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International Student Support Groups: Understanding
Experiences of Group Members and Leaders

Nathaniel W. Page

A dissertation submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Mark E. Beecher, Chair
Timothy Smith
Aaron P. Jackson
P. Scott Richards
Lane Fischer

Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education

Brigham Young University

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ABSTRACT

International Student Support Groups: Understanding Experiences of Group Members and Leaders

Nathaniel W. Page
Department of Counseling Psychology and Special Education, BYU
Doctor of Philosophy

A multi-site qualitative study explored the group experiences of 6 group leaders and 10 group members who participated in 7 different university counseling center international student support groups. Data collection and analysis phases followed the process of hermeneutic interpretation articulated by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), which resulted in nine major themes and ten sub-themes organized into four sections: (a) Recruitment and group design, (b) Experiences of group members, (c) Experiences of group leaders, and (d) Additional considerations. Implications for international student support groups are discussed.

Keywords: International students, groups, support, counseling

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DESCRIPTION OF DISSERTATION FORMAT

This dissertation, *International Student Support Groups: Understanding Experiences of Group Members and Leaders*, is structured differently than the traditional five-chapter format. It is organized and presented according to the length and style of a standard journal article in the fields of psychology and education. The reference section, on page 45, concludes the journal format portion of this dissertation and is followed by a full literature review and the associated references, as well as some supporting documents that are included as appendices.

International Student Support Groups:

Understanding Experiences of Group Members and Leaders

Ernesto was excited to move to the United States to pursue a graduate degree in mechanical engineering. He was motivated to make the most of both his educational and social experiences. Even though most of his American peers were friendly, Ernesto was surprised at how difficult it was to develop friendships with them. Even other international students seemed uninterested in hanging out. He heard there were a few other students from his country of origin who lived in his city, but he rarely interacted with them. Ernesto was also surprised at the difficulty of his coursework and found himself spending considerably more time on his homework and research than his native English-speaking classmates did. He often felt frustrated, confused, and isolated from his peers. As his first year came to a close, Ernesto resolved to spend the rest of his time in the United States focusing exclusively on his schoolwork and decided to wait until he returned home to pursue meaningful social relationships.

The number of international students studying in U.S. institutions of higher education reached a record high of more than 886,052 students for the 2013-2014 academic year, which was an 8.1% increase from the previous academic year (Institute of International Education, 2014). International student enrollment has been steadily increasing over the past few decades and this trend is expected to continue for the next several decades (Das, Chow, & Rutherford, 1986; Institute of International Education, 2014; Sandhu, 1995). There are many universities where international students constitute 5-17% of their student body. Brigham Young University, for example, enrolled 1,828 international students during the fall of 2014, which was about 6% of the entire student body (Brigham Young University, 2014).

While each international student's experience is unique, almost all could probably relate to Ernesto and his experience described above. In fact, most students (international or domestic) experience challenges in their social, academic, and emotional adjustment to life as a university or college student (Arnett, 2000; Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Credé & Niehorster, 2012; Hays & Oxley, 1986; Tinto, 1993; Ward & Kennedy, 1999). For international students, however, the adjustment challenges are compounded, more complex, and often very different than those of American students. Some of the most cited challenges include language difficulties (Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008; Sakurako, 2000), cultural adjustment (Constantine, Anderson, Berkel, Caldwell, & Utsey, 2005), employment restrictions and financial concerns (Thomas & Althen, 1989), discrimination (Poyrazli & Lopez, 2007), adjustment to the American university system (Aubrey, 1991; Zhai, 2002) isolation, homesickness, and lack of support from American peers (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Heggings & Jackson, 2003; Wehrly, 1988).

Several studies indicate that, due to increased adjustment challenges, international students are considered a high-risk group and may experience more psychological problems than their American peers (Dillard & Chisholm, 1983; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994; Yi, Lin, & Kishimoto, 2003). Some of the most cited concerns include anxiety, depression, academic problems, financial worries, relationship concerns (Fan, 2000; Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, & Lucas, 2004; Yi et al., 2003), as well as homesickness, language barriers, cultural isolation, loneliness, and stress due to adjustment and acculturation issues (Choe, 1996; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Heggings & Jackson, 2003; Pedersen, 1991; Olivas & Li, 2006; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wehrly, 1988).

University counseling centers are one potential resource for helping international students navigate adjustment challenges and address psychological concerns. However, it is well

documented that international students tend to utilize counseling services less than their American peers (Choe, 1996; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Heggings & Jackson, 2003; Pedersen, 1991; Olivas & Li, 2006; Wehrly, 1988). Identifying the reasons for this underutilization phenomenon can provide insight to counseling centers that are attempting to reach out to the international community. Some researchers have proposed that international students might be less aware of the option of counseling and the availability of university counseling services (Idowu, 1985; Mori, 2000). Others note that international students may fear the stigma attached to counseling (Arthur, 1997; Lin, 1996; Mori, 2000) and may prefer to seek help from family and other support services (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Pederson, 1991). Sue & Sue (1999) pointed out that the Western values and assumptions embedded in American counseling may deter international students from seeking and using counseling.

Smith, Chin, Inman, and Finding (1999) were among the first in the literature to propose the potential benefits of a support group for international students. Since then, other articles have asserted that a group approach to counseling with international students may directly positively impact adjustment difficulties and psychological concerns of international students in the following ways: increasing social support and interpersonal learning, decreasing isolation and loneliness, providing a safe and normalizing environment and a non-judgmental place to practice language skills, helping group members learn practical information about living in the United States, and providing opportunities to learn new coping strategies (Carr, Koyama, & Thiagarajan, 2003; Dipeolu, Kang, & Cooper, 2007; Smith et al., 1999; Walker & Conyne, 2007). Dipeolu et al. (2007) outlined an argument for why a group counseling approach may have important advantages over individual counseling with international students:

First, it would provide a supportive context for students to discuss adjustment concerns, thus normalizing these concerns and reducing feelings of isolation (Mori, 2000; Smith et al., 1999). Second, a support group would promote the development of a social support system to provide a critical buffer against adjustment stress (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Third, given that language skills have been found to be a critical element in adjustment (Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991), it would provide international students with a supportive and non-evaluative environment in which to practice English skills. Finally, it would foster information sharing between students regarding problem-solving and resources around campus and the community. In sum, group support offers advantages over individual counseling because groups can instill hope, modify feelings of being alone, impart information, assist students to feel needed and useful, help them to develop socializing techniques, promote interpersonal learning, and provide a sense of community and group cohesion (Carr et al., 2003, p. 66).

It appears that clinicians in many university counseling centers agree that a group approach may be beneficial for international students. A cursory review of university counseling center websites revealed that more than 25 universities were advertising one or more groups designed specifically for international students. The various types of group services for international students were listed as support groups, discussion groups, psychoeducational groups, and counseling groups.

