite textural and structural descriptions) were representative of their experiences. Another participant responded to member checking by stating that, “I currently don’t feel the same way as before.” In the same email, this participant also stated, “I understand that you should use the data collected from me, but can you tell me what I can do to delete or correct some parts of it?” The researcher responded to this participant’s email and offered her the opportunity to change her descriptions. The participant did not respond. With no revisions from the participant, the researcher assumed that this participant’s textural and structural descriptions reflected her
professional adjustment experiences at the time of the interview and that her comment regarding the change in feelings indicated a change over the eight months between her interview and receiving her descriptions for member checking. After three attempts, five of the eight participants did not complete the member checking process.

**Saturation of Data**

Data saturation occurred when no new major ideas or contributions emerged through continuous researcher analysis. By the eighth participant, there was no difference in contributions from the previous seven participants, indicating that data saturation was occurring. After consulting the peer reviewer, it was evident that no new major ideas or contributions had emerged from the eighth participant.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

In any type of qualitative research, the researcher is considered the primary instrument of measurement. Qualitative researchers have a responsibility to show that their studies are credible (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Trustworthiness (also referred to as validity, authenticity, verisimilitude, and credibility) is a critical component of any study as it helps a reader feel confident that the results of the study are valuable and worthwhile (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). A number of different methods are used to increase the trustworthiness of a study. Creswell (2007) recommended employing a minimum of two strategies to help ensure trustworthiness.

Strategies to enhance the trustworthiness of this study were: (a) engaging in epoché, (b) peer review, (c) member checking, (d) triangulation, and (e) using rich, thick
descriptions of participants’ experiences. Using multiple strategies to increase trustworthiness provides readers with greater confidence in the research.

**Engaging in Epoché**

As discussed earlier in this chapter, *epoché* (also referred to as bracketing) is defined as helping to set aside suppositions and beginning the study with a more open state of mind (Moustakas, 1994). Laverty (2003) stated that, “In phenomenological research, bracketing, which is incorporated into intentional focusing on the experience, is one factor that is central to the rigor of the study” (p. 31). Identifying the researcher’s assumptions at the beginning of the study is also vital for the reader’s understanding of views from which this material was approached (Creswell, 2007).

**Peer Review**

In addition to the researcher’s analysis of the data, the individual textural and structural descriptions and composite description were also examined by peer review. Creswell (2007) defined a peer reviewer as “an individual who keeps the researcher honest; asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations; and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher’s feelings” (p. 208). A current international student enrolled as a doctoral student in the Counselor Education and Supervision (CES) program at Kent State University was asked and agreed to serve as a peer reviewer. The peer reviewer helped the researcher regarding data collection and analysis. First, the peer reviewer read the researcher’s dissertation proposal to provide cross-cultural insight regarding methodology. Regarding data collection, the peer reviewer’s recommendation, the
researcher chose to complete the member checking process via email. It was understood that email allowed participants who did not speak English as a first language the opportunity to convey their thoughts without the added pressure of being verbally recorded.

The peer reviewer also read the individual textural and structural descriptions and final composite summary describing the essence of professional adjustment. The peer reviewer provided different ideas and interpretations of the data. After discussion and deliberation, the researcher and peer reviewer came to agreement regarding textural and structural summary (described in Chapter III). This step helped ensure the researcher was able to explain her thought process and rationale for the composite summary.

**Member Checking**

Member checking, as described earlier, is a vital component of trustworthiness. Lincoln and Guba (1985) have called it “the most critical technique” (p. 314). Member checking provides participants the opportunity to respond to the researcher’s preliminary interpretation of the data. The participant can check the researcher’s interpretation of the material (Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002) and point out any misinterpretations, missing data, and/or need for additional material. Member checking was essential to the credibility of this research. The term credibility refers to the congruence of the study’s findings and the “reality” of the phenomenon for participants (Shenton, 2004). Of the eight participants interviewed for this study, two completed the member checking process. One participant responded to the member check with an email that stated, “I currently don’t feel the same way as before.” In the same email, this participant also
stated, “I understand that you should use the data collected from me, but can you tell me what I can do to delete or correct some parts of it?” The researcher offered this participant the opportunity to change her description. The participant did not respond. With no revisions from the participant, the researcher assumed that this participant’s textural and structural descriptions reflected her professional adjustment experiences at the time of the interview and that her comment regarding a change in feelings indicated a change over the eight months between her interview and receiving her descriptions for member checking. Five of the eight participants did not respond to member checking emails after three attempts were made via email. Table 3 illustrates member checking data.

**Triangulation**

Merriam (1995) described triangulation as the use of multiple methods for data collection. Triangulation can increase a study’s trustworthiness as different methods of data collection can reveal different aspects of the phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 1999). Of the two participants who completed the member checking process, each participant was provided a peer perspective document (see Appendix H) and a copy of their textural and structural description to give to a professional colleague. The researcher did not receive a peer perspective response from either participant’s professional colleague. This was a limitation of the study discussed in detail in Chapter IV. Table 3 illustrates the efforts at triangulation of data.
Table 3

*Illustration of Member Checking and Triangulation Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Maggie</th>
<th>Thelma</th>
<th>Juliet</th>
<th>Morgan</th>
<th>Carol</th>
<th>Heather</th>
<th>Kate</th>
<th>June</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Pages of Transcription</td>
<td>21pgs</td>
<td>20pgs</td>
<td>13pgs</td>
<td>7pgs</td>
<td>22pgs</td>
<td>24pgs</td>
<td>16pgs</td>
<td>26pgs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Pages of Textural and Structural Summaries</td>
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<td>7pgs</td>
<td>5pgs</td>
<td>6pgs</td>
<td>7pgs</td>
<td>9pgs</td>
<td>5pgs</td>
<td>6pgs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member Check Responses</td>
<td>9/13/2016 Affirmative</td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>10/18/2016 Affirmative</td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>10/5/2016 Asked to make changes Responded 10/12/2016 No Response</td>
<td>No Response</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation</td>
<td>10/12/2016</td>
<td>10/26/2016</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangulation Response</td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td>No Response</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Rich, Thick Descriptions

Another method used for establishing credibility in this study was to describe the participants’ experiences in rich detail. To use this method, the researcher used a constructionist lens to describe the participants’ experiences of professional adjustment (Creswell & Miller, 2000). In other words, the researcher constructed meaning of the participants’ experiences of professional adjustment through prolonged time with the data and member checking. The researcher provided detailed descriptions of ICGs’ professional adjustment experiences in order for readers to make decisions about how this material applies to them and their work settings (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Readers are able to determine if there are any components they can “transfer” to their own lives due to shared perspectives (Creswell, 2007). According to Merriam (2002), “This involves providing an adequate database, that is, enough description and information that readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match, and thus whether findings can be transferred” (p. 29).

Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data analysis is considered open-ended and inductive (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher uses inductive methods rather than deductively developing a hypothesis to be tested (Merriam, 2002). As stated earlier in this chapter, the goal of phenomenological research is to understand the essence of the phenomenon being researched in the lived experiences of participants (McLeod, 2001). With this goal in mind, the researcher selected Creswell’s (2007) simplified version of Moustakas’ (1994) revision of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method for Analysis of Phenomenological
Data. In his simplified version, Creswell (2007) outlined four steps in data analysis: (a) identify significant statements in the interview transcripts; (b) develop individual textural and structural themes; (c) write a textural and structural description of the experience for each participant; and (d) write a composite description of the essence of the phenomenon of professional adjustment for the entire sample. This data analysis method was deemed the most appropriate for this study as it included a textural and structural description essential to understanding cultural components of the phenomenon. This data analysis method also provided in-depth descriptions of the phenomenon under investigation. Data analysis commenced after each participant completed the first and second interview. Figure 1 illustrates the process of data collection and data analysis.

**Step 1: Identify Significant Statements in the Interview Transcripts**

The first step in data analysis was to read the transcription of each participant’s interview to become familiar with his or her expressed experience. Each statement (e.g., word, phrase, or sentence) the participant made was initially considered equally valuable and meaningful to the research process (McLeod, 2001; Moustakas, 1994). This process of noting significant statements is referred to as horizontalization. Horizontalization helps the researcher examine the phenomenon from every possible angle and identify concepts that are repeatedly mentioned.

During horizontalization, significant statements were considered with respect to ICGs’ experiences of professional adjustment. All significant statements were
Figure 1. Illustration of the process of data collection and analysis
highlighted in the transcriptions. The researcher identified common significant statements within transcripts to gain understanding of the phenomenon of professional adjustment. Each significant statement was highlighted in the transcript and then transferred to a computer document for continued analysis.

An example of a significant statement found in Maggie’s transcription was, “The main reason I decided to come back home is because of my husband.” The decision to return home influenced Maggie’s professional adjustment, as it determined the location where her professional adjustment occurred. Her thoughts and feelings surrounding her decision impacted her professional adjustment. Another illustration of a significant statement for Maggie was: “He [Maggie’s husband] has made sacrifices these past five years while I stayed in the United States for my doctoral program so I think it’s going to be too selfish if I choose to stay in the United States.” Similar to the statement above, Maggie talked about her decision to return to her home country, stating that her husband had made “sacrifices” while she studied overseas. Maggie reported feeling it would be “selfish” for her to choose to stay in the United States. Table 4 illustrates the process of identifying significant statements in the interview transcripts.

**Step 2: Develop Individual Textural and Structural Themes**

Using the significant statements identified in Step 1, the researcher reflected on each statement and judged it against three standards: (a) Is the statement relevant to the investigation of professional adjustment for ICGs? (b) Could the statement’s expressed and/or implied meanings be described in more direct language and ultimately grouped with other statements? and (c) Is the statement redundant or does it overlap with other
Table 4

*Example of Data Analysis Step 1 & 2: Identifying Significant Statements and Developing Textural “Themes”*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Textural Significant Statements</strong></th>
<th><strong>Identify Statement’s Significance to the Phenomenon</strong></th>
<th><strong>Themes</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Textural descriptions describe “what” the participant’s experience was with the phenomenon (the behaviors, thoughts and feelings related to the experience)</td>
<td>(Considered with respect to ICGs’ experiences of professional adjustment)</td>
<td>Professional Adjustment Experiences</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| The main reason I decided to come back home is because of my husband. | The decision to return home influenced Maggie’s professional adjustment, as it determined the location in which the adjustment occurred and the thoughts and feelings surrounding her adjustment. | **Textural Theme** #1 Decision to return home |
| He [Maggie’s husband] has made sacrifices these past five years while I stayed in the United States for my doctoral program so I think its going to be too selfish if I choose to stay in the United States. | Maggie talked about her decision to return to her home country, stating that her husband had made “sacrifices” while she studied overseas. Maggie reported feeling it would be “selfish” of her to choose to stay in the United States. One reason she identified for feeling “selfish” was that she might have a chance work as a Counselor Educator in her home country, but her husband might not have the opportunity to work in the United States. | |
| I might have chances to become professor in [Home Country] but he will not have chances to become a [Husband’s occupation] in the United States. | It was very stressful during that first year [after returning home] | |
| It know that compared to the U.S., [Nationality] faculty position is rather rare, because this nation is small. | Maggie discussed feeling “stress” related to finding a job as a counselor educator during her first year home. She described her nation as “small” to demonstrate the limited number of jobs in counselor education. Knowing this, Maggie felt happy that she had stable employment while working towards a faculty position. | |
| I'm just pretty happy about my decisions [in regards to returning to home country] | Although, Maggie felt “stress” in her first year home, she also stated that she felt “happy” about her decision to return. | |
statements? (Merriam, 2002; Moustakas, 1994). If the statement met the first two standards, it was clustered with similar statements. Irrelevant and repetitive statements were discarded. These clusters are called textural themes (Creswell, 2007). Textural descriptions describe “what” the participant’s experience was with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). The data may be extensive and complex; therefore, identifying textural themes helps to organize the data for analysis (Wertz, 2005). Additionally, developing themes provided structure to the researcher’s emerging understanding of the phenomenon.

In the examples of significant statements mentioned previously, Maggie reflected on her decision to return to her home country to work. These sentences were grouped together and a theme developed that more directly captured the statements. The textural theme, decision to return home, emerged as an appropriate theme to group these significant statements. Table 4 illustrates the process of developing textural themes.

After developing textural themes the researcher conceptualized how Maggie’s professional adjustment experiences occurred. In other words, the researcher pondered “What were Maggie’s underlying structural beliefs that supported her in experiencing the phenomenon of professional adjustment in the way that she reported?” For example, Maggie’s professional adjustment after returning home to work appeared to be influenced by her values and beliefs regarding family. Maggie expressed a strong sense of responsibility to her family, specifically to her husband, who had remained in her home country while she earned her Ph.D. degree in the United States. Maggie felt responsible to return home and work, as she would have more opportunities to pursue her career in
her home country than her husband would have to pursue his career in the United States. Maggie weighed the pros and cons of returning home and felt there were more familial benefits to returning home than remaining in the United States. The structural theme, *self in relation to family*, emerged to provide insight into “how” the textural theme, *decision to return home*, occurred for Maggie. Table 5 illustrates the process of developing structural themes as applied to one participant.

Table 5

*Example of Data Analysis Step 2: Developing Structural Themes As Applied to One Participant*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textural Significant Statements</th>
<th>Identify Statements Significance to the Phenomenon (Considered with respect to ICGs’ experiences of professional adjustment)</th>
<th>Textural Themes</th>
<th>Identifying Structural Themes</th>
<th>Structural Theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The main reason I decided to come back home is because of my husband.</td>
<td>The decision to return home influenced Maggie’s professional adjustment, as it determined the location in which the adjustment occurred and the thoughts and feelings surrounding her adjustment.</td>
<td><strong>Textural Theme #1</strong> Decision to return home</td>
<td>Maggie’s professional adjustment after returning home to work was influenced by her relationship with her family. Maggie had a strong sense of responsibility to her family, specifically her husband, who had remained in her home country while she received her PhD degree in the United States</td>
<td><strong>Structural Theme #1</strong> Self in Relation to family</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Maggie talked about her decision to return to her home country, stating that her husband had made “sacrifices” while she studied overseas. Maggie reported feeling it would be “selfish” of her to choose to stay in the United States. One reason she identified for feeling “selfish” was that she might have a chance work as a Counselor Educator in her home country, but her husband might not have the opportunity to work in the United States. Maggie believed it was her responsibility to return to work in her home country and this was the more sensible decision. Maggie weighed the pros and cons of returning home and felt there were more benefits to her remaining in the United States. On another level was the feeling that, “I choose to be responsible and sensible” in my decisions.

I was very stressful during that first year after returning home.

I know that compared to the U.S., [Nationality] faculty position is rather rare, because this nation is small.