A relatively small body of literature provides some aid for clinicians interested in developing successful group services for international students. An extensive literature search using EBSCO resulted in eight articles (i.e., Carr et al, 2003; Delgado-Romero & Wu, 2010; Dipeolu et al, 2007; Lee, 2008; Smith & Khawaja, 2014; Smith et al, 1999; Sobre-Denton, 2011;

Yakunina, Weigold, & McCarthy, 2011) and two book chapters (i.e., Walker & Conyne, 2007; Yau, 2004) that are related to international student groups. Four of these articles address groups that are in some way related to a university counseling center (Carr et al, 2003; Dipeolu et al., 2007; Smith et al., 1999; Yakunina et al., 2011) and one article reports pre-post data from an group intervention (STAR Programme) led by two clinical psychology graduate students at an Australian university (Smith & Khawaja, 2014).

These articles and books chapters on international student groups are based on the authors' personal clinical experiences and knowledge working with international students in group and individual settings. They provide valuable insights regarding how the authors approached such issues as advertisement and recruitment, group formation and development, group format and agenda, ethical considerations, discussion topics, group states and process, and group supervision within the development of their groups.

Despite the growing body of articles, Yakunina et al. (2011) stressed that there is a lack of formalized research and emphasized the need for clinicians and researchers to evaluate international student groups in order to demonstrate their efficacy. Yau (2004) stated, "There is a dearth of research studies on group counseling, support groups, or psychoeducational group programming with international students" (p. 255), and therefore he based his chapter on literature about psychoeducational workshops for international students, cultural exchange programs, intercultural communication workshops, and multicultural groups. In addition to pointing out the lack of research, Yau also asserted that very little professional consensus and conceptual clarity exists regarding groups with international students, and agrees with Leong and Chou's (1996) statement, "It seems quite clear that the practice of counseling international students cannot wait for the fruits of scientific research" (p. 238).

One recent article (Smith & Khawaja, 2014) has provided some formalized empirical data from a pilot study of a four-week experiential and cognitive-behavioral group intervention for international students attending an Australian university. The group was co-lead by two graduate students and supervised by a licensed psychologist. It is unclear if it was conducted in connection with a university counseling center. The results show that their intervention increased group members' psychological adaptation and coping self-efficacy from pre- to post-group.

Statement of the Problem

There is seemingly a great need for additional support for international students and many counseling centers have recognized the potential value of support group services. However, at the present time, it seems that many counseling centers have been unsuccessful in their attempts to develop and maintain this type of service. While the existing literature provides some valuable information and ideas based on each author's personal clinical experiences and knowledge, there is still much work to be done to establish professional consensus and conceptual clarity regarding best practices for international student groups. There is also very little published research evidence regarding best practices for developing and leading these types of groups.

Current Study

This multi-site study gathered the perspectives of group leaders and members from successful international student support groups at seven universities in the United States. The data help provide a valuable step toward professional consensus and conceptual clarity regarding how to develop and improve group services for international students. They also provide empirical support that demonstrates the value of a group approach for helping international

students face adjustment challenges and psychological concerns. It is anticipated that this qualitative research will help further the dialog on establishing best practices for working with international students in groups.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to understand group leaders' and group members' experiences in international student group counseling.

Research Questions

This study addressed the following research questions:

1. What is the experience of international student group members with the group?
2. What is the experience of international student group leaders with the group?
3. How do the experiences of group members and group leaders compare with each other and with the knowledge base in current literature?

Method

The study was approved through the Institutional Review Board at Brigham Young University on June 11, 2012. A letter from the BYU IRB was provided to the review boards at each university with participating students. This method section details the research design including participants, procedures, data analysis, and limitations.

Research Design

Generalization is one of the basic schemas of scientific reasoning, and both quantitative and qualitative methods can produce limited types of generalization. In quantitative approaches researchers attempt to reduce contextual variables in order to isolate specific phenomena and then make statistical generalizations based on inferences of sample and population data (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). In qualitative approaches, on the other hand, researchers often work to gather

contextual information and understand specific phenomena within their context and then work to generalize results to other cases that share similar contextual variables. Schwadnt (2007) refers to this approach as *analytical generalization*.

A qualitative design was chosen for this study in order to help produce a deep, meaningful, and context-specific understanding of participants and their experiences related to their support group. The researchers assumed that this rich understanding of participants' experiences would best lead researchers and readers to appropriately generalize and transfer findings to other contexts—principally to counseling center clinicians who wish to develop international student group services in their college settings.

This study was, in part, confirmatory in that the researchers desired to know if themes from the theoretical literature would be upheld by the experiences of group members and leaders in several university contexts. The study was also exploratory in that researchers desired to learn additional themes regarding the experiences of group members and leaders with an international student group that have not yet been discussed. Resulting themes from international student interviews were compared with themes from group leader interviews and with themes in current literature on groups with international students. This follows a data triangulation methodology like that defined by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) as “an attempt to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity of human behavior by studying it from more than one standpoint” (p. 254).

The philosophical foundation for the conceptualization and data gathering/analyses phases of this study was based in a relational ontology. Slife (2004) explained that a relational ontology is based on the assumption that relationships to our context are not only fundamental to our existence, but constitute our existence. We exist within, and *because of*, relationships. Slife

continued to note, “all things, including all practices, have a shared being and a mutual constitution in this sense. They start out and forever remain in relationship” (p. 159). Therefore, he says, it would change the nature of persons to try to abstract them from their context and understand them as a self-contained organism. It would also change the nature of things such as ideas, practices, and understandings to try to abstract them from their contexts—which include traditions, biases, and prejudices.

From these assumptions, the researchers chose an epistemological paradigm that is hermeneutic and dialectic (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Schwandt (2000) noted that, from a hermeneutic philosophy, “reaching an understanding is not a matter of setting aside, escaping, managing, or tracking one’s own standpoint, prejudgments, biases or prejudices. On the contrary, understanding requires the *engagement* of one’s biases” (p. 195, italics in original). Therefore knowledge or understanding, “is something that is *produced* in dialogue, not something *reproduced* by an interpreter through an analysis” (Schwandt, 2000, p. 195, italics in original).

It is important to note that the hermeneutic and dialectic epistemology, and the relational ontology assumptions of this study differ from some other qualitative approaches, including the commonly used Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) developed by Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997), which assumes a constructivist ontology, and primarily a constructivist epistemology (Hill et al., 2005). Hill et al. (2005) explained that a constructivist ontology is the assumption that, “people construct their reality and that there are multiple, equally valid, socially constructed versions of ‘the truth’” (p. 4). Therefore, knowledge is something that is *uncovered* through the interview process, and the role of the interviewer, “is typically as a trustworthy reporter trying to uncover what the participant truly believes, rather than as someone who

engages with the participant in a deeply relational way to coconstruct meaning.” (p. 5). From this perspective, truth is established individually and reified by the amount of individuals endorsing a similar truth. Therefore, consensus among participant data and among researchers (e.g., inter-rater reliability) about an abstract “truth” is what constitutes legitimacy. Researchers need to be aware of their biases in order to contain them from disrupting the purity of the truth that the participant has already constructed.

Consensus was not the goal of the present study because, from a relational ontology, truth is established through the dialectic and hermeneutic dialogue process. In fact, knowledge and understanding are produced just as well, if not more so, through dialogues replete with diversity and conflict. The knowledge gained from this study was *produced* through the dialogue process of the interviews and the dialogue process of the research team during transcript analysis.

Participants

There were two different sets of participants in this study: group leaders and group members. The initial phase of the study focused on interviewing group leaders and analyzing resulting transcription data, and the second phase focused on group member interviews and data analysis. The international student groups were also treated as distinct participants. This is because the researchers intended to understand the development and dynamics of the group-as-a-whole systems (see Agazarian, 1989) in addition to understanding the impact groups had on individual group leaders and group members.

Group leaders. Efforts were made to make contact with all known international student group leaders in the United States, through the use of e-mail listserves and personalized phone calls from the principal investigator. Six group leaders (five licensed staff psychologists and one doctoral trainee) from five university counseling centers in the United States volunteered and

participated in the study. (Institutional affiliations were not listed in order to protect the confidentiality of research participants.) Two interviewees had been international students in the United States during their graduate training, one was an immigrant to the United States as a child, and three identified as second or third generation immigrants. Five group leaders identified as female and one as male. Group leaders had been leading international student groups for a range of 2 semesters to 10 years. All group leaders reported that international student concerns were one of their primary clinical interests.

Three group leaders volunteered to participate in the study by responding to an e-mail sent through a listserv of professionals interested in group interventions in college counseling settings. Three group leaders volunteered after a personal invitation from the principal investigator on the telephone.

Group members. Interviews were conducted with 10 international students from four universities. Group members had attended a counseling center support group for an average of 10 months (range of 2 months to 4 years), and had been in the United States for an average of 26 months (range of 2 months to 10 years). Nine students came from Asian countries (China, Macau, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia) and one from Saudi Arabia. Four students were in Ph.D. programs, five were in master's programs, and one was completing the first semester of freshman year. Seven identified as female and three as male. Group members volunteered to participate in the study after learning about it through a flyer distributed by their group leader. Significant efforts were made to conduct interviews with more group members, and the data collection phase of the project was extended several semesters in order to try and recruit more group member participants.

The group members volunteered to participate in the study by responding to a recruitment letter and sign-up sheet that was announced by the group leader during a session, or sent by the group leader through to e-mail (see Appendix B). The group leaders were instructed to help group members understand that participation was completely voluntary and that declining to participate was a viable option and would not impact them in any way. Group leaders were not made aware of which group members participated in the study.

International student groups. Seven groups were represented in this study and all participants were connected with a group designed specifically for international students and conducted under the auspices of a university counseling center. Groups were advertised as “support” and/or “discussion” groups and met weekly for 60-90 minutes. Four groups met in a room in the counseling center and three groups met in locations outside the counseling center. Four groups had a closed enrollment format while three had open (e.g., “drop in”) group formats. Most of the groups could be described as a mixture of support and psycho-education, and some included task-oriented or process-oriented components. There was significant discrepancy in the way groups approached confidentiality, extra-therapy relationships, the role of the group leader(s), and the purpose of group. These discrepancies are described in the results section of this paper.

Procedures

The chosen methodology was a systematic interpretation process referred to as *hermeneutic interpretation* and described by Kvale and Brinkman (2009) and by Jackson and Patton (1992), and is very similar to the *Collaborative Hermeneutic Interpretation* (CHI) method used by McKenzie et al. (2013). Interviews were conducted via telephone and Skype by the principal investigator who had received extensive training in qualitative interviewing. All

participants signed a consent form (See Appendix C) prior to scheduling an interview and were provided time during the interview to ask questions about the informed consent and the research project.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature and lasted between 46 and 64 minutes. Each interview followed a sequence of themes that were addressed through the use of questions (See Appendix E) yet the interviewer was open to changing the sequence and to addressing new themes in order to help the participant's story and experience unfold in a meaningful way. Many of these questions were based on themes from current literature and designed to assess if the group members' and leaders' experiences confirmed or disconfirmed these themes. Other questions were designed to help make space to explore new areas and create hypotheses that might add to the current literature. The interviewer also used conversational skills to help produce an understanding of the participant's experience. For example, follow-up questions, clarification questions, interpretive statements, empathy statements, intentional silence, and summary statements were often used.

Through the interview dialogue and the subsequent analysis of interview transcripts, the researchers and research participants produced a meaningful understanding of the lived experiences of the group members and leaders. The data collection and analysis attended to the following aspects of qualitative research interviews (adapted from Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009, p. 28-32).

1. *Life World*. Attention to the everyday lived world of the interviewee and his or her relation to it.
2. *Meaning*. Efforts to seek meaning of central themes through dialogue.
3. *Qualitative*. Dialogue aimed at qualitative rather than quantitative language.

4. *Descriptive*. Encouragement of nuanced and different descriptions of the participants' life worlds.
5. *Specify*. Encouragement of specific situations and action sequences, not general opinions.
6. *Deliberate Naiveté*. Interviewer is open to new and unexpected phenomena and tries to limit "readymade categories" and "schemes of interpretation."
7. *Focused*. Attention is on the content of interest, but is neither strictly structured questions or entirely "nondirective."
8. *Ambiguity*. Acknowledgement of possible ambiguities and contradictions in the dialogue.
9. *Change*. Awareness of new insights that may come to interviewer and participant in the interview.
10. *Sensitivity*. Different interviewers can produce different statements on the same themes, depending on their sensitivity to and knowledge of the interview topic.
11. *Interpersonal Situation*. Knowledge that each interviewer brings varying degrees of sensitivity to different aspects of the participants' experiences and perspectives.
12. *Positive Experience*. Interviews can be an enriching experience for interviewees, and as a result they may attain new insights into their life situations.

The group leader and member interviews were transcribed and analyzed by a research team comprised of three graduate students, three undergraduate students, and one faculty member. The research team held one-hour meetings weekly throughout the phases of transcription and post-interview analysis. Each member transcribed between two and six interviews and used this meeting to ask questions and arrive at a consensus regarding formatting

of the transcripts (e.g., use a dash if a speaker is cut off from talking, or use “[?]” when the transcriber can’t understand a word or phrase). The team completed the interviews and transcriptions of group leaders first, and then proceeded into post-interview analysis with these data. The ten group member interviews were conducted during the time that the team was analyzing the six group leader interviews. Once the group member interviews were completed and transcribed, the team began analysis on these ten interviews. Upon completion of the group member analysis, the team conducted an overall analysis comparing the themes of the group leader data with the group member data.