Maggie discussed feeling “stress” related to finding a job as a counselor educator during her first year home. She described her nation as “small” to demonstrate the limited number of jobs in counselor education. Knowing this, Maggie felt happy that she had stable employment while looking for a faculty position.

I’m just pretty happy about my decisions in regards to returning to home country.

Although Maggie felt “stress” in her first year home, she also stated that she felt “happy” about her decision to return.
Step 3: Individual Textural and Structural Descriptions

Themes identified in Step 2 were then synthesized into a textural and structural description for each participant. This was accomplished when the researcher went back through the transcripts and considered each participant’s textural and structural themes and identified situations or contexts in which they appeared (Creswell, 2007). For example, Maggie talked about her experiences working as a part-time lecturer. She discussed how she applied her Western counselor education across cultures and identified some issues associated with her experiences. In Maggie’s case, language barriers pertained to counseling terminology she had learned in English but did not have an equivalent term for in her native language. This experience impacted her professional adjustment. Using verbatim examples from the transcriptions of participant interviews, the researcher wrote a detailed description of “what happened” (Moustakas, 1994) for each participant in relation to the phenomenon of professional adjustment since returning home from studying in the United States. See Appendix I for an example of Maggie’s textural description.

A structural description of the phenomenon follows the textural description and describes “how” the experience occurred (Creswell, 2007). For example, Maggie talked about language differences when translating and interpreting professional English terminology into her native language, but the more resounding feeling was one of professional confidence and strength. Maggie remembered feeling insecure about her skills while studying in the United States but identified feeling empowered as a professional in her home culture, where she had indigenous knowledge of the counseling
culture. Her underlying feeling of confidence in her home country seemed to support Maggie’s professional adjustment experience and she was able to feel successful as a part-time lecturer. See Appendix I for an example of Maggie’s structural description.

**Step 4: Composite Description**

The composite description is the final step of the data analysis process and incorporates textural and structural descriptions across participants (Moustakas, 1994). The final composite description is at the end of the study describing the “essence” of the phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Textural and structural themes (identified in step 2 and synthesized in step 3) were considered significant for the composite description if three or more participants shared them (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). The six resultant textural themes across participants were: (a) I Decided to Return Home, (b) I am Navigating My Professional Development, (c) I Applied My Western Counselor Education Across Cultures, (d) My Beliefs About My Individual Characteristics, (e) My Identified Coping Strategies and Support for Professional Adjustment, and (f) My Ongoing Professional Identity Development.

The three composite structural themes across participants were: (a) Self in Relation to Others, (b) Self in Relation to Environment, and (c) Self in Relation to Work. Although participants’ shared experiences of professional adjustment, their values, beliefs, and the cultural context, which were underpinning their experiences of professional adjustment, were not the same for each participant. Structural and textual sub-themes emerged during data analysis to help illuminate these similarities and differences across participants. For example, as mentioned previously, Maggie’s decision
to return home was, in part, due to her beliefs about family, whereas for Morgan the
decision to return home was, in part, due to challenges obtaining employment in the
United States. Both participants shared the experiences of returning home, but their
individual reasons for doing so were different.

Chapter II Summary

This phenomenological study sought to gain information pertaining to the
following research question: “What are the professional adjustment experiences of
international counseling graduates who completed a CACREP-accredited counseling
program in the United States, upon returning to their home country?” This study was
intended to reveal the “essence” of professional adjustment for participants. The
“essence” was described in the composite summary, which is the researcher’s
interpretation of participant’s textural and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2007). The
composite summary clarifies the core meanings for participants and provides
organization to the phenomenon of professional adjustment specific to ICGs in this study.
As the counseling profession becomes increasingly recognized as a global profession, the
voices and perspectives of ICGs’ professional experiences are essential to the continued
development of counselor education.

In this chapter, methods for analyzing the research question were described and
included the following: participant selection, data collection, trustworthiness methods,
modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method of Analysis of Phenomenological
Data was used for data analysis in this study. The researcher engaged in bracketing her
assumptions in relation to the phenomenon being studied in order to aid in transparency and trustworthiness of the study. Additional techniques to ensure trustworthiness for the study included: member checking, peer reviews, and rich and thick descriptions of data. Chapter III presents findings from this phenomenological investigation.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS

Chapter III presents the results of this phenomenological study of the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates (ICGs) upon returning to their home country. The purpose of the study was to explore the lived experiences of eight ICGs within three years of returning to their home country to work. The sample comprised eight females from two different regions of the world. Participants’ ages ranged from 26 to 37 years. Of the eight participants, two completed a master’s degree in counseling and six completed their Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) degree in Counselor Education and Supervision. Participants completed their degree from programs accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP), in three different regions of the United States as designated by the Association for Counselor Education and Supervision.

Of the eight participants, four identified as working in the counseling profession in their home country. Of those four, two reported working as full-time counselor educators at the university level, one reported working part-time as a university lecturer, and one reported working as a school counselor. Four participants reported having employment outside the counseling profession (i.e., working in a different profession). Each participant met the following inclusion criteria: (a) self-identified as a former international counseling student, (b) completed a graduate degree (masters or doctoral degree) from a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States, (c) lived in a country that had a local professional counseling association, (d) lived in a country that
had at least one counseling degree program at a local institutions of higher education, and (e) lived in their home country for a minimum of three months, but not longer than three years since returning from their counseling studies in the United States.

All participant interviews were completed via Skype and participants were assigned a pseudonym. For three participants (Morgan, Carol, and June), the two interviews were conducted over two separate dates. For five of the participants (Maggie, Thelma, Juliet, Heather, and Kate), the two interviews were conducted and completed on one date in a single Skype session. The two interviews, when added together, ranged in length from 1 hour, 3 minutes to 1 hour 44 minutes. Interviews were conducted in Fall 2015 and Spring 2016. This chapter presents the six composite textural themes of professional adjustment and the three composite structural themes of professional adjustment that were identified from data analysis. The researcher identified composite themes across participants when three or more ICGs shared the textural (i.e., action, event, feeling) or structural (i.e., belief, value, or cultural context) experience. Composite themes are presented in Table 6 and comprise the essence of professional adjustment for the ICGs in this study.

**Experiences of Professional Adjustment**

The researcher analyzed participants’ lived experiences of professional adjustment across participants with respect to two areas (i.e., textural and structural). First, as a response to the researcher’s prompts (e.g., “Tell me about your professional

Table 6

*Composite Textural and Structural Themes of Professional Adjustment Experiences*
### Textural Themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>6 Textural Themes</th>
<th>3 Structural Themes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I Decided to Return Home</td>
<td>Self in Relation to Others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am Navigating My Professional Development</td>
<td>Self in Relation to Environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I Applied My Western Counselor Education Across Cultures</td>
<td>Self in Relation to Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Beliefs About My Individual Characteristics</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Identified Coping Strategies and Supports for Professional Adjustment</td>
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<tr>
<td>My Ongoing Professional Identity Development</td>
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adjustment as a counselor or counselor educator since returning to [country]’, participants described what happened in regards to their professional adjustment experiences. Composite Textural descriptions account for the researcher’s interpretation of what the participants’ experienced with regard to professional adjustment upon returning to their home country.

Second, the researcher identified composite structural themes. Composite structural themes provided background (e.g., beliefs, values, cultural context) with respect to how participants’ lived experiences of professional adjustment came to occur. In other words, composite textural themes described what participants experienced and composite structural themes described how participants’ experienced professional adjustment with consideration to their beliefs, values, and cultural context. Sub-themes were also identified to facilitate clarity within each theme. The remainder of this chapter explores the composite textural and structural themes and sub-themes identified by the
researcher while analyzing participant interview transcripts (see Figure 1 in Chapter II for analysis procedure).

**Composite Textural Theme 1: I Decided to Return Home**

A composite textural experience (e.g., event, action, feeling) of all participants was making the decision to return to their home country to work. Participants chose to return home for multiple professional and personal reasons including one or more of the following sub-themes: (a) their employment status; (b) contractual agreement with previous employers, universities, or home government; (c) desire to facilitate positive cultural change; and (d) responsibility to family. Table 7 summarizes the sub-themes for Composite Textural Theme 1.

Table 7

*Sub-Themes for Composite Textural Theme 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textural Theme 1: I Decided to Return Home</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 1: Employment Status</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 2: Contractual Agreement</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 3: Desire to Facilitate Positive Cultural Change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 4: Responsibility to Family</td>
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</table>

**Employment status.** Each participant in the current study discussed employment status (i.e., whether or not they had or could find stable employment after graduation) as a deciding factor in her decision to return home to work. Maggie reported that she returned to the work she held prior to obtaining her degree overseas. Maggie stated, “I
came back to [home country] because I have a very stable job while I can prepare to apply for a faculty job.” Having employment helped to ease Maggie’s transition home as it provided her with financial stability as she prepared to apply for a faculty position as a counselor educator in her home country.

Similar to Maggie, Juliet also discussed her transition back to working at a job she held in her home country prior to attending a university in the United States. She identified a primary professional identity that was different from that of counselor or counselor educator. Juliet stated, “When I was studying in the U.S. or even before I went to the U.S., I wanted to integrate the teachings of [religious affiliation] and counseling approaches.” Juliet described herself as a “very rare case” and “unique.” Upon returning home, Juliet also began another graduate degree program in higher education focused on the teachings of her religious affiliation.

Whereas Maggie and Juliet knew they had stable employment in their home country prearranged prior to graduation, Morgan’s decision to return home was, in part, due to difficulties obtaining her school counselor certification in the United States. Morgan described feeling “disappointed” and “shocked” when she realized she could not obtain her school counselor certification in the United States. Morgan further described her experiences by reporting:

I didn’t want to start off my career by being underemployed, for lack of a better word. I did look for options back in [home country] as a plan B, which became plan A. So that was a good thing that it clicked over here [home country] so that I came back to a job. And I wasn’t left floundering.
Like Morgan, Kate reported, “It is very difficult to get a job in the United States as a foreigner. Actually, I applied to one or two universities but I was not successful.” Kate reported that before she moved back, she applied for a job in her home country that was outside of the counseling profession. After being offered the position, she moved home and started working within two weeks.

Again, similar to Kate and Morgan, Carol’s decision to return home was influenced by her experiences trying to obtain work in the United States. Carol spent three months looking for employment in the United States before finding and accepting a job in her home country. Carol found the job search process to be “difficult.” Carol expressed feeling “depressed” while she was looking for counseling work. Carol stated that, “When I was still in the U.S., I felt quite depressed at a point, like I was unemployed for about three months.” She said that after sending out “so many” resumes and cover letters, with no job offer, that she felt she may not have enough “practical experiences” to obtain counseling work. Carol described feeling like she had to keep numerous part-time jobs to pay her bills, explaining, “I was quite depressed because I have my bills to pay and it felt like I was doing so many things [work] that are not related to counseling at all.” Thus, when Carol received a full-time job offer in her home country, she decided to return home stating, “I guess my decision is quite simple. I got a job offer in [city in home country] and that is why I came back from the U.S.”

**Contractual agreement.** Each participant reported returning home due to their ability to find stable employment and a few, more specifically, discussed making the decision based on a contractual agreement with either a university in their home country
or the county’s government. Thelma stated that her decision to return home was, in part, due to a contractual agreement she made with a university in her home country. Thelma said, “Because of the contract, because my university sent me to study overseas for a few years to complete my doctoral program. I signed an agreement to teach for [home university] for seven years.”

Heather also signed a contract with the university she worked for in her home country to “further” her studies and return home to teach as a faculty member. Heather reported, “I have to come back.” Heather felt that her university in her home country lacked “expertise” in mental health counseling, which was one of the reasons she selected that academic focus for her Ph.D. degree.

Similar to Thelma and Heather, June talked about receiving a scholarship from her government to fund her education and living expenses while studying overseas. The terms of her contractual agreement with her government were that June either repaid her loan debt or she would become a faculty member at one of her country’s institutions of higher education. When making her decision to return home, June weighed the benefits of having a faculty job (i.e., job security in her home country) against the “stress” of trying to find a faculty position in the United States and having to repay her government for her graduate coursework. June stated, “I [had] to go back.”

**Desire to facilitate positive cultural change.** Two participants, Thelma and Heather, identified returning home to share their knowledge as counselor educators and to use it to help facilitate positive sociopolitical change in their home country. Thelma described her return as, “a golden opportunity for me to bring back all the new things and
to make some corrections in what we [professional counselors and counselor educators] may be doing.”

Heather also reported that her decision to return home was, in part, due to the “need” for counselor educators at the Ph.D. level in her home country, specifically, those who received their degree “overseas” and could bring back “new knowledge” to advance the counseling field. Heather expressed feeling a “responsibility” to give back to her community. She stated, “I hope that I can educate people about mental health issues or disorders. Mental health problems [are] not merely a disease, there [are] preventions or treatments to help them [clients] cope with their problems.”

**Responsibility to family.** Participants reported that family was a contributing factor to their decision to return home. Participants identified various familial factors including whether their significant other had employment in their home country, taking care of aging parents, and parental expectations of where they should live.

Maggie stated, “The main reason I decided to come back home is because of my husband.” Maggie’s husband remained working in their home country while she attained her Ph.D. degree in the United States. Maggie said that her husband enjoyed working in their home country and she was concerned he might have a difficult time finding employment if she asked him to move to the United States.

Whereas Maggie identified her husband, other participants discussed their parents as influential in their decision. Morgan discussed her parents as a factor in her decision to return home:
I am an only child and I am very close to my parents. It was a conscious decision to say, “Okay, I want to be close to where they are.” For them to travel all the way back and forth would be too much of a demanding task.

Similar to Maggie, Kate also stated that, “I was worried about my parents because they are getting old. So I felt like I should be near to them.” Kate further reported that her perception of her parents’ expectations also guided her decision to return home and work:

I didn’t want to get a job immediately after I finished my doctoral degree. I just wanted to travel, but I felt like my parents really expected me to get a good job [in home country] and earn money since I got a doctorate degree.

Again, similar to Maggie and Kate, Heather talked about her family as a major deciding factor in her decision to return home. While in the United States Heather’s mother died. Heather mentioned, “I spent three years there [United States] without my family. That [mother’s death] made me realize that my Ph.D. is not my priority, my family is my first one.”

**Composite Textural Theme 2: I am Navigating My Professional Development**

Participants completed a CACREP-accredited graduate degree program designed to meet the needs of the counseling profession as it has developed in the United States. Participants described returning to their home country, where the profession of counseling has developed, or is currently developing, within the cultural context of their home country. A second composite textural theme was the experience of navigating their professional development. Sub-themes identified by the researcher were: (a) finding
balance between personal and professional roles; and (b) professional development opportunities and challenges. Table 8 summarizes the sub-themes for Composite Textural Theme 2.