The post-interview analysis was conducted following the same hermeneutic interpretation as the interviews (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The analysis team created a qualitative analysis guide (see Appendix F) to structure the hermeneutic interpretation process. The following outline describes the basic tenets of this process:

1. Team members made an effort to be aware of personal and team biases and assumptions through the use of journal writing exercises and group discussions.
2. Team members read each transcript and pulled themes individually.
3. The team met weekly for one hour to compare and discuss themes with the intention of constructing collaborative interpretations. A team leader took notes on the group discussions and the whole team worked to accurately articulate emerging themes in written format. Team members were encouraged to voice discrepancies in their interpretations, and in each meeting a list of questions was generated for subsequent readings and team discussions.
4. The team repeated steps 1-3 multiple times in order to re-examine the transcripts and find evidence that confirmed or disconfirmed the emerging themes. As parts of

the text were continually compared to the whole, the repetition deepened understanding of current themes and helped produce new themes and answer research questions. This part of the analysis is often referred to as a “cycle” or a “spiral” and was well articulated by von Zweck, Paterson, and Pentland (2008): By revolving through the hermeneutic circle at each level of the spiral, analysis alternated between seeking the meaning of individual parts of data with contextualizing this information within the overall interpretation... a layering of new knowledge was created that developed progressively deeper insight (p. 125-126).

The research team met for a total of 12 weeks and completed three full cycles of analysis with each group leader and group member transcript.

5. An external auditor (a researcher not involved in the previous four stages of analysis) examined both the research process and product in relation to the original transcripts. His purpose was to evaluate the accuracy of the findings, interpretations, and conclusions of the research.

In order to increase the accuracy and credibility of the study results, two group leader research participants and two group member participants were asked to perform a member check on resulting themes. These participants were sent an e-mail with an attached document of the themes in written form. They were asked to critically analyze the findings and provide any feedback that would be incorporated into the hermeneutic process of analysis. One group leader and one group member responded to the e-mail and expressed that they felt the themes accurately captured their experiences and did not have any critical feedback.

Assumptions and Biases of the Researchers

The principal investigator was a European American male student from the United States who was in a counseling psychology doctoral program. The research team was comprised of a European American male faculty psychologist, a female counseling psychology doctoral student from China, a female counseling psychology doctoral student from Japan, a male and a female undergraduate student who identified as European Americans, and one undergraduate female who identified as a foreign-born U.S. citizen who emigrated from Hong Kong.

All members of the research team journaled about their assumptions and biases prior to beginning the interviewing and analysis processes and then discussed these entries with the group. Team members who identified as international students or first generation immigrants worked to understand how their personal experiences could aid, and limit, their ability to accurately understand participants' experiences. Team members from the United States also worked to understand how personal experiences might contribute, or detract, from being able to accurately understand participants' experiences. It was assumed that the diversity of the team members' experiences, biases, and assumptions—and the process of continually examining these experiences, biases, and assumptions—would ultimately aid in increasing the accuracy of the interpretation and resulting themes.

Team members shared some general assumptions about the research project: first, that a support group approach for international students could be helpful for any student with adjustment concerns, despite the demographic diversity and the variety of adjustment concerns found among the international student population; second, that students participating in the study would primarily be those who had had positive experiences with their group; and third, that the interviewees would be forthright and authentic in sharing their experiences.

Results

Data collection and analysis resulted in several themes and sub-themes that communicated the experiences of group leaders and members. The themes and sub-themes were organized and displayed according to what is most relevant to clinicians who are interested in starting and/or improving group services for international students in counseling center settings. Figure 1 depicts a diagram of the organization of the resulting themes into four main sections: recruitment and group design, group member experiences, and group leader experiences, and additional considerations. Data from both group leader and group member interviews were used to support themes, and selected quotations from the transcripts were used to help explicate themes.

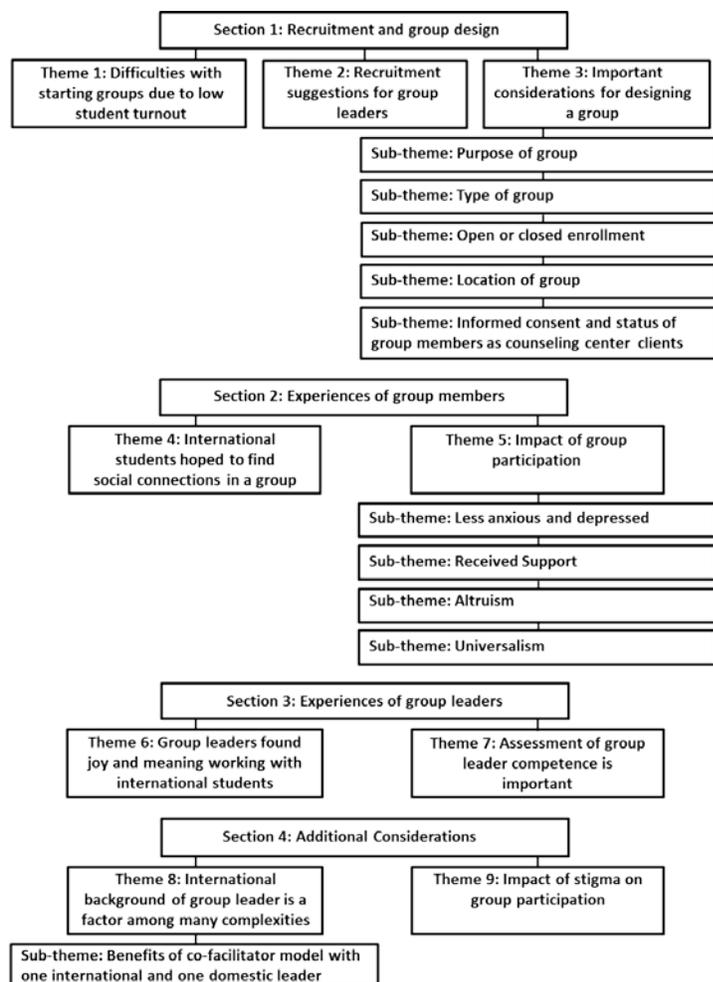


Figure 1. Organization of themes and sub-themes.

The quotations were generally written exactly as transcribed from the audio recordings of the interviews. Group members varied in their development of English proficiency and consequently showed the normal phenomena of speaking errors that occur when acquiring a language. Some changes were made to correct grammatical errors in order to help readers accurately understand the intended meanings of the phrases, and these corrections were indicated with squared brackets. However, some errors were left uncorrected in efforts to maintain the original voices of the interviewees. Typically, in scholarly writing each of these errors would be indicated with the Latin adverb [*sic.*] to notify readers that the error did not arise out of the

transcription process but was intentionally reproduced as it appeared from the original source. The authors chose not to include a [*sic.*] for each of these errors assuming that readers would understand that errors occurred on account of the normal process of interviewees practicing and developing proficiency with the English language.