Table 8

*Sub-Themes for Composite Textural Theme 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composite Textural Theme 2: I am Navigating My Professional Development</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 1: Finding Balance Between Personal and Professional Roles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 2: Opportunities and Challenges</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Finding balance between personal and professional roles.** One challenge, identified by some participants while discussing their professional development, was finding a balance between their personal and professional roles. After being away from their family while obtaining their graduate degree, participants had to make difficult decisions regarding how they spent their time. Maggie talked about the different professional components (e.g., counselor licensure, presentations, workshops, publications, etc.) to invest herself in that would best help her to pursue a career in counselor education in her home country. According to Maggie, “Publication is more important to apply for a faculty position in [home country] than counselor certification.” In addition to planning her career path, Maggie stated that she wanted to plan for other life changes. Maggie identified numerous career and life events to navigate through in her first year home, asking a series of questions during the interview: “When should we
try to have babies?” “When should I try and apply for a faculty position?” “When do I need to achieve my publication goals?” Maggie expressed feeling “very nervous” about navigating these decisions during her first year home.

Similar to Maggie, Carol discussed finding balance between personal and professional roles after returning to live in a new city in her home country. Carol stated:

It felt demanding, balancing my life and work in [home country]. So I needed to learn how to work and at the same time adjust to the environment. It is still difficult for me living in a totally different environment.

Carol also described feeling like her life was mostly work during her first year home and stated that “it takes time” developing a social network and learning to live in the new environment.

Some participants talked about developing good boundaries and self care strategies as essential components to finding balance between their personal and professional roles. Upon returning home, Morgan moved in with her parents, which she described as a “little bit of a shift from being independent, coming back and staying with parents.” Morgan further described her experience.

It is kind of hard when you have a lot of friends and family around and they want to meet you all the time. You get tempted after work to stay out late and then you have to get up early again so that messes the whole cycle up. But I managed to put my foot down and say, “Okay, you know what, I’m going to bed at nine thirty and that is the latest.” That way I was fresh enough and had the energy to get through the day. I also joined the gym and some extracurricular stuff that kept me
physically active. That helped because I was socializing, but also doing something constructive, so it put me in a better mood.

Like Morgan, Heather discussed the importance of developing firm boundaries between her professional and personal life as a coping strategy. She reported that,

I will not bring office stuff back home. So I make sure after office hours I spend quality time with my family. For me this is another way I can forget about all the stress in the work setting and I can focus on my family. That is the way I can cope … during the daytime. So it is kind of like the healing process. My family is my healing process.

She also stated,

I have to make sure that I would not bring any negative emotions back to home. So when I’m dealing with my kids, my role is a mom, but when I’m working my role is as a colleague. The clear cut of my roles as a mother, as a daughter-in-law, and as a faculty member, I have to really differentiate those roles.

**Opportunities and challenges.** In addition to finding a balance between personal and professional roles, participants also discussed navigating their professional development in regards to opportunities and challenges they identified. Kate discussed navigating career opportunities and challenges including finding “good” employment, deciding whether or not to pursue counselor licensure, and publishing journal articles in her home country.

June also described professional challenges that made her professional adjustment “difficult.” Most distinct of these challenges was her current position as a faculty
member who filled in for other faculty members when they were absent from class or unable to proctor exams. June described her position as, “basically teaching nothing” as she did not teach her own regularly scheduled course(s). June explained that the university her government assigned her to did not have a counseling degree program. June further described the adjustment from being a Teaching Assistant in United States for two years to an emergency faculty member in her home country. She described her adjustment as being “difficult” with a lot of “bureaucracy” and “everybody is looking into each other’s business.” June stated, “They assigned me to a university that I don’t want to be in, but I have to.”

June described challenges in regards to different cultural norms between her home country and the United States. She reported that her culture is “laid back,” explaining that “tomorrow you have your appointments, but you can cancel them at any time.” June further reported a struggle between her and her superiors where June thought her superiors would like her to adjust to their way of doing things and as June stated, “I am hoping they are going to adjust my way. So we will see who is going to win at the end of the story.”

As discussed in theme 1, some participants knew they would be returning home and working as a counselor educator, due to a contractual agreement. Unlike Maggie, Carol, Kate, and June who were navigating their professional roles in full-time positions outside the profession of counseling, Heather knew she would be employed as a counselor educator upon returning home. This appeared to aid Heather in her ability to prepare for different professional opportunities and challenges while she was still in the
United States. She obtained her National Certified Counselor (NCC) certification and attended various workshops and conferences that would provide her with knowledge in specific areas of need in her country. Heather reported:

I also attended several seminal workshops like conflict resolution, play therapy, and suicide intervention workshops. By attending conferences and workshops [in the United States] helped to prepare myself for when I introduce the mental health program [in home country]. I have all this material and I have all this skill I can teach my students and my colleagues.

Other career aspects Heather identified included becoming a member of her national counseling association and building a professional network outside her university. She described feeling rewarded by helping students and colleagues stay current on counseling trends and techniques in her home country.

Heather explained that navigating different career issues, such as learning how her place of employment had changed while she was away, was something she had not anticipated or prepared for. Heather also talked about “obstacles” in her department when she attempted to introduce aspects of her Western education and found that others may not be “ready” for these ideas. Heather noted,

I want to make changes in the department. I want to introduce the new stuff, but unfortunately they have so many obstacles for me, because people here are not really ready to change. That is one thing I realized.

Heather mentioned how she remained positive and patient. Heather further stated that promotion and tenure, in her home country is “competitive.” She talked about being
“disciplined” in order to make sure she is doing everything necessary to get promoted. Heather explained,

I know in the U.S. when you are an assistant professor within five years you can get promoted to associate professor, but in my country nobody will tell you when you have to apply for associate professor. So I have to really discipline myself when you are going to fulfill all the requirements in order to get promoted to be associate professor. So this kind of career planning is also very important.

Similar to Heather, Thelma also talked about navigating different professional development opportunities and challenges including the research and publication requirements of her position.

When I came back [home country] one of the requirements as a senior lecturer [counselor educator] is that you have to publish research. I have to teach, find research time, and publish two articles. I need to do that every year. This is the expectation.

Thelma further reported that although she felt more prepared to select different professional development opportunities, she was adjusting to publication expectations of her home country such as publishing professional literature in high impact journals. Thelma stated, “I never learned about this [regarding publishing in high impact journals] in the U.S., but every time I want to publish I have to check what index the journal is.”
Composite Textural Theme 3: I Applied My Western Counselor Education Across Cultures

In addition to navigating their professional development in their home culture, participants described how they applied their Western counselor education across cultures. As mentioned previously, participants completed a Westernized graduate counseling degree and had to make decision about how to apply their education in a different cultural context. In regards to their professional adjustment, participants shared similar experiences applying their Western counselor education including: (a) language barriers, (b) differences in teaching philosophies, and (c) finding “Where do I fit?” Table 9 summarizes the sub-themes for Composite Textural Theme 3.

Table 9

*Sub-Themes for Composite Textural Theme 3*

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composite Textural Theme 3: I Applied My Western Counselor Education Across Cultures</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 1: Language Barriers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 2: Teaching Philosophies</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sub-theme 3: Where do I Fit?</td>
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**Language barriers.** Participants described language barriers in applying their Western counselor education across cultures. Carol and June reported that it was difficult to find words in their native language to discuss concepts they had learned. Carol described how it was challenging to even describe what career her professional degree had prepared her to enter. Carol stated,
It’s hard for me to tell people in [native language] what I have learned. Even diploma translated in [native language] is not that correct. Especially when we are talking about counselor education. Also people will think that you are doing some type of education but not like counseling. So difficult for them to understand what I’m doing.

Similar to Carol, June struggled to describe her professional identity to others in her home country. She reported describing herself as being a “consultant” saying, “It’s a little bit scarier for people when I say counselor” due to stigmas regarding mental health in her country. June also described feeling frustrated when she had to search for words in her native language to express concepts or ideas she had learned in English,

I learned everything in English and all the terminology and everything is in English so when I come back now I want to tell something but I don’t know the equivalent for that word. So it is really challenging for me.

Like Carol and June, Thelma also reported language barriers regarding her professional identity. Thelma’s home country did not have a clear cultural definition of a counselor’s roles and responsibilities that distinguished it from other similar professions in her country. Thelma described a person in her home country who publically “talks in front of people” and “gives advice.” She noted, “Yeah, in [home country] people are confused between counselor and [other person] because they believe [these other people] are counselors too.”

In addition to the challenges Carol, June, and Thelma described regarding professional identity, Maggie and Heather discussed language barriers specific to
teaching counseling at the university level. Maggie stated, “I learned all the counseling related terms in English so [native professional language] terms are just more unfamiliar to me.” Although Maggie reported at times it was “hard to recall” terms in her native language, she also expressed feeling her counseling students were “satisfied with her.”

Like Maggie, Heather discussed language barriers when teaching counseling courses in her home country. She reported challenges defining and explaining counselor terminology to students in her native language:

Honestly, in the beginning it was really hard for me. In the past three years, I didn’t speak one word in my national language. So when I came back here, I have to like throw out the words in my language. It took a while to adjust that process, because all of my students use my native language so I have to use that language as well. But in the class I will tell them, I will use English, but if they don’t understand I will try my best to explain in our native language.

**Teaching philosophies.** In addition to language barriers, ICGs also described cultural differences in teaching philosophies. Heather and Thelma were both employed as counselor educators in their home country. Heather discussed applying a more Western approach in her own teaching practices:

I observe how my professor taught in the class [in the United States] and what kind of methods she used so I can transfer that skill, the teaching methods, into my teaching class [in her home country]. So I think that would be helpful, I can give my students the new teaching style. They are really excited about that and they appreciate that.
Heather described feeling confident as a counselor educator in her home country: “The university in the United States really prepared me to be a faculty member.” Heather also highlighted teaching differences including encouraging students to engage in class by asking questions:

In my culture students are more reserved. They will not ask questions directly. But in the U.S. students ask questions very common. But right now I get used to the teaching style or even the learning style in the U.S. because I think that will be helpful. So when I was in class I always encourage students, “If you don’t understand please don’t be hesitant to ask question.” My students became more engaged in the class and they know that if they ask questions, I will not punish them.

Thelma also compared and contrasted teaching styles in her home country with those used in United States. She talked about the changes she had made teaching students in her home country, including being more “friendly,” encouraging participation in the classroom, and providing feedback and opportunities for students to make corrections on their assignments. Thelma stated:

The nature of our teaching style here is totally different, it is a conventional method. We’re more on teaching centered. So there are lots of PowerPoints. The style is more on teacher. So students just sit and listen. No conversation or communication. I try to change that style, by having them do some participation and encourage them to talk more in class.
Thelma encouraged her students to be open to a philosophy of teaching that was different from the traditional approach used in her country. She reported receiving “very good feedback” and feeling her Western counselor education was a source of professional confidence.

**Where do I fit?** For Heather and Thelma, their Western counselor education helped them to feel confident in some aspects of their professional adjustment, but it was also reported as a source of confusion by some participants, as they had to find their place within the different cultural norms. Morgan stated that the primary and secondary school systems in her home country were very different from those in the United States. Morgan mentioned that this was “a big part of professional adjustment” for her:

For the first year I focused on trying to figure out how this is different from other curriculum that I’m familiar. So there was a lot of training and workshops and all of that stuff. Just to sort of understand how counseling fits into the scheme of things.

Morgan attended trainings and workshops to gain a better understanding how to apply Western counselor education across cultures while adjusting to differences in school counseling approaches. Morgan discussed being the first professional counselor in her school system and the issues associated with finding her own place, educating others about her professional roles, and advocating for herself. Morgan identified one of her “biggest difficulties” as “making people who weren’t familiar with counseling a little more open to it.”
Similar to Morgan, Thelma reported feeling like a “newcomer” at her university, as she was not educated in her home country. Thelma reported that it was important for her to integrate her Western education into the teaching practices of counselor educators in her home country as a way to facilitate change in the profession. Although Thelma stated she felt like a “newcomer,” she did not indicate feeling lonely or judged, she modeled patience and expressed understanding that cultural change takes time to occur:

I got my training as a counselor educator in the U.S. and then bring all the knowledge to make some change in my profession, especially in the counseling field. This is not really easy for me. I need to plan very well what I can do and what I can't do for that.

Unlike Morgan and Thelma, Carol obtained employment outside the profession of counseling. She stated that her experiences with her studies in the U.S. “helped me better fit” in her current professional position. This professional position required her to interact with international colleagues, from the United States. The responsibilities of her current position felt easier to fulfill due to her experiences studying in the United States.

**Composite Textural Theme 4: My Beliefs About My Individual Characteristics**

Another aspect of ICGs’ professional adjustment experiences included participants’ beliefs about how their professional adjustment was impacted by their age and gender. Participants discussed experiences of ageism in the work place and described feeling as if they had to prove their professionalism and competence to others in the workplace.
June and Heather described their beliefs about individual characteristics, such as age, as influential in their professional adjustment. June reported feeling as if other faculty members try to give her advice. June stated, “So you can give me some advice, but you cannot tell me that I know better” and “I think they kind of see me as like a kiddo in the class or department.” On the other hand, June also stated, “The younger generations are more eager to learn from me than the older generations. That’s kind of a difference” and “some of them are so eager to learn from me, because they know I am fresh.”

Similar to June, Heather noted thinking that her colleagues did not always demonstrate confidence in her thoughts and/or opinions because of her age and her status as a junior faculty member:

People will say, “Oh you are so young, but you have Ph.D.” And even like when we come out with a new idea some people will think over that new idea because they do not have confidence about what I have said as a junior faculty member. Heather also described responding to her colleagues’ concerns regarding her age:

“You have a Ph.D. [degree] and I have a Ph.D. [degree]. It does not matter if I am young and you are old. I have to respect you, because you have more experience than me.” So this is how I cope with the situation. Always respect the senior faculty member, but at the same time, I help promote my new ideas in a direct way. So they can slowly accept the new ideas.

Like June and Heather, Morgan described thinking that she was being judged at work due to her age and status as a new employee. Morgan described her experiences:
Like someone says, “Oh but you are so young.” So there is that whole [stereotype of young adults as being] inexperience and that sort of stuff coming into play. I actually had my current principal tell me within the first week of work, something to the effect of, “So if you don’t have too much work to do, come and find me or the assistant principal, cause we don’t want you sitting on Facebook all day.” I did not see that coming! I was like “Okay, I will make sure I have enough work to do.” So I thought that was a little uncalled for but probably related to, you know, saying younger person probably likes Facebook sort of stuff.

As a school counselor, Morgan worked with both students and their parents. She talked about how she anticipated parents’ potential concerns regarding her age as indicator of her competence to help their children:

Most often what I do to overcome that with parents is to show them the stuff that I’m using or the theory that I am basing my [counseling] sessions on. Sort of give them the materials so they can understand for themselves. So that way sort of breaks the ice and also gives them insight into how I function. So it doesn’t really throw focus on the age so much.