Recruitment and Group Design

Many international student support groups fail to thrive because too few students turn out for group sessions. In fact, of all the counseling centers that were actively advertising an international student support group at the time of this study (approximately 25 centers), fewer than half reported that they were successful in running this type of group. The majority reported that because of low student turnout, the group had not been able to start or had been inactive for several semesters. Group leaders in this study spent a considerable amount time in their interviews discussing with the primary investigator their own difficulties with developing their group. They were quick to offer suggestions for recruitment and how they had made decisions regarding their group design.

Difficulties with starting groups due to low student turnout. The group leaders from this study reported the difficulties they had experienced with low turnout, and many offered reasons why their groups didn't initially fill up. One leader commented, “[Students] just didn't show up, and then I think it was a couple things. One was the marketing and [my] just not being very savvy about marketing, and...[my] not really knowing a lot of partners on campus.” Many group leaders reported that it took multiple attempts before they were able to maintain a successful ongoing international student group.

Group member participants also noted the difficulties with low turnout and offered ideas as to why students might not be showing up. A student from Saudi Arabia, who went to the first

session at the suggestion of a friend, said, “In the beginning [it] was only me and another student... I don't think I've seen, like, marketing, I haven't seen any flyers or promotion of the support group anywhere.”

Recruitment suggestions for group leaders. Group leaders were eager to offer suggestions for how to recruit international students successfully. It is important to note that the group leaders in this study were thoroughly invested in working with international student populations and expended large amounts of time and energy in the recruitment activities they suggested. Many group leaders found it effective to recruit participants at cultural orientation meetings, as well as at international student and graduate student orientations. One said, “I really tried to go into their world on campus and really get to know them.” This leader tried to establish herself as a “trusted person” so that “they might consider me as an extension maybe of their family in the U.S.” Others strengthened their contacts with faculty and with university organizations that regularly deal with international students. One made it a practice to “bug the [international student office] director every quarter and get him to send [information] out on...his own [email] list just for international students.” Another developed contacts in the departments of chemistry and engineering and “some of the places where a lot of international students tend to be.” He felt that “other administrators who also work with international students...often have access in ways that you don't, to that community.” One successful group leader offered workshops and classes for international students and was part of the Graduate Ally Coalition, an organization that examines “what issues are out there and what resources need to be provided.” This organization plans potluck dinners to provide a venue for students to mingle. “Those are great places that I go to show my face, explain a little bit about what I do, and [offer] a little bit of info on the group that I run.” One leader also suggested co-hosting the group with

another department or campus organization. In general, group leaders felt that intentional planning and outreach are necessary for successful groups. “It’s not just typical advertising,” said one group leader. “You really have to go outside the traditional bound of thinking.”

The input from group leaders has been summarized into eight suggestions (See Table 1.), primarily focused on increasing campus awareness of the group service and helping the group leader(s) establish trusting relationships within the international student community that resulted in referrals.

Table 1

Recruitment Suggestions for Group Leaders

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1. Invest in developing relationships with the international student community and with organizations such as the international student scholar services, clubs/organizations for international students, academic support office, professors in graduate departments with high numbers of international students.
 2. Attend international student orientation and graduate student orientation (to make a presentation, have a booth, distribute flyers about the group, mingle with international students and university staff).
 3. Send group information, such as flyers and announcements, through the campus international student listserv.
 4. Attend and/or create social events for international students.
 5. Develop outreach services for international students.
 6. Hold drop-in office hours (e.g., Let’s Talk hours) at the international student services office and advertise them extensively.
 7. Consider offering refreshments as an incentive for attending group meetings and/or social events.
 8. Consider hosting group with an associated university organization and including co-facilitators from those organizations
-

Group members from this study reported learning about groups at their universities through the following methods: an email from group leader sent through a university listserv, a presentation at international student orientation, a referral from individual counseling sessions with the group leader, and a recommendation from a friend already in group.

Important considerations for designing a group. The groups in this study differed considerably in terms of purpose, type (e.g., mixtures of support, discussion, psychoeducation, process-oriented, and task-oriented), norms, and rules. Despite the vast differences between the international student support groups represented in this study, research participants concurred in pointing out several important considerations for running groups designed for international students (See Table 2). Some of these considerations were treated as subthemes and are expanded below.

Table 2

Considerations for Group Leaders

1. Purpose of group
 2. Type of group (e.g., support, psycho-educational, process oriented, mixed, etc.).
 3. Open or closed enrollment
 4. Location of group (counseling center or elsewhere)
 5. Informed consent and status of group members as counseling center clients
 6. Type of student concerns and pre-group screening (purely adjustment concerns, or allow more severe psychological concerns)
 7. Issues of confidentiality
 8. Multiple helping roles of group leader(s) (therapist, advisor, friend, mentor, advocate, etc.)
 9. Norms for how to handle potential dual relationships
 10. Norms for extra-therapy relationships
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Purpose of group. Quite possibly the foundational consideration is the purpose, or goal, of the international student group. Group leaders in this study reported different goals for their groups, and these differences then impacted decisions regarding group type, norms, and rules. The most striking difference was whether or not the group was designed to increase socializing and friendship development or not. One leader expressed, “Another whole goal I had of creating the group was that they [international students] could establish relationships outside of their own graduate department...and expand their friendship networks.” Other group leaders desired to

create a more therapy-oriented space and, therefore, established more rigid norms to limit extra-group relationships and maintain confidentiality.

Type of group. The type, or structure, of the international student groups in this study initially arose out of the group leader's goal(s) based on his or her assumptions of what would be best for international students. Group leaders reported that they adjusted the group type to meet the specific needs of their university and of the students in the group, as opposed to matching it to an "ideal" group or to a previous experience leading a group at a different university. One group leader said she had expected to run a group similar to the one she helped co-lead during her doctoral internship training. She found, however, that the needs of international students at her current university were different enough that she needed to make significant changes to the group type, purpose, location, and even time. Another leader explained that the type of her group changes each semester depending on group members' needs, and that she asks each group at the beginning of the semester how they want to use their time together. She reported that sometimes it is more process-oriented and sometimes more psycho-educational. She also said that sometimes students desire to use the group to help them receive feedback on oral presentations and written projects for class assignments.

Open or closed enrollment. Group leaders differed in the ways they approached group membership and expressed the pros and cons of each format. Group leaders tended to adopt an open, or drop-in, format when they wanted to increase turnout and help students create social connections, but acknowledged the negative impact that it can have on group cohesion and depth of group work. One leader expressed:

We've gone back and forth about [having] drop-in or not... drop-in is good in the sense that we've probably got more participation overall ... but it's also bad in the sense that

some of those group norms and all those things about group process don't actually happen in the same way because there are new members introduced... [and] that might take away a little bit from how comfortable people feel.

Group leaders who had a substantial number of referrals tended to move to a closed format, and to conduct group screenings prior to the initial meeting.

Location of group. Group leaders reported having changed the location of their group in efforts to increase turnout or reduce stigma. Limited space on campus was another reason for a change of venue. At the time of data collection, several of the groups in this study were holding sessions in their counseling centers, some in campus locations with close proximity to the international student services office, and one leader was in the process of changing the space for the upcoming semester. Group leaders also reported having previously held successful groups at student union buildings and community rooms that were near international student housing. The group leaders who held meetings in the counseling center tended to be those with consistently high number of referrals and those wishing to maintain more formal group norms limiting extra-therapy relationships.

Informed consent and status of group members as counseling center clients. An important consideration, which can be associated with the location and type of group, is whether group members should be clients of the counseling center or not. Group leaders said that they needed to work with their center directors and other university staff in order to understand implications of holding a support group outside of the counseling center with students who were not clients. Some said that it was important to create an informed consent document to help communicate norms and expectations of group membership. Among the points covered were

attendance and participation, the importance of confidentiality, grievance protocol, and resources for self-care in emergencies.

Type of student concerns and pre-group screening. As with other considerations, group member selection criteria and pre-group screening arose out of the group leader's goals for the group. The open-enrollment groups that focused on increasing social networks tended to allow any international student to attend meetings regardless of adjustment or psychological concerns.

The closed-enrollment groups with more formal boundaries regarding confidentiality and extra-therapy relationships tended to have specific selection criteria for group members, and many conducted individual pre-group preparation meetings. One of these leaders reported that she screened out international students who seem to be experiencing more significant psychological concerns (e.g., depression, anxiety) and referred them to other counseling center groups or to individual therapy.

Issues of confidentiality. Group leaders and members spoke to the fact that international student communities are often quite small and group members are usually associated in some way outside of group. One student spoke about the difficulties of knowing information about another group member from a close friend who used to date the group member, saying, "It's hard for me to face the girl in the group...because that girl is Chinese." She also noted, "Among the international students—especially among Chinese students—our circle is pretty small. We can always meet somebody we know, so it's kind of awkward."

Group leaders also addressed the fact that international students may not readily understand the notion of confidentiality as it applies to support groups. One leader said she uses a lot of case examples when discussing confidentiality in the first group sessions. Some

discussed the unique implications cultural differences can have on confidentiality. One group leader said that he frequently prepares students for group by asking them:

Are you ok with potentially running into someone from your cultural community, like if you're Chinese there might be another Chinese person from the group? And also being prepared, or willing, to possibly running into someone from their grad group.

Role of the group leader. Group leaders said that working with international students often necessitates stepping into a helping role that is outside of the traditional counselor/client relationship. Some of the most common roles discussed in the interviews were adviser, mentor, advocate, role model, expert on international student concerns, and friend. One group leader used the term *multiple helping roles* in her description of working with international students and told several stories of how she intervened with international students from different roles. These stories involved this group leader's stepping into an advocacy role to help solve international student's problems in efforts to avoid drastic consequences—most commonly being deported. One story dealt with an international student who was referred to crisis counseling because of coming “unglued” in the International Student Services office. After working with the student and calling multiple campus offices (registrar, international student support services, office of graduate studies, dean of the student's graduate department), this group leader was able to help the student resolve concerns, re-register, and avoid the imminent deportation.

Group leaders also talked about how working with international students has pushed the limits of their training and traditional Western notions of counseling. Their role as group leader has sometimes ended up looking different than the traditional role of a support group leader. One leader commented:

I do think working with international students requires kind of letting go of some of our fixed notions and our training and really kind of being flexible in some of those boundaries... It's not just providing therapy, there's so much involved with working with international students that's systemic as well... so this [group] has evolved because of failed experiences with more traditional services. So it's been a lot of trial and error and having to be flexible and let go of my notion of what is therapy.

Experiences of Group Members

Group members shared their experiences with joining and participating in their groups. Their stories shared several themes regarding the reasons for joining this type of group and the impact that it has had on them.

Desire to find social connections through the group. While international students reported joining a group for a variety of reasons, one of the most common was the hope that they could develop social connections through the group and thus assuage some of their feelings of loneliness and isolation. One student from China expressed, "I just want[ed] to make friends. You know I don't know much people [in the United States], so I want[ed] to kind of extend my friend circle." A Taiwanese Ph.D. student, who had attended the group for four years, reported, "Before I had this group I feel really lonely and lost." A student from Macau was away from home for the first time in his life, "I kind of want[ed] to meet some people, kind of have, like, a sense of belonging."

Impact of group participation. Group members articulated various ways that they had been positively impacted by the group experience. They felt supported in psychological concerns; they felt less anxious and depressed and more normalized (universalism). They were glad to receive advice and, in some cases, to have a safe place to vent. They expressed that they

felt uplifted because they were able to help other members of the group (altruism). The group experience also impacted their social adjustment in that they learned new information, expanded their worldviews, practiced English, and developed social connections. Group members reported that they could not think of ways that they were negatively impacted by participating in the support group.

Less anxious and depressed. Group members talked about how they felt less depressed and anxious as a result of joining and participating in a group. A student from China said, “Yes, [I feel] less anxiety. And more important, I feel happier.” A student from Malaysia expressed that being able to talk about her concerns and join with others who share similar experiences (also see Universalism theme) was helpful in alleviating her depression:

I first came here, and I don't have friends, and I haven't been talking for more than weeks because I didn't have friends to talk [to]... so when I join the group I can share my feelings and finally I can talk, which makes me feel less depressed and also I found some people who have the same feeling as me—they are also depressed, [and] also have the problem of feeling alone.

Received support. These group members expressed that they found the support they were hoping for by participating in a support group. Some said they felt supported simply by attending sessions, even if they didn't speak up. When asked how the group has impacted her, a student from China explained how she felt less helpless and more supported:

There are many things. The first is, I feel support. I feel the support from them [group members]. Because at that time, before I went to the group, I always feel very, very helpless. I feel like nobody is going to support me. And there are seldom people who can understand my issue...so I feel really, really helpless. I joined the group. I said that

my intention was to seek support, emotional support in the group from the group members. And I said I don't care what kind of topic we're talking about, I just feel I want to feel relax[ed] and supportive in the group. That's all I need. So that's the most helpful thing I get from the group.

Altruism. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) used the term *altruism* to identify the therapeutic factor of group members benefiting from helping other group members. They noted that, “members gain through giving, not only in receiving help as part of the reciprocal giving-receiving sequence, but also in profiting from something intrinsic to the act of giving” (p. 13).

A particularly notable result was group members describing how they were positively impacted by helping other group members. International students often feel undervalued and helpless, and interview participants expressed that the act of helping other group members helped them to develop more self-confidence and to feel valued and empowered to help themselves and others. Students reported that they helped others by offering suggestions, imparting information, empathizing, and simply offering supportive statements. A student from Taiwan said, “Just [to] help other people to solve their problem, which boosts my confidence. I feel, you know, I'm helpful. It's a good feeling.”

A student from China said that helping other group members increased her self-confidence. She noted that she would not be able to experience the same benefit in individual therapy:

I feel like helping others make me feel better now and make me feel like I am not...I was not a useless person. I am useful, I can help others. At least this give me some kind of confidence, which in individual consulting service I cannot feel.