In addition to age, Maggie also identified beliefs about her gender as influential in her professional adjustment. Maggie stated, “I think if I were a man, I would definitely stay in the U.S.A. I would ask my wife to stay in the U.S.A. and support me as a professor.” Maggie expressed feeling “pressure” as a woman to give up her career. Maggie also identified her age as an important aspect of her adjustment stating:
As I get older, I feel like family has more priority than my career. When I was in my twenties, I feel that my career is number one, but now I think if I don’t become a professor it doesn’t matter.

**Composite Textural Theme 5: My Identified Coping Strategies and Supports for Professional Adjustment**

Due to challenges experienced regarding reacculturation and professional adjustment, participants identified numerous coping strategies and supports that were helpful in their transition. Participants identified the sub-theme of, staying connected, as essential to their professional adjustment.

All of the participants in this study discussed staying connected to a professional network as a primary coping strategy and source of support for their professional adjustment. Participants discussed the challenges and benefits of staying connected to a professional network both in their home country and abroad. Carol discussed the importance of having a professional network. She identified being a National Certified Counselor (NCC) as a vital resource as she had access to continuing education webinars. Carol stated, “I feel like if I’m not attending those webinars, I’ll have no relationship with counseling at all.” Carol discussed experiences that have made it “difficult” to reach out to support systems like her doctoral cohort, for example, due to poor Internet connectivity in her home country. Kate also reported difficulties maintaining a professional network in her home country, “I lost my [professional] contacts in [home country] while I was doing a doctorate study so networking was my weakness.”
Juliet discussed both maintaining her professional connections in her home country while she was studying in the United States and maintaining the professional connections she developed in the United States after she returned home. Juliet specifically mentioned her thesis advisor from her master’s degree program in her home country and a faculty mentor in the United States who had been instrumental in supporting and guiding her during challenging times. She stated, “I can say that the relationship that I had with the faculty member [in the United States] helped. When I worked on publishing my dissertation, without his help, I would not have finished.” Juliet further described the emotional benefits of having a good support network:

I’ve been like in this pattern of like being burnt out, like hurrying, meeting after meeting, and then finishing, but there were people cheering me on. One of the things I really wanted to resolve in my life [was the feeling of always] being really busy and being burnt out and then being really busy and burnt out again. Even emotionally and developmentally there are people there to really hear and really guide me in many ways. It really helped me a lot.

June talked about her two siblings who were both faculty members in higher education in her home country. Although her siblings had different academic degrees and worked at different institutions, they were able to help her adjust to the academic culture of her home country. June further described support from colleagues, friends, her husband, and her cat. June stated,
I have one colleague actually. She had been in the States for about eight years, but she wasn’t able to complete her Ph.D. so she is back for about three years. So she is the one, she can relate to me whenever I have adjustment issues.

Again, similar to Juliet and June, Maggie identified her professional network as essential to support her professional development. She stated that without the collaboration of her American colleagues and doctoral cohort, professional adjustment as a counselor educator would be “impossible.” Maggie stated, “The most helpful and important thing in preparation for applying for a faculty position in [home country] are publications. So the most helpful thing until now is the collaboration with my American colleagues.” Maggie also identified talking with peers, sharing feelings and thoughts with those peers who have shared similar experiences as one of her most helpful coping strategies. In addition to American colleagues, Maggie reported receiving “emotional, psychological, and practical support from my master’s degree advisor in [home country].”

Like other participants, Morgan recalled the ease of her transition home due to having a strong professional support network. “The move itself wasn’t that stressful. The job too, like I said, I had a great support last year, who made it very easy to transition in.” Morgan identified coping strategies and supports that contributed to her first year adjustment including two supervisors, one in her department and one who provided clinical supervision. Morgan noted:

Because it was the first year, going from being a student to professional, it really helped make the transition a lot better for me because I had someone to bounce
my ideas off of. If I had ideas I knew who to go ask. As opposed to saying, ‘I’m the expert I know how to figure this out.’ It really helped having both of those people.

Thelma also mentioned numerous groups and individual colleagues that aided and supported her professional adjustment after arriving home. She stated, “I keep saying that this is my learning process so I try to put away my shield to ask people for help. I try to get someone to help me for different issue and not be afraid of that.” Thelma discussed her new professional responsibilities upon returning home, specifically her new administrative responsibilities, describing them as a “big and huge” adjustment. Thelma identified coping strategies and supports including reaching out to her dean.

One person I like to talk to is my dean. She is really really helpful and a good listener. After four years I came back to [home university] and try to learn the changes in the system. She is the one who helped me to understand the system.

Composite Textural Theme 6: My Ongoing Professional Identity Development

Another factor that influenced professional adjustment across participants was the development of their professional identity. Carol, Katie, and Maggie felt their professional identity was less clear after returning home from the United States to work in positions outside of the counseling profession.

Participants who returned home and entered into a full-time employment in the profession of counseling reported feeling more aligned with their professional identity and future professional development. Although the profession of counseling in their home country may be in a different stage of development than the counseling profession
in the United States, the three participants who worked in a full-time counseling position felt clear about their professional trajectory. Participants who did not enter full-time employment in the profession of counseling described their adjustment experiences as less clear or not as smooth as those who were working in the profession of counseling.

Participants working in the profession of counseling appeared to feel more aligned with their professional identity. For example, Thelma and Heather worked full-time as counselor educators in their home country. They discussed professional development goals such as promotion and tenure. Neither participant reported feeling “lost” or “confused” in regards to their professional identity or goals for the future.

Participants who returned home and did not work in the field of counseling shared feelings of confusion regarding a path to their professional development and identity. Kate reported, “I still want to become a faculty member [counselor educator] at some point. In a way I kind of gave up that goal.” Kate also stated,

I might adjust my goals. Not goals, actually I don’t have any goals, I just got a job two years ago and I earn money from that. I have a job…and I don’t know what to do anymore, but just stay there.

Like Kate, Carol stated that counseling is still a potential “career goal in the future.” She added that she had her National Certified Counselor (NCC) certification and attended workshops to keep the certification current. Carol stated that after putting “so much effort” into obtaining her master’s degree in counseling, and then obtaining work outside the field, she felt “lost” and in need of her own career counseling. Carol stated, “You put so much effort in learning this [counseling] and gaining the degree in this field
and now what you are doing [for employment] have no relationship at all. So you are kind of lost I feel.”

When Maggie returned to her home country she returned to the job she had prior to coming to the United States for her Ph.D. degree. Maggie did not return to a job as a clinical counselor or a full-time faculty member, deviating from a “standard” professional development model for counselors or counselor educators. Maggie expressed that,

If I [had] applied to a faculty position in the United States my transition from a counselor trainee to counselor educator might have been smooth but in [home country] I’m just a [title of current employment] with a doctoral degree. It’s very weird. . . . It doesn't feel as smooth.

**Composite Structural Themes of Professional Adjustment Experiences**

The aforementioned composite textural themes are the researcher’s analysis of participants’ shared experiences of professional adjustment. The composite textural themes described experiences that were shared by three or more participants and pertained to “what” happened in relation to the phenomenon under investigation. The following section discusses the composite structural themes that describe the underlying beliefs, values, and cultural context that underpinned participants’ professional adjustment. Composite structural themes highlight participants’ shared meanings regarding “how” their lived experiences of professional adjustment came to occur. The composite structural themes are: (a) self in relation to others, (b) self in relation to environment, and (c) self in relation to work. Similar to the composite textural themes,
the researcher identified shared composite structural themes when they were shared by three or more participants (see Table 10).

Table 10

Composite Structural Themes and Sub-Themes of Professional Adjustment Experiences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composite Structural Theme 1: Self in Relation to Others</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sub-theme 1: Firm Boundaries</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sub-theme 2: Supports</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Composite Structural Theme 2: Self in Relation to Environment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sub-theme 1: Responsibility to Environment (i.e., country, university, and community)</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Sub-theme 2: Comfort in the Familiar</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Composite Structural Theme 3: Self in Relation to Work</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Sub-theme 1: Professional Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sub-theme 2: Adjustment from Student Work to Professional Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sub-theme 3: My Work Reality is Not What I Thought it Would Be</td>
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</tbody>
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**Composite Structural Theme 1: Self in Relation to Others**

Structural components (i.e., beliefs, values, and cultural context) of participants’ experiences informed how they made decisions about their professional adjustment in relation to others (e.g., colleagues, administrators, parents, partner/spouse, and children). The following two sub-themes were identified by the researcher regarding how participants’ attributed meaning to their relations with others: (a) developing firm boundaries and (b) utilizing supports.

**Firm boundaries.** Participants’ beliefs, values, and cultural context underpinned their professional adjustment in regards to their relations with others. Heather appeared to feel frustrated and disappointed by her colleagues in her home country that were hesitant to try different teaching methods. Heather responded to her feelings of frustration with
her colleagues by developing firm boundaries between time spent at work and time spent with her family. She exercised patience and positivity in the face of adversity. By maintaining firm boundaries Heather was able to fully appreciate her time with her family, calling this her “healing” time after returning from a stressful day. It is also important to note that Heather’s mother died while she was studying in the United States, which was both disheartening and eye opening for Heather. Heather realized she wanted to be close to her family and that her family was her greatest priority.

Similar to Heather, Morgan valued the establishment of firm boundaries. Morgan also responded to challenges with others at work by advocating and demonstrating her professional capabilities. As a school counselor in her 20s, Morgan believed it was important to prove herself as mature and responsible to her principal and the parents of her students. She was determined to educate her co-workers about her professional role within the cultural context of the school and how she could support their students and classrooms. During the day Morgan worked to educate and advocate for her professional self, and in the evenings Morgan had to set firm boundaries on her time with family and friends in order to uphold her professional standards and maintain positive self-care routines.

It is also important to note that participants felt pressured by others and in the absence of strong boundaries, at least one participant found she regretted some of her professional adjustment decisions. Kate felt pressured by her parents to quickly find employment. Her desire to please her parents led her to take a job outside her professional field (i.e., counselor education). Kate also felt disappointed that she was not
able to take a longer break between receiving her doctoral degree and taking a professional position.

**Supports.** Participants appeared to value support found in others in regards to their professional adjustment. In Carol’s account, she seemed resilient and resourceful by talking with colleagues about her “job difficulties.” Carol also valued family and friends to help her with job and professional identity challenges. Like Carol, Morgan demonstrated resourcefulness by identifying supports in her home country that strengthened her professional adjustment. During her first year home, Morgan had both a departmental and clinical supervisor. She felt comfortable in asking for help and open to receiving their advice when needed.

Similarly, Juliet returned to her home country feeling “burnt out” after completing her doctoral degree. She described her professional colleagues, mentors, and supervisors as supportive and even instrumental in helping her move forward professionally. Juliet valued the support and guidance of others to help her on her career journey. She did not identify any major adjustment issues regarding other people after returning home. She stated that her family relationships had not changed, leaving her feeling comforted by the familiarity of these supports.

Again, similar to other participants, June identified colleagues, and animal assisted strategies as self-care strategies to help her cope with the struggles of her workplace. These supports seemed to keep June from feeling deflated or lost in her surroundings, as she was able to rely on her supports to problem solve the adjustment difficulties she encountered. Like June, Maggie appeared resilient during her professional
adjustment home. She acknowledged that returning home was not a smooth professional transition, but she maintained a strong personal and professional support network to help her through these challenges.

**Composite Structural Theme 2: Self in Relation to Environment**

How a participant viewed herself in relation to her environment influenced her underlying experiences of professional adjustment. Sub-themes were developed highlighting participants’ shared beliefs: (a) responsibility to environment (country, university, and community); and (b) comfort in the familiar.

**Responsibility to environment.** For Heather, self in relation to environment was a structure permeated by a sense of responsibility. Heather felt responsible to her country, university, and community. After receiving a financial scholarship from her government, Heather felt obligated to return home and fulfill her contractual obligation to teach. In addition to her contractual obligation, Heather wanted to help create positive change in her community. Heather appeared proud of her education and degree and seemed to feel responsible to share the knowledge, education, and cultural experiences she received while abroad with others in her home country.

Similar to Heather, Thelma valued being a cultural agent of change and this idea was interwoven throughout her interview discussing her professional adjustment experiences. Thelma wanted to make “changes” in counselor education in her home country. She worked at her university prior to obtaining her degree in the United States and had always planned to return home and work in the counseling field. She was steadfast in her resolve to influence positive professional changes at her university and in
her home culture. Thelma felt frustrated when she had to negotiate a slower pace of change in her counseling department due to colleagues with a different mindset.

**Comfort in the familiar.** Kate’s return to her home country was a welcome respite from the language barriers she felt while studying in the United States. After returning home, Kate felt at ease, being able to speak her native language without concern about being judged. Kate was also pleased to be closer to her parents and to be able to help them as they were aging. Similarly, while in the United States, Maggie reported feeling a lack of confidence in her counseling skills due to language barriers in counseling sessions and supervision. After returning home, Maggie reported feeling more confident in her professional abilities as she was comfortable and familiar with the native language.

Carol also reported that it was “helpful” for her to visit her grandmother and family in her hometown. Carol stated that being in a familiar environment was relaxing as she knew the area and the culture. Like Kate and Maggie, Juliet regarded her professional adjustment to her environment as “easy.” Juliet returned to working on a research project that sought to infuse the principles of her religion and make them more accessible to others. She knew her co-workers, and she was familiar with her work and corresponding responsibilities.

**Composite Structural Theme 3: Self in Relation to Work**

How a participant viewed herself in relation to her work influenced her professional adjustment. Participants shared similar structural components regarding their professional adjustment to work. The researcher documented sub-themes regarding
participants relation to work: (a) professional identity; (b) adjustment from student work to professional work; and (c) my work reality is not what I thought it would be.

**Professional identity.** Carol obtained full-time work outside the profession of counseling, which seemed to cause internal dissonance between the job she had and the job for which she was educated. Carol appeared to feel that her professional identity was delayed. She felt disappointed because her professional identity as a counselor was in conflict with her current job outside the profession. She continued to attend online workshops to maintain her NCC certification and desired a position in the counseling field in the future ultimately holding on to the professional identity she developed in the United States, but had been unable to actively start working towards in her home country. Adding to her feeling of professional isolation as a counselor, Carol was challenged to explain her professional credentials across cultures due to differences in language and misunderstanding about the definition of her degree.

Similarly, Maggie had deviated from what seemed to be a smooth professional trajectory in the United States, in which she would graduate with her Ph.D. degree and apply for a job as a counselor educator. For Maggie, self in relation to her professional identity was full of uncertainty, a journey without a clear road map. Maggie did not feel she had reached the full potential of her Ph.D. degree as she had not yet achieved a full-time faculty position in academia. Her professional adjustment was underpinned by insecurity about her professional identity.