Later in the interview this same participant told how she had empowered herself to offer support and help in relationships outside of group:

...in the group I can help others...I can provide suggestions... It makes me feel good to help others. In this way, I feel confidence. Then in my own life outside this group, I can also help others—especially my friends. We can probably provide support to each other and also suggestions.

Universalism. Yalom and Leszcz (2005) used the term *universalism* to identify the powerful impact of recognizing that one's deep personal experiences may be widespread human concerns. This understanding works to help remove a group member's sense of isolation, validate personal experiences, and raise self-confidence (p. 6-7).

Group members emphasized that they felt normalized and a sense of belonging through the process of sharing common concerns and experiences. For example, a student from Taiwan expressed:

Another way is when people have similar experience as I had before. And I feel, oh yeah, you know... we all understand. We encounter the same worries or we have the same problems. Not only me worry this way or not only me feel uncomfortable about anything. So you will feel more supported mentally. Yeah. And you can share your experience to help those people who encounter the same difficulty you have before. So that's really cool. Kind of, boost my confidence.

Experiences of Group Leaders

Many of the themes relating to group leader experiences were included in the first section of the results: *recruitment and group design*. This section includes two themes resulting from

group leaders talking about the personal impact that running these groups had on their lives and their professional development.

Group leaders found joy and meaning working with international students. The group leaders in this study expressed passion and enjoyment for working with international students, and most all commented on how rewarding they found it. One group leader expressed, “It’s a blast... it’s very connecting... I get to learn about cultures and different people that I’ve had limited experience or contact with.” Another commented:

You know...if it weren’t for you, they couldn’t stay [in the United States], if it weren’t for you, they couldn’t graduate. When you know exactly what you do that actually might make a difference, that’s fun!... It’s a privilege to be on a journey with them.

Another group leader said:

The broader and more diverse my caseload and the people that I work with, the more I grow and the more enriched I am. So if working with international students wasn’t a part of my work I think I’d be bored out of my mind.

Another leader:

I think just seeing someone change, seeing someone who’s just come to this country and is really isolated and doesn’t have a lot of connections and then seeing them at the end of the group where they’ve been able to find a community and they feel like they’re...they feel good about being here versus wanting to go home every day. So I think seeing that change in people, again probably similar to individual work that we do in that seeing change is really nice and rewarding...when you’re going out and doing these groups and

kind of going out into the community. It's just a different feeling than when you're in your office and seeing people. So I think it's given me a lot of pleasure and it's been really rewarding.

Assessment of group leader competence is important. Group leaders noted the importance of continually seeking training to increase competence for working with multicultural and international student populations. One leader emphasized her opinion that, because of the many unique concerns involved in working with an international student population, group leaders should receive extensive training in international student concerns. Another leader expressed his opinion that white group leaders should be working to improve their multi-cultural competencies and to understanding the impact of their culture and ethnicity when working with international populations:

I think it's important for the facilitator of the group to be doing their own work when it comes to things like privilege and oppression and power, because more times than not we're going to be a white clinician...and we have—as a white person—a lot of privileges, and I think it's really important to be aware of privilege, oppression, biases, stereotypes.

Additional Considerations

All group members and leaders were asked if it was better to have an American group leader or one with an international background. They were also asked how stigma impacted their experience with the group. The resulting themes were treated as additional considerations for running an international student support group.

International background of group leader is a factor among many complexities. All group members and leaders were asked if it was better to have an American group leader or one

with an “international background” (e.g., previous status as an international student or status as an immigrant). Group members reported that they would feel more confident of being understood by and connecting with a group leader with an international background versus an American leader. For example, a student from Macau said:

For me having an international leader would be more beneficial because ...you may want someone who shares your background, and you will feel the sense of “we-ness” and so if you have an American leader and— even though the American leader can do a very good job—the student may still take more time to open up himself or herself...[it] may be another barrier.

Some students provided sophisticated answers that articulated that the international background of the leader is only one important factor. A group member from Saudi Arabia shared that, while she would prefer a leader with an international background, she would feel comfortable with a white American leader as long as he or she had enough international and multicultural experience to really be able to understand international students.

Some group members shared that they have benefited from a group leader who came from their same culture, and from a leader who spoke their same language. A Chinese group member shared, “In the group, the consultant is Chinese. She can speak Chinese. And also she can speak English... [she] can understand...cause we have the same cultural backgrounds... [she] can understand me very directly.”

One group leader reported that occasionally her cultural background was a barrier to connecting with students from her same country of origin. She explained that some students assumed she would act or react like parental or other authority figures from their culture of

origin. “Sometimes [students] can see my name before even having met me and assume that they might not be able to disclose that they are questioning their sexuality or that they are in a dating relationship that is secret from their parents.”

Benefits of co-facilitator model with one international and one domestic leader. Group leaders and members agreed that a co-facilitator approach was best, and many described the benefits of having one leader with an international background and one American. One group leader with an international background stated, “When I’ve had co-facilitators that identify as white...that’s worked and they’ve been able to connect.” A group member from China said:

Although this is an international student group we still need one American [leader] to be a guide... so we can ask her questions ...and it also helps us to correct some concepts that is wrong. So that is another thing that has been really helpful.

Another group leader shared:

So the nice thing about the group co-facilitator model is I can share my experience...then the other [leader] is someone who is more domestic or a white counselor...someone who can give more of a true American, so to speak, perspective. So it’s interesting for them [group members] to think, “Wow, Americans are not this homogenous group that are all white.” So I really like that model.

Impact of stigma on group participation. Group members were asked about their experience with stigma and attending the group. They reported being aware of the potential stigma but group members reported having different responses to it. A few students said they were not personally affected by the stigma and were able to attend without worry. One student from Taiwan was asked if he found there to be a stigma with attending the group, and responded, “Yeah, definitely. For me I feel totally okay. I don’t really mind.” He continued to say that,

while he didn't feel worried, he had heard peers express fears that attending a counseling service, like the support group, could follow them back to their country of origin and negatively impact their employment potential. He stated:

I think for people in China they may encounter a larger problem because when they need to go back to find a job in China they need to be very discrete in case some people will say, "Oh that guy who had joined the supporting group maybe he has some problem." I think that kind of rumor can impact his career path I guess... You need to be very well behaved.

Several students indicated that they did worry about what people might think, yet they were able to overcome these worries and join the group. A group member from China shared:

I found out this group is not for weird person[s], for me I think it is normal. I can talk [about] it with my roommates and friends that I am attending such a group, not specifically information, but I can tell them I am attending this group. They didn't say much bad things about me. I think, they regard me as usual, so I am open to this now, it's ok.