In contrast to Carol and Maggie, Thelma returned to her home country with a secure job in academia as a counselor educator. She felt aligned and confident in her own
professional identity due to her ability to merge components of her Western education with her professional work in her home country. Unlike all the other participants, Juliet’s original goal in obtaining her degree had never been to become a professional counselor or counselor educator. Her professional identity was integrated with her spiritual beliefs and the teaching of her spiritual beliefs to others. Juliet found her work rewarding and fulfilling. She chose to return home to continue her education and career development towards becoming a spiritual practitioner in her belief system.

Adjustment from student work to professional work. Participants discussed structural components of transitioning to a new stage of work (i.e., student work to professional work). Heather described an “easier” transition when returning home in that she was returning to a university where she had “previously worked.” She stated, “I just report for duty in the university. . . . So for me the transition is a little bit easier for me.” The structure, self in relation to work, encompassed Heather’s patience, positivity, planning, and professional advocacy while navigating different aspects of her career. Heather returned to work at a university that was well-known to her as she had worked there prior to studying abroad. Heather returned to her home country knowing that she had a job, which helped make her transition to work feel “easy.” What she identified as challenging in her adjustment were things like learning new software and integrating her Western teaching philosophies into her counselor education program.

Self in relation to work is a structure that highlighted Thelma’s passion and frustration. Thelma seemed to be planful while she was in the United States, knowing she would be returning home. She attended workshops and conferences in order to bring
home as much of her Western counselor education as she felt would be applicable. Although she had planned for transition, adjusting back to work after being away for four years appeared to feel arduous for Thelma. She struggled to learn new administrative responsibilities. However, she felt confident in her work and in facing different aspects of her professional adjustment due to strong planning skills and courage to seek out people and opportunities that helped and supported her.

Unlike Heather and Thelma, Morgan stated that her decision to return home was made after her discovery that she could not obtain school counselor certification in the United States due to her status as an international student. Morgan’s sense of self in relation to work was one of determination and resilience, which helped her to professionally adjust her initial plan to work in the United States and find work in her home country. Although Morgan felt “disappointed” that she could not gain certification in the United States, her determination to find employment assisted her in moving forward with her career. Morgan’s decision to return home was in some ways a forced move, due to the aforementioned reason. Morgan, however, was able to see a silver lining for her professional adjustment in that she was employed as a counselor and had an income in her home country. Morgan also identified other positive factors related to moving home such as being closer to her family.

**My work reality is not what I thought it would be.** Participants’ appeared to have to adjust their beliefs regarding the reality of their work in their home country. Kate talked about her dream to become a faculty member, but also the reality of how difficult
obtaining a job in academia was in her home country. Kate described feeling disappointed about her current employment:

Yes, but the thing is this is not what I dreamed about. This is just a job, but was not my goal. And this is contract work so with my degree I think I can get a better job and this is below my expectation actually. And as I said, my goal was to become a faculty member and getting a job in the university in [home country] is very difficult, even with a university degree.

Kate felt dissonance between her dream to become a faculty member and her current employment. She felt her dream was not attainable due to difficulties during her doctoral studies (i.e., language barriers and lack of experience presenting/publishing scholarly research) and career obstacles in her home country (i.e., lack of professional contacts, expectation regarding professional publications and credentials). Kate felt underemployed by her current job, and did not feel prepared to apply for a faculty position. She felt unhappy in relation to her work. Overall, Kate was dissatisfied with the reality of her professional adjustment to work.

Like Kate, Carol felt disappointed in her current employment. Carol had initially hoped to find employment in the United States. Her initial decision to return home came after months of financial stress. While attempting to find full-time employment in the United States, Carol felt tired and disappointed. These emotions led Carol to accept a non-counseling position in her home country. Although disappointed, Carol stated that her decision to return home felt like a relief from her work-related struggles in the United States.
Similar to Carol, June did not feel like she had a choice about returning home. She had a contractual agreement with her government and did not want to assume the financial burden to repay her government if she stayed in the United States. June also talked about adjusting her professional expectations, as the reality of her experience as a faculty member did not match with her professional vision. June reported that when she first returned to her country she was eager to teach and educate others. June stated that after being home for 10 months she had not been an instructor of record for a course. June stated, “it has been ten months nearly, and I don’t know still how my first day of class will look like.”

June appeared concerned that she had not started teaching any of her own courses, leaving her feeling underutilized. June reported that she was adjusting to a different teaching style in her home country and understanding the work related “bureaucracy and paper work.” Although she was frustrated, June coped by requesting a new university placement with her government, which showed determination in the face of work challenges.

Chapter III Summary

Chapter III reported the results of this phenomenological study of the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates after returning to their home country to work. The findings in this chapter represent the researcher’s interpretation of the participants’ perceptions of their experiences of professional adjustment after returning to their home country to work. Specifically, the composite textural and structural findings, provided in this chapter, presented what occurred across participants’
professional adjustment experiences and how their beliefs, values, and cultural context underpinned shared experiences.

Professional adjustment was the focus of this study, in order to aid counselor education programs in the United States to more effectively prepare professional counselors, through programming and curriculum, for returning to their country to work. The results of data analysis presented in Chapter III suggest that a number of issues influence professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates including: making the decision to return home, navigating professional development, applying Western counselor education across cultures, beliefs about individual characteristics, identified coping strategies and supports, and ongoing professional identity development. There is also evidence to suggest participants’ beliefs, values, and cultural context underpinned their professional adjustment by influencing their relationship with others, their environment, and their work. A discussion of the research is provided in Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV

DISCUSSION

Professional development is inherent to counselor education programing and curriculum development (Rønnestad & Skovholt, 2013). Although there has been a growing number of initiatives to enhance the professional development of counselors worldwide (e.g., International Counseling Association, International Registry of Counseling and Related Educational Programming, National Board of Certified Counselors International), little is known about the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates who return to their home country to work. This study investigated the following research question: “What are the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates who completed a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States and have returned to their home country?” The first person accounts of eight international counseling graduates (ICGs), upon re-entry to their home country after earning a counseling degree from programs in the United States, were subjected to phenomenological analysis.

Professional adjustment was the focus of this study and the researcher identified six composite textural themes and three composite structural themes across participants. Each theme applied to a minimum of three participants. Composite textural themes accounted for the researcher’s interpretation of what the participants experienced in regards to professional adjustment after returning home to work. Composite structural themes accounted for the beliefs, values, and cultural context that underpinned
participants’ experiences (i.e., “how” the experience came to occur). The composite textural and structural themes comprised the essence of professional adjustment for ICGs.

Findings of the current study revealed that participants decided to return to their home country for various reasons (e.g., employment status, contractual agreement, desire to facilitate positive change, responsibility to family). After making the decision to return home, participants had to navigate their own professional development and choices about how and when to apply their Western counselor education across cultures. Participants reported feeling their professional adjustment was impacted by individual characteristics (e.g., age, gender) and by coping strategies and supports such as staying connected to professional colleagues. Participants also reported that their professional adjustment was influenced by their professional intent and whether they had attained employment as a counselor or counselor educator.

It is important to note that participants lived in five different countries, representing two different geographical regions of the world. ICGs’ shared beliefs, regarding their experiences, are considered with the understanding that they may have had different cultural values and norms and that the cultural context (i.e., historical development of counseling as a profession) of each country was different. Findings also suggest that participants’ cultural context, beliefs, values, and norms (i.e., structural components) underpinned the phenomenon of professional adjustment in three distinct areas (i.e., self in relation to others, self in relation to environment, and self in relation to work).
In regards to participants’ relationships with other people, participants appeared to value firm boundaries between their professional and personal time. Similarly, participants also seemed to value other people who provided personal and professional support as a means to ease professional adjustment. With respect to their environment, participants also appeared to believe they had a responsibility to their environment (i.e., country, university, and community). Similarly, participants reported finding comfort in their own familiar culture (i.e., environment). In relation to work, participants discussed their professional identity, their adjustment from student work to professional work, and the realization that, “my work reality is not what I thought it would be.” In other words, participants had to make adjustments to meet the “norms” of their work in their home country.

In this final chapter, the resultant composite textural and structural themes, presented in Chapter III, are discussed in terms of relevant professional literature and research. Findings of the current study are consistent with re-entry literature (Jung, Lee, & Morales, 2012; Thompson & Christofi, 2006; Szkudlarek, 2010) and strengthen understandings of professional adjustment as a co-occurring phenomenon with re-entry to one’s home country. Findings of the current study offer insight into how counselor education programs might prepare international graduates for professional adjustment prior to returning to that country (Westwood, Lawrence, & Paul, 1986). Results also support similar findings regarding the influence of coping style on professional adjustment (Adler, 1981).
The importance of developing a professional network, both in the United States and in the country where the graduate plans to work, also is discussed in this chapter. Professional adjustment challenges, including alignment with a counselor professional identity in their home country and the impact of individual characteristics (e.g., age and gender) are discussed as they relate to the literature (Stanard, 2013). Limitations of this study also are considered as well as implications for counselor education and future research.

**Professional Adjustment Upon Returning to One’s Home Country**

Professional adjustment on re-entry after a sojourn abroad is an understudied phenomenon (Jung et al., 2012; Thompson & Christofi, 2006; Szkudlarek, 2010). In the current investigation participants’ re-entry co-occurred with their professional adjustment experiences as participants simultaneously returned home and began working. As illustrated in Composite Textural Theme 1, *I Decided to Return Home*, participants made a decision to return to their home country to work for various personal and professional reasons. Participants’ professional adjustment experiences were directly impacted by their re-entry experience.

Understanding the professional adjustment process of a select group of counseling professionals in various countries and regions of the world strengthens the existing literature on re-entry for counselors. ICGs identified professional adjustment issues such as building a professional network, obtaining counselor certification (if available in their country), and identifying professional development opportunities (i.e., post-graduate training, conferences and workshops, and publishing scholarly work).
Some participants discussed attending professional workshops and/or conferences since they returned to their home country, but none of the participants mentioned having begun their certification or licensure process, if available, in their home country. Additionally, some of the participants discussed maintaining their National Counselor Certification (NCC), but none of the participants reported that they joined their professional counseling organization in their home country. Participants expressed that professional adjustment challenges added more stress to their re-entry process. Given the importance of understanding ICGs’ professional adjustment experiences upon returning home to work, discussion is provided of participants’ re-entry experiences, counselor professional identity development, language barriers, coping modes, and individual characteristics.

Re-entry

Re-entry is the transition from the host culture back into one’s home culture (Adler, 1981; Thompson & Christofi, 2006). Participants in the current study experienced professional adjustment during their re-entry (i.e., transitioning from the counseling profession as it exists in the United States back into the counseling profession as it exists in the participants’ home country). Consistent with other re-entry literature (Szkudlarek, 2010; Westwood et al., 1986), numerous affective, cognitive, and behavioral aspects of re-entry and professional adjustment are highlighted in the following discussion.

Affective theories of re-entry refer to the psychological well being of the returnee (Szkudlarek, 2010). Most influential of these theories is the W-Curve model, which hypothesizes distinct stages of re-entry (Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963). There are
currently no distinct theories of professional adjustment for ICGs. The researcher compared the current study’s findings to the four stages of the W-Curve model (i.e., return home, reverse culture shock, reacculturation, and stable state).

Although participants in the current study reported a range of feelings such as isolation, resilience, and frustration, they did not report feeling “reverse culture shock” or a “stable state” in regards to their professional adjustment. The absence of discussion surrounding these two stages of adjustment, as outlined by Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963), is inconsistent with extant literature and may suggest that professional adjustment is distinctly different from re-entry. The end stage of re-entry is a “stable state,” but professional adjustment may be more of an ongoing phenomenon as individuals’ professional objectives change and develop. This further enhances existing scholarly literature about the process of professional adjustment for ICGs as it may be different from that of re-entry although happening simultaneously.

As previously suggested (Prichard, 2011; Sussman; 2001; Szkudlarek, 2010; Westwood et al., 1986) and supported by accounts of participants in the current study, The three ICGs who did not mention preparing for professional adjustment prior to graduation reported more affective difficulties (e.g., stress and frustration) than those who had anticipated their return home to work and planning ahead for their professional adjustment. In this study, planning ahead included actions such as: (a) developing a professional network in ones’ home country; (b) anticipating challenges associated with re-entry after a sojourn abroad; (c) attending counseling workshops and conferences in the United States pertaining to their future work; and (d) researching counseling
organizations, certification, and licensure opportunities in one’s home country.

Participants who did not mention planning ahead for professional adjustment reported feeling more concerned about finding stable employment and having financial security. Participants who felt unprepared to find employment in the counseling profession and also felt unprepared for the challenges of re-entry, reported feeling “lost” upon transitioning home.

At the time of their interviews, all participants were working full-time and had stable employment. Two participants planned ahead for re-entry and reported full-time employment in the counseling profession, three planned ahead for re-entry and reported full-time employment outside the counseling profession, one did not discuss planning ahead for re-entry and found full-time employment in the counseling profession, and two did not report planning ahead for re-entry and reported full-time employment outside the counseling profession. It is noteworthy that only three of eight ICGs reported working full-time in the profession of counseling after returning home to work. Table 11 illustrates ICGs’ full-time employment status and preparation for re-entry.

Table 11

*Illustration ICGs’ Full-Time Employment Status and Preparation for Re-Entry*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full-time Employment Within the Profession of Counseling</th>
<th>Planned Ahead for Re-entry</th>
<th>Did Not Mention Planning Ahead for Re-entry</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 participants</td>
<td>1 participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the three participants who had planned ahead for re-entry, but did not obtain employment in the counseling profession, one stated during her interview that her professional trajectory had never been to obtain work as a counselor or counselor educator. Instead, this participant pursued a different career path that was supported by her degree, as she had planned. The second participant had been assigned by her government to a faculty position at a university in her home country that did not have a counseling department or program. This participant had signed a contractual agreement with the government in her home country. Her agreement included funding by her government for her education and in return she would either accept a faculty position in her home country or repay the money. The participant had planned to return home as a counselor educator, but was assigned to a university where this was not a possibility.

The third participant who had planned ahead for re-entry, but did not obtain full-time employment in the counseling profession, was preparing to apply for a full-time position as a counselor educator in her home country. At the time of her interview, she was working full-time in a career she had held prior to obtaining her degree while lecturing part-time in the profession of counseling. This finding suggests that for some international counseling students studying in the United States, it will not be immediately feasible to obtain a position in the counseling profession upon returning to their home country. Faculty in counselor education programs could ask international counseling students about their professional expectations (e.g., type of employment desired, number
of publications, desired professional development) of counselors in their home country, in order to assist them in finding employment in the counseling profession prior to returning to their home country. Questions like these may assist ICGs in thinking about and planning for future employment after graduation.

It is also noteworthy that three of the four participants who had not planned ahead for re-entry had hoped to remain in the United States after graduation, but were unable to find employment that could support their visa requirements. Therefore, it may be useful for counselor education programs in the United States to help prepare ICGs for the potential concrete challenges (e.g., obtaining visa approval, certification/licensure requirements in the United States and their home country) as well as other challenges related to professional adjustment prior to graduation (e.g., feeling disconnected from the profession of counseling, family responsibility).

In addition to affective challenges of re-entry, participants in this study also described cognitive aspects of re-entry. Cognitive theories of re-entry such as those discussed by Jung et al. (2012) and Szkudlarek (2010) described returnees met or unmet expectations of their transition and explore the role cultural identity may have on re-entry to one’s home country. For example, participants’ cultural identities (e.g., daughter, wife, counselor) may have caused issues in regards to developing professional and personal boundaries (e.g., dividing their time between work and family or asking for professional support from others).

Participants in this study who discussed being resilient and resourceful in regards to developing boundaries with others (e.g., family, colleagues, supervisors,
administrators) reported feeling more successful in their professional adjustment. Similarly, participants’ beliefs about seeking support, such as asking for help from others eased some participants’ professional adjustment challenges as they were able to get needed support (as illustrated in Composite Structural Theme 1, *Self in Relation to Others*). Preparing ICGs for potential challenges in regards to setting boundaries and asking for support prior to returning home may help ICGs in their professional adjustment.

Jung et al. (2012) proposed the concept of *benefits* to capture the advantages participants in their study noted after returning home. For example, ICGs in Jung et al.’s study described their collaboration with American scholars as an opportunity that set them apart from other professionals who received their counselor education in their home country. In the current study, participants’ descriptions of the benefits of maintaining a professional network (e.g., collaboration on research with colleagues and professional development opportunities in the United States) appear to be consistent with the benefits described by Jung et al. Maintaining a professional network may aid ICGs’ professional adjustment as it supports the education and scholarly work undertaken while abroad, and provides them a unique opportunity for cross-cultural collaboration.

Lau and Ng (2012) presented the concept of *Sojourner and Returnee Adjustment Distress*, referring to returnees’ reported feelings of isolation and frustration while adjusting to work in their home country. In the current study, participants who did not feel as if they had maintained a professional network either in their home country or in the United States described feeling isolated at home during professional adjustment. This
finding suggests that helping ICGs to build a professional network both in their home country and in the United States prior to returning home may significantly reduce feelings of professional isolation and provide opportunities for ICGs to feel connected and supported by others. Counselor educators in the United States might provide opportunities for international students to complete independent investigations focused on the similarities and differences of the counseling profession in their home country. Part of the course work might be to develop professional connections (i.e., network) in their home country.

Participants’ underpinning values in regards to their environment (i.e., university, community, family, and work) influenced their professional adjustment. Participants’ self-determination and resiliency shaped their adjustment from student work to professional work, as illustrated in Composite Structural Theme 2, *Self in Relation to Environment* and Composite Structural Theme 3, *Self in Relation to Work*. It seems these values helped participants to seek support and resources for their professional adjustment.

In Composite Textural Theme 5, *My Identified Coping Strategies and Supports for Professional Adjustment*, participants highlighted the importance of a strong professional network in both the participants’ home country and in the United States. Chur-Hansen (2004) investigated international students trained in their profession outside their home country. Chur-Hansen described how participants felt at a disadvantage with regards to building a strong professional network when compared with others who had been trained in their profession within their home country. This finding is consistent with the current study in that participants reported that staying connected to a professional
network of people (e.g., their student cohort, faculty advisors, mentors, colleagues) and service (e.g., administrative support, clinical support, and organizational supports) both in the United States and after they returned home eased their professional adjustment. Composite Structural Theme 1, *Self in Relation to Others*, described participants’ beliefs regarding their identified supports as being instrumental to their professional adjustment especially during the initial period home (i.e., defined in this study as having returned home between three months to three years at the time of the interview).

**Counselor Professional Identity Development**

All of the participants in the current study graduated from a master’s or doctoral level counseling program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). CACREP standards and scholars in the profession have increasingly emphasized a unified counselor professional identity over the past few decades (Alvarez & Lee, 2012; Kaplan & Gladding, 2011; Lee, 1997; Stanard, 2013). The development of professional identity for counselors-in-training is outlined in Section II of the 2016 CACREP standards (CACREP, 2016). As a result, ICGs graduating from CACREP-accredited programs have a well-developed sense of professional identity, in the United States. Conversely, Stanard (2013) stated that, the counseling profession in the United States differs significantly with counseling in various parts of the world.

Participants’ beliefs about professional identity impacted their transition home and to work. This was illustrated in Composite Textural Theme 6, *My Ongoing Professional Identity Development* and Composite Structural Theme 3, *Self in Relation to*
**Work.** After returning home, participants who worked in the counseling profession, identified feeling more aligned with their professional identity and career trajectory. For example, participants working in higher education reported that applying teaching strategies—which may be different from their cultural norm—helped increase their confidence in their Western education and set them apart from their peers. ICGs who obtained work outside the counseling profession felt their professional identity and adjustment path were less clear when compared to those who found employment in the profession. Participants working in a different profession were less clear on their career trajectory, which left them feeling more disconnected.

International initiatives such as the International Association for Counseling (IAC), the National Board of Certified Counselors International (NBCC-I), and the International Registry of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (IRCEP) were, in part, developed to help unite counselors under a commonly agreed upon definition of the profession (Alvarez & Lee, 2012). The majority of participants in this study either did not seem to have awareness of international initiatives or did not see the initiatives as being beneficial in their professional adjustment. Some participants did indicate having their National Certified Counselor (NCC) credential, and mentioned it as a way of staying connected to their Westernized education after returning home. Encouraging ICGs’ global perspective, by gaining awareness and membership in organizations such as IAC, prior to returning home, may help ICGs feel connected to their professional identity, and may also to help them to identify with their cultural understanding of the profession.
Lau and Ng (2012) presented the concept, *American-Centric Training*, referring to a general lack of diversity-oriented training within counseling programs. Along the same line, Jung et al. (2012) discussed the concept, *application and modification*, regarding how participants in their study applied their education to their professional work in their home country. Participants in the current study echoed these thoughts after returning home, describing feeling professionally divided between two norms: their Western counselor education, and the cultural expectations of counseling in their home country.

Participants described what appeared to be a merging of their Western counselor education with the cultural norms in their own country. Some participants in the current study struggled to find their professional “fit” between the cultural norms and expectations of an American counselor’s professional identity in their home country. Counselor educators can better prepare international counseling students by planning curriculum that meets CACREP standards and educates students about the potential areas of difference between an American-centric professional identity and an international counselor’s professional identity. For example, CACREP-accredited counselor education programs require education on the American Counseling Association’s (ACA) code of ethics. This code was developed to meet the professional identity needs of counselors practicing in the United States. Developing lesson plans that includes cross-cultural perspectives on these codes, offers an opportunity for ICGs to think about similarities and differences in professional identity and ethical standards across cultures.
Language Barriers

Language is presented in the scholarly literature as having a significant impact on the development of counseling as a global profession (Grabosky et al., 2012; Hutz-Midgett & Hutz, 2012). As described in Composite Textural Theme 3, How I Applied My Western Counselor Education Across Cultures, participants in the current study identified challenges with regard to language barriers during their professional adjustment. Language barriers included a lack of cultural understanding regarding the profession of counseling and a counselor’s responsibilities. These findings are in line with Stanard’s (2013) discussion highlighting the subtle complexities of how differences in language can be used to illustrate variations in the profession of counseling around the world. ICGs employed as counselor educators and lecturers at the university level mentioned that translating their Western education into their native language was initially a challenging part of their professional adjustment.

Consistent with an array of scholarly literature devoted to exploring the profession of counseling in various countries around the world, language is noted as having an influence on the development of counseling as a profession (Grabosky et al., 2012; Hutz-Midgett & Hutz, 2012; Watanabe-Muraoka, 2007). In countries where the terms “counseling” and “counselor” were reported as not well-defined, ICGs experienced professional adjustment difficulties. ICGs were challenged to explain their profession to others in countries where the profession was not yet clearly understood or accepted.
Coping Mode

Participants’ overall attitude towards their re-entry upon returning influenced their professional adjustment. Consistent with research conducted by Jung et al. (2012) in which the concept, coping, emerged referring to their participants’ adjustment upon returning home, participants in the current study, reported differences between the profession of counseling in their home country and in the United States. Research conducted by Adler (1981), identified four distinct coping styles of returnees. In the current study five of the eight participants may have been considered proactive (optimistic-active), as they integrated their Western counselor education (e.g., empathy skills, active listening, asking open-ended questions, using specific course work) into their work during their professional adjustment.

It is important to note that of the five participants who may be considered proactive in their coping mode, three were employed full-time in the counseling profession and two were employed full-time outside the profession of counseling. A proactive coping style may be associated with employment, and future research on professional adjustment can focus on whether a proactive coping style led to full-time employment or if full-time employment allowed for a proactive coping style. Similar to Thompson and Christofi’s (2006) study, participants who were proactive in their professional adjustment offered more positive comments and focused on integrating their Western education with their employment at home.

A participant’s coping mode may impact their ability to integrate their knowledge and skills into their work upon returning home, regardless of whether or not they were
adjusting to a position in the counseling profession. Consistent with Adler’s (1981) coping modes, one participant in the current study (Carol) may have been considered re-socialized (optimistic-passive) as she focused more on reintegration and adjustment to her environment than on merging her overseas experiences within her place of employment.

Research conducted by Christofi and Thompson (2007) categorized all of the participants in their study as pessimistic during re-entry. In contrast, only two of the eight participants in the current study might have been described as pessimistic in their re-entry; one seemed more alienated (passive-pessimism) as she was disappointed by her current employment and home environment, while she also felt disconnected from her experiences abroad. The other participant might have been considered rebellious (active-pessimistic) in regards to her coping mode as she expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of her home environment and place of employment. Again, it is worth noting that future research on professional adjustment should focus on whether the disappointment and disconnection upon returning home led to ICGs’ pessimistic coping style or whether a pessimistic coping style led to the disappointment and disconnection ICGs reported in their professional adjustment experiences.

**Individual Characteristics**

In Composite Textural Theme 4, *My Beliefs About My Individual Characteristics*, participants’ professional adjustment appeared to be impacted by their individual characteristics of age and gender, which is consistent with the literature (Brabant, Palmer, & Gramling, 1990; Jung et al., 2012; Szkudlarek, 2010). Participants in the current study...
ranged from 26 to 37 years of age. Szkudlarek (2010) reported that the age of the returnee influences their re-entry stress with “older” returnees reporting less adjustment stress than “younger” ones. As all of the participants in the current study were relatively close in age (i.e., only 11 years between the oldest and youngest participants), comparisons between “older” and “younger” returnees are difficult to make.

Participants, however, discussed psychological distress associated with their professional adjustment in regards to their age and in conjunction with their “newness” at work. Participants described how others (e.g., colleagues and administrators) challenged their professionalism and competence based on their “younger” age. As illustrated in Composite Textural Theme 4, My Beliefs About My Individual Characteristics, participants described responding to their perceptions of ageism in the workplace by advocating for themselves and demonstrating their professional capabilities. According to Szkudlarek (2010), age is a frequently researched variable for re-entry; however, research specifically focusing on ageism at the workplace appears to be lacking.

According to Brabant et al.’s (1990) findings, gender of the returnee was the most important variable in determining issues of adjustment. It is important to note that all of the participants in the current study identified as female. Therefore no comparisons can be made with previous research on the sole factor of gender. Of the eight female participants in the current study only one stated that the expectations of her gender (e.g., to emotionally support her husband, take care of future children, her home and extended family) did not allow her to pursue a career path in the way she might have liked.
Consistent with Brabant et al.’s (1990) findings, participants discussed challenges balancing their family life and career plans.

Participants did not specifically identify their gender roles or norms as an influential factor in their professional adjustment, but their accounts of challenges balancing work roles and family roles, is consistent with Jung et al.’s concept of Challenges. Family has been discussed in re-entry literature (Jung et al., 2012; Pritchard, 2011; Szkudlarek, 2010). Family was identified in the current study (i.e., Composite Structural Theme 1, Self in Relation to Others) in regards to the family’s ability to support reacculturation challenges of ICGs, finding balance between work and family, and taking care of aging family members and children. Participants’ discussions of issues related to their family may be due to their female gender role as numerous re-entry studies have drawn a connection between female returnees reporting greater adjustment stress due to role expectations.

Limitations of the Study

There were research limitations in this phenomenological study. First, all of the participants in this study identified as female; thus, findings may not be transferable to ICGs who identify as male. A second limitation is the potential for researcher biases influencing the data analysis (Moustakas, 1994). As someone who has lived overseas and returned to my home country to work, my experiences could have affected data collection (i.e., interviews) and data analysis. As a measure of trustworthiness, I engaged in bracketing my assumptions regarding this investigation (see Chapter II) to become conscious of biases I may have held during the process of investigation.
Recruitment efforts for the current study took place from September 2016 through February 2017. Accessing participants who met the inclusion criteria was a challenge and represents a limitation of the study. The researcher sent over 50 recruitment emails to key informants in an attempt to gain access to potential participants. However, many institutions do not keep contact information for ICGs after graduation. Additionally, many alumni may no longer check their university email after graduation. In future studies, recruiting participants at international conferences may ease the challenge of recruiting participants via key informants. Potential participants could be recruited directly by the researcher at the conference.

Another limitation of the study occurred during data collection. Initially the researcher had intended to conduct two interviews on separate dates with each participant. The time between the two interviews was intended to allow for reflection on the initial interview. However, due to participant availability and time differences between countries, the researcher conducted two interviews on one date with five of the eight participants. Technological difficulties also occurred during participant interviews via Skype including maintaining a clear image of the participant, unclear audio, and unanticipated breaks in communication due to the screen “freezing.” Although infrequent, difficulties encountered via Skype may have altered participant responses due to missed communication and/or lost train-of-thought by the interviewee and researcher.

A final limitation of the study was the lack of participant responses to the researcher’s attempts to member check. All eight participants were sent a copy of their individual textural and structural description via email for member checking. Two of the
eight participants provided an affirmative member check. One participant responded to the member check with an email that stated, “I currently don’t feel the same way as before.” In the same email, this participant also stated, “I understand that you should use the data collected from me, but can you tell me what I can do to delete or correct some parts of it?” The researcher offered this participant the opportunity to change her description. The participant did not respond. With no revisions from this participant, the researcher assumed that her textural and structural descriptions reflected her professional adjustment experiences at the time of the interview and that her comment regarding a change in feelings indicated a change over the eight months between her interview and receiving her descriptions for member checking. Any change in feeling or perspective for this participant (from interview date to date of last email from this participant) therefore cannot be verified.

The other five participants did not respond to this researcher’s attempts to contact them to complete member checking. The process of member checking was used as a measure of trustworthiness for my interpretation of the participant narratives during analysis. The lack of affirmative responses from six of the participants means that the researcher analysis of these participants’ textural and structural descriptions cannot be verified. In future studies, focusing on the importance of member checking with participants at numerous intervals in the steps of data collection and analyses (i.e., informed consent, at the beginning and completion of each interview, and a reminder that the member check will be forthcoming while the researcher is transcribing data) may help to highlight its importance.
Implications for Counselor Education

The findings of the current study suggest that professional adjustment for ICGs can be stressful, isolating, and challenging. The results of this investigation are only a small representation of the experiences international counseling graduates (ICGs) have after returning to their home country to work. As such, this study can be viewed as a starting point for conversation about the emerging needs of ICGs and the preparation of professional counselors to work in a global environment.

Implications for counselor education programs include developing career assistance programs and curriculum (e.g., courses, electives, and/or independent investigations) that are specific to the unique needs of international students. As previously suggested (Yang, Wong, Hwang, & Heppner, 2002), there is a growing need for culturally competent career assistance specific to the unique challenges of ICGs. Participants discussed the importance of career preparation, in advance of their return home as impotent to their professional adjustment. None of the participants reported having any programmatic career assistance from their counselor education program prior to transitioning home. According to Brabant et al. (1990), there is a “disturbing” and “obvious lack of contact” with international students after they return to their home country (p. 399). Preparing international counseling students for professional adjustment before returning home to work may help students become aware of potential issues such as the possible importance of staying connected to their professional network.

A career preparation program for ICGs could help them build a professional network both in their home country and in their host country. Helping international
counseling students make professional connections in their home country, prior to returning home, might help prevent them from feeling lost and/or isolated upon return. A professional network may include, joining a counseling association in their home country as well as an international one such as NBCC-I. ICGs could be encouraged to research the state of counseling in their home country and to make contact with professional counselors (or counselor educators) in their home country prior to returning. A career program might help ICGs better understand requirements for counseling licensure/certification and/or barriers to obtaining specific counseling credentials both in the United States and in their home country. Gaining a greater understanding of the counseling profession in one’s home country might help to prepare ICGs and ease their adjustment home.

Counselor education programs may also offer international students the opportunity to complete independent investigations regarding counseling as a profession in their home country. Similar to the core multicultural counseling course offered in CACREP-accredited programs, programs could offer an additional opportunity for international students to engage in an independent investigation with a faculty member that is specific to cultural counseling in the student’s home country.

Participants provided different reports on transferring the content of their curriculum to their home countries. For example, Morgan identified her multicultural counseling course as essential to her professional adjustment as a school counselor in her home country. Other participants stated that they would have liked more of an emphasis on the integration of diversity and multicultural counseling into all of their course work.
A contribution from the current study for counselor educators is the continued development of understanding surrounding ICGs’ professional adjustment experiences after returning home to work. In other words, reading about the professional adjustment experiences of ICGs upon returning to their home country may deepen counselor educators awareness regarding issues such as making the decision to return home, navigating professional development opportunities, applying a Western counselor education across cultures, and professional identity development. Compared to domestic counseling graduates remaining in the United States to work, ICGs returning to their home country have unique professional challenges (e.g., finding employment in a country with different mental health laws, understanding an ethical code that differs from ones in the United States, and developing a professional network in one’s home country after living overseas for multiple years). Counselor educators need to be aware of the challenges ICGs may encounter to better prepare them for their professional adjustment, and they may prepare students through lessons in specific coursework or through individual advisement.

As international initiatives continue to develop momentum in the profession of counseling, counselors around the world have more opportunities to collaborate via electronic communication (e.g., Skype or webinars). Counselor educators should evaluate the inclusiveness of their curriculum and assign projects that can both meet their CACREP content standards, and help students remain aware or updated on counseling trends in their home country. Similarly, research assignments may encourage students to
connect with professionals in different countries for networking around professional issues (e.g., human rights, poverty, addiction, trauma, environmental crises, and so on).

It is also worth noting that a class environment that encourages cross-cultural exploration may benefit domestic counseling students’ through increased awareness of global issues. Greater awareness of cross-cultural differences in beliefs, values, and norms may help students working with international clients in the United States (e.g., international students, immigrants, refugees). It may benefit all counseling students to learn about the cross-cultural differences between the profession of counseling as it has developed in the United States, and the development of counseling as a profession in other regions of the world. Course assignments (e.g., research papers and reflection papers) that regard counseling as a national and international profession might not only better prepare ICGs for professional adjustment upon returning home, but might also educate domestic students planning to work with international clients.

**Future Directions in Research**

Findings of the current study provide a phenomenological description of eight ICGs’ lived experiences of professional adjustment after returning to their home country to work. According to a literature review conducted by Szkudlarek (2010), numerous investigations reported differences between male and female experiences of re-entry. Participants in the current study identified as female. Future investigations are needed to illuminate the professional adjustment experiences of ICGs who identify as male, in order to gain a greater awareness of similarities and differences in professional adjustment experiences associated with one’s gender.
Similarly, future studies should be conducted with ICGs from different geographical regions to gain a better understanding of the experiences of professional adjustment for participants returning to regions with different cultural contexts than those in this study. Another area for future research would be to explore the professional identity development of ICGs. Longitudinal studies exploring the professional identity development may help to prepare ICGs for professional adjustment and help to develop their career trajectory in their home country. For example, participants in the current investigation had recently returned to their home country (i.e., between three months and three years). At the time of their interview, the researcher interpreted participants’ reports regarding their professional identity as generally being either professionally aligned or disconnected. Interviewing ICGs who have been home at least three months, but no more than three years and then again when they have been home longer then four years, but no more than eight years, may provide a different perspective regarding ICGs’ long-term professional identity development, as ICGs would have more years to establish their professional identity.

Quantitative studies focused on the development of a professional network for ICGs, prior to graduation, is another area worthy of further investigation. The current study identified the development of a professional network as an important element for ICGs’ professional adjustment after returning to their home country. For example, a quantitative survey may be used to assess how professional networks are best formed for ICGs. A Likert-type scale could be developed that compares activities used to develop a professional network (e.g., email, attending conferences and workshops, joining
international organizations, introduction through colleagues). A quantitative survey may also be able to identify from what regions ICGs would prefer to develop a professional network (i.e., the United States, the ICGs’ home country, or both).

**Conclusion**

This was a phenomenological inquiry that sought to understand the professional adjustment experiences of ICGs after returning to their home country to work. This study was guided by the following research question, “What are the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates who have completed a CACREP-accredited degree program in the United States and returned to their home country to work?”

The researcher identified six Composite Textural Themes and three Composite Structural Themes that comprise the experience of professional adjustment. Composite themes were identified when three or more ICGs shared the textural experience (i.e., action, event, feeling) or structural component (i.e., belief, value, or cultural context). Composite themes comprise the essence of the lived experiences of professional adjustment. The six Composite Textural Themes were: (a) I Decided to Return Home; (b) I am Navigating My Professional Development; (c) How I Applied My Western Counselor Education Across Cultures; (d) My Beliefs About My Individual Characteristics; (e) My Identified Coping Strategies and Supports; and (f) My Ongoing Professional Identity Development. The three Composite Structural Themes were: (a) Self in Relation to Others; (b) Self in Relation to Environment; and (c) Self in Relation to Work.
The Composite Textural and Structural Themes address the research question and comprise the essence of the experience of professional adjustment. The study’s findings added new information to an existing body of literature on the professional adjustment of ICGs entering the counseling profession in their home country. Professional adjustment for ICGs merits further exploration to better support ICGs returning to their home country and to strengthen the profession of counseling around the world. Areas for further exploration might include counselor education programming and curriculum development. The current study’s findings offer support for career preparation programs for ICGs within counselor education programs prior to graduation. Supporting the emerging professional adjustment of ICGs strengthens counseling as a unified global profession.
APPENDICES
APPENDIX A

KENT STATE UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS APPROVAL
Appendix A

Kent State University Institutional Review Board
For Human Participants Approval

The Professional Experiences of International Counseling Graduates Upon Returning to Their Home Country
APPENDIX B

KEY INFORMANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL
Appendix B

Key Informant Recruitment Email

The Professional Experiences of International Counseling Graduates Upon Returning to Their Home Country

My name is Deborah L. Duenyas, and I am a Ph.D. candidate in the Counseling and Human Development Services program at Kent State University. My dissertation research is a phenomenological inquiry of the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates (who earned their counseling degree in the United States) and then returned to their home country. Cynthia Osborn, Ph.D. and John West, Ed.D. are my dissertation co-directors, and this study has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (log # 15-450). I believe this research will benefit the counselor education community by identifying professional adjustment issues international counseling graduates encounter upon returning to their home country. In addition, I believe this study will have implications for counselor education curriculum and programming to prepare international counseling students for professional adjustments before returning to their home country.

The participants in my study must meet the following conditions: (a) identify as an international counseling graduates who traveled to the United States on a student visa specifically to attend a graduate-level counselor education program, (b) have completed a master’s or doctoral degree from a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States, (c) have returned to his or her home country where there is both a professional counseling organization and a university based counselor education program, and (d) been living in his or her home country for a minimum of three months, but no longer than three years since returning from the United States.

In order to locate participants, I am contacting faculty members at CACREP-accredited counseling programs in the United States to help me identify one or two international counseling graduates who completed either a master’s or doctoral degree from their program and have returned to their country to work. Can you identify at least one international counseling graduate who graduated from your program that you believe has returned to their home country to work? If you have one or two people in mind, please provide me with the graduate’s name, office phone number, and professional e-mail address, so that I may (a) add their names to a pool of potential participants and (b) contact them to determine if they are interested in participating in this dissertation research study. If you prefer, or if you have questions, you can also contact me by phone at (973) 487-0188. If possible, please inform your international counseling graduate that you are referring him or her, to me, before giving me his or her contact information.

Thank you for your time and consideration in assisting me with my dissertation research.

Sincerely,

Deborah L. Duenyas, M.Ed., PC
Doctoral Candidate, Counseling and Human Development Services Program
Kent State University
Appendix C
CESNET-L Recruitment Email

The Professional Experiences of International Counseling Graduates Upon Returning to Their Home Country

My name is Deborah L. Duenyas, and I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the Counseling and Human Development Services program at Kent State University. My dissertation research is a phenomenological inquiry of the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates (who earned their counseling degree in the United States) and then returned to their home country. Cynthia Osborn, Ph.D. and John West, Ed.D. are my dissertation co-directors, and this study has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (log # 15-450). I believe this research will benefit the counselor education community by identifying professional adjustment issues international counseling graduates encounter upon returning to their home country. In addition, I believe this study may have implications for counselor education curriculum and programming to prepare international counseling students for professional adjustments before returning to their home country.

Participants will be eligible to participate in this study if they meet the following conditions: (a) identify as an international counseling graduates who traveled to the United States on a student visa specifically to attend a graduate-level counselor education program, (b) have completed a master’s or doctoral degree from a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States, (c) have returned to his or her home country where there is both a professional counseling organization and a university based counselor education program, and (d) been living in his or her home country for a minimum of three months, but no longer than three years since returning from the United States.

To participate in this study, please email me with your name, office phone number, and professional e-mail address so that I may contact you with informed consent documentation.

Or
If you are a faculty member at a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States and can help me identify one or two international counseling graduates who completed either a master’s or doctoral degree from their program and have returned to their country to work. If you have one or two people in mind, please provide me with the graduate’s name, office phone number, and professional e-mail address, so that I may (a) add their names to a pool of potential participants and (b) contact them to determine if they are interested in participating in this dissertation research study. If you prefer, or if you have questions, you can also contact me by phone at (973) 487-0188. If possible, please inform your international counseling graduate that you are referring him or her, to me, before giving me his or her contact information.

Thank you for your time and consideration in assisting me with my dissertation research.

Sincerely,

Deborah L. Duenyas, M.Ed., PC
Doctoral Candidate, Counseling and Human Development Services Program
Kent State University
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT RECRUITMENT EMAIL
Appendix D

Participant Recruitment Email

The Professional Experiences of International Counseling Graduates Upon Returning to Their Home Country

My name is Deborah L. Duenyas, and I am a Ph.D. Candidate in the Counseling and Human Development Services program at Kent State University. My dissertation research is a phenomenological inquiry of the professional adjustment experiences of international counseling graduates (who earned their counseling degree in the United States) and then returned to their home country. Cynthia Osborn, Ph.D. and John West, Ed.D. are my dissertation co-directors, and this study has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (log # 15-450). I believe this research will benefit the counselor education community by identifying professional adjustment issues international counseling graduates encounter upon returning to their home country. In addition, I believe this study may have implications for counselor education curriculum and programming to prepare international counseling students for professional adjustments before returning to their home country.

Participants will be eligible to participate in this study if they meet the following conditions: (a) identify as an international counseling graduates who traveled to the United States on a student visa specifically to attend a graduate-level counselor education program, (b) have completed a master’s or doctoral degree from a CACREP-accredited counseling program in the United States, (c) have returned to his or her home country where there is both a professional counseling organization and a university based counselor education program, and (d) been living in his or her home country for a minimum of three months, but no longer than three years since returning from the United States.

If you meet these requirements and would like to participate in this study, please complete the attached consent forms and participant data sheet. Once completed, return the forms to disaacs1@kent.edu. I will contact you to set up our initial interview. If you have questions, you can also contact me by phone at (973) 487-0188.

Thank you for your time and consideration in assisting me with my dissertation research.

Sincerely,

Deborah L. Duenyas, M.Ed., PC
Doctoral Candidate, Counseling and Human Development Services Program
Kent State University
APPENDIX E

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM
Appendix E

Participant Consent Form

The Professional Experiences of International Counseling Graduates Upon Returning to Their Home Country

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Study Title: The Professional Experiences of International Counseling Graduates Upon Returning to Their Home Country

Principal Investigator: Cynthia Osborn, Ph.D.
Co-Investigators: John West, Ed.D., Deborah Duenyas, M.Ed., L.P.C.

You are invited to participate in a research study regarding the professional experiences of international counseling graduates who completed a CACREP accredited counselor education program in the United States and then returned to their home country to work. I am interested in studying their work-related adjustment after returning to their home country. This document provides you with information regarding the project, what you will need to do, and the associated risks and benefits of the research. Your participation is voluntary. Please read this form carefully. It is important that you ask questions and fully understand the research in order to make an informed decision. You will receive a copy of this document to take with you.

Purpose
The purpose of this phenomenological study is to understand the professional adjustment experiences of former international counseling students (who completed a CACREP-accredited counselor education program in the United States), after returning to their home country to work.

Procedures
Your participation will include meeting via telephone or Skype for two semi-structured interviews (45-60 minutes each) focusing on your experiences of professional adjustment since you returned to your home country to work. You will be emailed a summary of preliminary data analysis specific to you for member checking. After you agree that the researcher’s summary of your professional adjustment experience is representative of your experience, you will be asked to give the description of your professional adjustment experiences to a professional colleague to review for further checking. Your colleague will return the peer perspective form to the co-investigator, Deborah Duenyas.

Although there are no direct benefits to you for participating in the study, your participation will help add to the understanding of former international counseling
students’ professional adjustment after returning to their home country to work. Participation offers the opportunity to discuss your experiences of professional adjustment with another counseling professional familiar with CACREP-accreditation in the United States. There are no anticipated risks or discomforts beyond those encountered in everyday life (e.g., possible technical difficulties when trying to communicate using Skype).

Your study-related information will be kept confidential within the limits of the law; that is, your name, the name of the university you attended in the United States, and the name of your current employer and professional colleague will not be used in any publication or presentation of research results. A pseudonym will be used to replace your actual name, university, employer, and professional colleague. Your research information may, in certain circumstances, be disclosed to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which oversees research at Kent State University, or to certain federal agencies. Your confidentiality may not be maintained if there is an indication that you may harm yourself or others, or if there is any indication of child or elder abuse. Informed consent forms will be converted to digital files and stored on the password protected computer of Deborah Duenyas, M.Ed, P.C.

**Your participation is voluntary.** You may choose not to participate or you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty.

**Contact Information**
If you have any questions or concerns about this research, you may contact Deborah Duenyas at 973-487-0188, Dr. John West at 330-672-0713 or Dr. Cynthia Osborn at 330-672-0695. This project has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board (log # 15-450). If you have any questions about your rights as a research participant or complaints about the research, you may call the IRB at 330.672.2704.

**Consent Statement and Signature**
I have read this consent form and have had the opportunity to have my questions answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I understand that a copy of this consent will be provided to me for future reference.

__________________________________________
Participant Signature

__________________________________________
Participant Printed Name
APPENDIX F

AUDIO RECORDING CONSENT FORM
Appendix F

Audio Recording Consent Form

The Professional Experiences of International Counseling Graduates Upon Returning to Their Home Country

Cynthia Osborn, Ph.D., John West, Ed.D., and Deborah Duenyas, M.Ed.

By agreeing to participate in this study, you are asked to consent to having the two individual interviews (45-60 minutes each) audio recorded. This will make it possible to transcribe the recording for data analysis purposes. A pseudonym will be used to replace your actual name, university, employer, and professional colleague. Audio files will be stored on the password protected computer of Deborah Duenyas, M.Ed, L.P.C. After completion of this research study, audio recordings will be destroyed.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Deborah Duenyas at (973) 487-0188 or disaacs1@kent.edu or Dr. Cynthia Osborn at (330) 672-0695 or cosborn@kent.edu or Dr. John West at (330) 672-0713 or jwest@kent.edu. If you have questions about the rights of human participants in research, or to report a problem, you can contact the Kent State University IRB office at (330) 672-2704.

CONSENT

I agree to participate in two audio-recorded interviews about my experiences of professional adjustment after returning to my home country to work as part of this research project and for the purposes of data analysis. I agree that Deborah Duenyas may audio-tape these interviews. The date, time and mode of the interview (i.e., Skype or phone) will be mutually agreed upon.

________________________________________  ______________________
Signature                                      Date

I have been told that I have the right to listen to the audio recording of the interviews before they are used. I have decided that I:

_____ want to listen to the recordings       _____ do not want to listen to the recordings

Sign now below if you do not want to listen to the recordings. If you want to listen to the recordings, you will be asked to sign after listening to them.

Deborah Duenyas may / may not (circle one) use the audio-recorded files made of me. The original recordings or copies may be used for:

_____ this research project _____ publications _____ presentations at professional meetings

________________________________________  ______________________
Signature                                      Date

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Appendix G

Demographic Form

The Professional Experiences of International Counseling Graduates Upon Returning to Their Home Country

Please complete the entire form.

First Name: ___________________________ Last Name: ___________________________

Home Address: ___________________________________________ Apt/Suite #: ______

City: ___________________________ Province: ___________________________

Municipality: ___________________________ Country: ___________________________

Home Phone: ___________________________ Mobile Phone Number: ___________________________

E-mail: ___________________________________________

Skype User Name: ___________________________

Age: ___________________________

Native Language/s: ___________________________________________

How do you identify culturally, which may include nationality, race, and/or ethnicity (e.g., Australian Aborigine): ___________________________________________

What is your graduate academic degree background?

Master’s degree, Program Title: ___________________________________________

Month and Year Graduated ___________________________________________

Doctoral degree, Program Title: ___________________________________________

Month and Year Graduated ___________________________________________

How many months/years has it been since completing your CACREP-accredited degree in counseling in the United States and returning to your home country? _________________
Place an X in the circle below to indicate which response applies to you.

Gender: ( ) Female ( ) Male ( ) Transgender ( ) Other: Please specify _____________

What is your current primary job function?
( ) Counselor ( ) University Full-Time Faculty Member/Lecturer ( ) Part-time Faculty Member/Lecturer ( ) Other ________________________________

What is your primary work setting?
( ) Community (residential)
( ) University (Clinical)
( ) Hospital (in patient)
( ) School
( ) Correctional Facility
( ) Community (out patient)
( ) University Full-time or Part-time Faculty/Lecturer (Academic)
( ) Hospital (out patient)
( ) Private Practice
( ) Other ________________________________
APPENDIX H

PEER PERSPECTIVE
Appendix H

Peer Perspective

The Professional Experiences of International Counseling Graduates Upon Returning to Their Home Country

Dear ________________,

As a final step in this research project, please provide the following peer perspective to a professional colleague along with the enclosed description of your professional adjustment experiences. The peer perspective provides the researcher with another means to validate her description of your experiences.

Thanks again for your time and willingness to be a part of this investigation!

Sincerely,

Deborah Duenyas, M.Ed., LPC
Doctoral Candidate
Counselor Education and Supervision
Kent State University
(973) 487-0188
disaacs1@kent.edu
Peer Perspective

You are invited to provide a peer perspective of the professional adjustment experiences of an international counseling graduate who completed a CACREP accredited counselor education program in the United States. My name is Deborah L. Duenyas, and I am a Ph.D. candidate in Counseling and Human Development Services at Kent State University in Ohio.

Your peer __________________, has volunteered to participate in this study, which has been approved by the Kent State University Institutional Review Board. Your participation is voluntary. Please read the attached description of __________________’s professional adjustment while returning to work in ___________________________.

(Country)

After reading the description, please respond to the following questions:

Does the attached description of __________________’s professional adjustment capture, or is it consistent with, your understanding of the participant’s professional adjustment since obtaining a master’s degree and/or doctoral degree in the United States?

Please circle: Yes or No

Please explain:


Professional Title: __________________________

Relationship to Participant: __________________________

Years Knowing the Participant: __________________________

After completing the peer perspective, please scan and email this document to Deborah Duenyas at disaacs1@kent.edu. Thank you!
APPENDIX I

MAGGIE TEXTURAL-STRUCTURAL DESCRIPTIONS
Appendix I

Individual Textural and Structural Description of Professional Adjustment

The Professional Experiences of International Counseling Graduates Upon Returning to Their Home Country

This researcher investigated professional adjustment through interviews with eight participants who identified themselves as international graduates, who had completed a counseling degree program in the United States, and who had returned to their home country to work. Using the verbatim transcripts, an individual textural description of the experiences of professional adjustment was constructed for each participant. The following presents the nature and focus of the experiences of professional adjustment, as discussed by Maggie. Professional adjustment for Maggie occurred around her experiences of deciding to return home, navigating career and life choices, applying her Western counselor education across cultures, beliefs about individual characteristics, identified coping strategies and supports, and ongoing professional identity development.

Maggie identified two reasons for deciding to return home including her husband and work. Maggie stated, “The main reason I decided to come back home is because of my husband.” Maggie’s husband remained working in their home country while she attained her Ph.D. degree in the United States. Maggie stated that her husband enjoyed working in their home country and he might have had a hard time finding employment if she asked him to move to the United States. The second reason Maggie reported making the decision to return home was that, “I decided to come back to [home country] because
I have a very stable job while I can prepare for applying to a faculty job.” Maggie was able to return to the work she held prior to obtaining her degree overseas. Maggie’s employment provided her financial stability while she prepared to apply for a faculty positions as a counselor educator in her home country.

Professional adjustment for Maggie included *navigating career and life choices*. Maggie talked about the different professional components (i.e., counselor licensure, presentations, workshops, publications, etc.) to invest herself in that would best help her to pursue her counselor education career in her home country. According to Maggie, “Publication is more important to apply for a faculty position in [home country] than counselor certification.” In addition to planning her career path, Maggie stated that she wanted to plan for other life changes. Maggie identified numerous career and life events to navigate through in her first year home including, “when should we try to have babies? When should I try and apply for a faculty position? When do I need to achieve my publication goals?” Maggie expressed feeling “very nervous” about negotiating these decisions during her first year home.

*Applying Western counselor education across cultures* was a part of Maggie’s professional adjustment. Maggie discussed the relevance of language as a professional in her home country, “I learned all the counseling related terms in English so [native professional language] terms are just more unfamiliar to me.” Although Maggie reported at times it was “hard to recall” terms in her native language, she also expressed feeling her counseling students were “satisfied with her.” This was another adjustment for Maggie, because as a doctoral supervisor and student in the United States Maggie
reported feeling “limited to understand” and “withdrawn” due to language differences. Maggie stated, “It was hard to get over my [lack of] confidence, from losing track, but after I got back to [home country] it was [felt] natural to get out of that track [to regain confidence in my professional work].”

Maggie further identified beliefs about individual characteristics (i.e., age and gender) as aspects that influenced her decisions regarding her professional adjustment. Maggie stated that, “I think if I were a man, I would definitely stay in the USA. I would ask my wife to stay in the USA and support me as a professor.” Maggie expressed feeling “pressure” as a woman to give up her career. Maggie also identified her age as an important aspect of her adjustment stating, “As I get older, I feel like family has more [of a] priority [in life] than my career. When I was in my twenties, I feel that my career is number one, but now I think if I don’t become a professor it doesn’t matter.”

Maggie also identified coping strategies and supports that assisted her professional development. She stated that without the collaboration of her American colleagues/cohort, professional adjustment as a counselor educator would be “impossible.” Maggie stated, “The most helpful and important thing in preparation for applying for a faculty position in [home country] are publications. So the most helpful thing until now is the collaboration with my American colleagues.” Maggie also identified talking with peers, sharing feelings, and thoughts with those peers who have shared similar experiences as one of her most helpful coping strategies. In addition to American colleagues, Maggie reported receiving, “Emotional, psychological, and practical support from my master’s degree advisor in [home country].”
Maggie described her ongoing professional identity development. When Maggie returned to her home country she returned to the job she had prior to coming to the United States for her PhD degree. Maggie did not return to a job as a clinical counselor or a full-time faculty member, deviating from a “standard” professional development model for counselors or counselor educators. Maggie expressed that, “If I [had] applied to a faculty position in the United States my transition from a counselor trainee to counselor educator might have been smooth but in [home country] I’m just a [current employment] with a doctoral degree. It's very weird” and “It doesn't feel as smooth.”

**Structural Description of Professional Adjustment for Maggie**

Whereas the textural description described “what” happened, using the verbatim examples from the participant, the individual structural description illustrates the researcher’s interpretation of “how” this experience came to be. After careful reflection and analysis on the events and situations, feelings and thoughts presented by the participants and connected with professional adjustment, the researcher conceptualized the underlying structures of the experience, beyond the evident and into the essence of the experience. The underlying structures of Maggie’s professional adjustment are expressed as *self in relation to family, self in relation to gender and age, self in relation to environment, self in relation to home culture, and self in relation to professional identity.*

Maggie’s professional adjustment after returning home to work was largely influenced her *relationship with her family.* Maggie had a strong sense of responsibility to her family, specifically her husband, who had remained in her home country while she
received her Ph.D. degree in the United States. Maggie felt responsible to return home and work, as she would have more opportunities to pursue her career in her home country than her husband would in the United States. Maggie believed it was her responsibility to return to work in her home country and this was the more sensible decision. Maggie weighed the pros and cons of returning home and felt there were more benefits to her returning than to her remaining in the United States. On a deeper level was the feeling that, “I choose to be responsible and sensible” in my decisions.

Maggie’s choice to be “responsible and sensible” was also a source of stress for her as she navigated her career and life choices after returning home. After returning home, Maggie found herself dividing her time between her family, her day job, part-time lecturing, and preparing to apply for faculty positions. Maggie wanted to use her time effectively, which involved teaching herself to manage time in a way she felt was responsible and sensible. The fear of making choices that were not “responsible or sensible” caused Maggie to feel nervous and stressed in her initial adjustment home.

For Maggie, *self in relation to gender and age* involved pressure. Maggie talked about being a female in her thirties. She identified the pressure she felt to start a family. Maggie stated that she would not feel this pressure if she was a man. She also reflected on experiences in her twenties when she did not feel this pressure. The pressure influenced her professional adjustment because Maggie struggled with this pressure as a professional woman, as she wanted to start a family and obtain a faculty position at a university.
For Maggie, the structure *self in relation to environment* was one of resilience during her professional adjustment home. Maggie identified coping strategies and supports, echoing the phrase, I can cope with the stress of my professional adjustment. Maggie identified numerous internal and external supports to help her achieve her professional goals and invest her time appropriately. She acknowledged that returning home was not a smooth professional transition, but she maintained a strong personal and professional support network to help her thorough these challenges.

*Self in relation to her home culture* was a feeling of professional confidence for Maggie. Although, Maggie talked about language differences when translating and interpreting professional English terminology into her native language, the more resounding feeling was one of professional confidence and strength. Maggie remembered feeling insecure about her skills while studying in the United States but identified feeling empowered as a professional in her home culture, where she had indigenous knowledge of the counseling culture.

By returning to her home country, Maggie had deviated from what seemed to be a clear professional trajectory in the United States to navigating a less defined career course in the home country. For Maggie, *self in relation to her professional identity* was full of uncertainty, a journey without a clear road map. Maggie did not feel she had reached the full potential of her Ph.D. degree. Her professional adjustment was influenced by this insecurity about her professional identity.

In essence, professional adjustment for Maggie can be understood through her relationship with her family, gender and age, environment, home culture, and her
professional identity. Maggie’s professional adjustment was permeated by a sense of responsibility to herself and to her family. On one hand Maggie was working to pave a career path in her home country, while on the other struggling with the desire to start a family. Maggie felt proud of her professional accomplishments, but also struggled to find the right balance of time for work and time for family.
REFERENCES