Group leaders also noted the potential stigma and desired to reduce it, yet seemed to have differing opinions regarding the location of group services. Of the seven groups represented in this study, four held meetings in the counseling center and three in other campus locations. One leader, who held his group in the counseling center, wondered how much stigma had impacted students from joining his group and noted his limitation in being able to learn this:

Yeah, you know the stigma, there's a little bit of stigma to counseling... I don't know. I guess at least the people that are there are fine with it. But there's always...I don't know if someone didn't come because it was in our building, or...there's a self-selection

process there where I just don't know if it's a major issue. From what I've heard, not really. It's more just a general idea of counseling is a bigger issue than where it's at...but I don't know.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences of group leaders and group members participating in international student groups in order to aid professionals who are working to develop group services in a counseling center setting. Many of the findings from this study provide support for perspectives in the literature on international student groups, and some contribute new perspectives and information to the literature knowledge base. This discussion section highlights the ways these findings support the current literature and explicates some of the new contributions. It is hoped that these findings will aid counseling center clinicians in their endeavors to start and improve group services for international students.

Reflection on Themes and Current Literature

A striking finding from this research was the number of counseling centers that were advertising a support group for international students, yet had been unable to successfully develop one due to low student turnout. Throughout the course of one year, in order to recruit group leader and group member participants, the research team contacted over 25 centers that listed an international student group on their website, yet the majority of these centers were unable to provide any input because they had not been able to start a group. Significant and continual efforts were made by the research team to recruit group leaders and group members to participate in this study, yet few staff and students were available to, interested in, or qualified to volunteer. It seems noteworthy that the struggle to gather participants for this study paralleled the struggle group leaders commonly face in filling and maintaining their groups.

The group leaders who did participate in this study focused on these issues in their interviews and their concerns are reflected in the first two themes that emerged: (a) *difficulties with starting groups due to low student turnout*, and (b) *recruitment suggestions for group leaders*. These themes have particular importance for counseling center clinicians who are considering starting an international student group. Group leaders from this study offered a few suggestions that have not been mentioned in the literature including: (a) attending international student orientation in order to make a presentation, have a booth, distribute flyers about the group, and mingle with international students and university staff, (b) holding drop in office hours (e.g., Let's Talk hours) at the international student services office and advertising them extensively, and (3) establishing trusting relationships with clubs/organizations for international students (e.g., Asian student association), academic support offices, and professors in graduate departments with high numbers of international students. It is also important to note that, of the group members participating in this study, many attended the first time because of an announcement sent through the office of international student services or from seeing a presentation at international student orientation.

As noted in the literature, the purpose, or goal, of the group is the primary consideration and this decision may lay the foundation for all additional considerations. The main difference among groups in this study, with regards to their purpose, was whether they were designed to increase social connections or not. It seems clear that many international students face adjustment challenges like cultural isolation, lack of support, and loneliness (Choe, 1996; Heggings & Jackson, 2003; Olivas & Li, 2006; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), and that many would like a venue to help them find and make friendships. The group members from this study

reported that one of their main reasons for joining the group was to find social connections. A group with the purpose of helping international students create social connections could be very beneficial for campus communities that lack other programs, events, and services for helping international students designed for this purpose. Group leaders should assess their campuses to see if there is a need to help international students develop social connections and consider if a support group is an appropriate approach for this goal.

This study also supports the literature in noting several other key considerations for developing an international student support group (e.g., structure, location, time, norms and expectations, membership commitments). Yakunina et al. (2011) noted some of these same considerations and organized them into three categories: (a) practical considerations, (b) ethical considerations, and (c) cultural issues. Because the goals of group leaders may differ, and each campus context is different, there doesn't seem to be a gold standard for how to best establish an international student group. Therefore, it is important for group leaders to carefully think through each of these considerations (See Table 1.) as they relate to their campus contexts.

A suggestion for counseling center clinicians wanting to start a group is to hold a focus group to help learn the current needs and interests of international students at their university and make decisions regarding key aspects of the group (e.g., purpose, structure, time, location). This focus group could consist of international students, staff members from the international student office, and possibly other invested parties. The principal investigator conducted this type of focus group at a state university in New England, which resulted in collaboratively making decisions regarding location, time, structure, discussion topics, and co-leadership. Additionally, this focus group served to improve connections with the international student community and to learn how best to advertise the group to international students.

Researchers and clinicians have published articles which assert that a group approach to counseling with international students can positively impact adjustment difficulties and psychological concerns of participating group members and may be beneficial in ways that individual counseling is not (e.g. Dipeolu et al., 2007). This study confirmed these themes by providing evidence that group members indeed felt more connected, more supported, less anxious, and less depressed as a result of participating in their support groups.

A notable result of this study was group members sharing how they were positively impacted through the process of being able to help other group members. The notion of altruism, as defined by Yalom and Leszcz (2005), has not yet been discussed in the literature in relation to international student groups, but it was clear from these data that among the greatest benefits of participating in group was the increased sense of personal worth and empowerment that resulted from stepping into the role of helper. Therefore, group leaders who actively look for ways to involve group members in helping one another may significantly increase the effectiveness of the group experience for members.

A common, and important, question that many clinicians ask is if it is best for the leader of this type of group to have a background as an international student or as an immigrant. Some research has shown the benefits of providing culturally adapted mental health interventions (Griner & Smith, 2006), but no studies have yet addressed this issue with regard to group leaders of international student support groups. In the present study all participants were asked for their perspective. While most group members said that they would prefer a group leader with an international background, it seems clear that, in the absence of such a person, counselors with a European American background can effectively lead groups for international students and should be encouraged to do so when there is student need. This seems consistent with Cabral and

Smith's (2011) meta-analytic review which showed that clients had a moderately strong preference for a therapist of their own race and a tendency to perceive these therapists more positively, yet racial/ethnic matching seemed to have almost no benefit on treatment outcomes. Therefore, having a group leader with an international background may positively impact recruitment of students, but it may not make a difference for the treatment outcomes of the participating students. It is also clear that any group leader, whether international or domestic, should continually work on increasing multicultural counseling competencies in order to develop proficiency for working with international students. A recommended approach could be a co-facilitator model where one leader has an international background and the other a background in the host culture.

The existing literature emphasizes the need to reduce the stigma associated with counseling services in order to increase the ability and likelihood of international students accessing these services. Many authors have asserted that international student group services should be held in locations away from the counseling center as a way of reducing stigma in order to increase participation. Results from this study, however, showed that some group leaders have successfully held groups in counseling centers because enough international students were able to access services despite any barriers related to stigma. Therefore, holding group sessions outside of the counseling center might not be necessary, and there may be other ways to combat the barriers of stigma. In fact, continual efforts to disassociate the counseling center from the group could ultimately increase stigma by reinforcing the notion that it is shameful to attend such a group. It seems important for group leaders to carefully consider the location of their group and to work to understand any stigma concerns that may be preventing international students

from attending the group. Further research is needed to understand the barriers, including stigma, that prevent international students from accessing international student group services.

Study Limitations

Some limitations in this study merit comment. Group members and leaders all volunteered to participate and all reported primarily good experiences with the group. Interviews were not gathered from group leaders who attempted, but were unable to run a group. There were also no interviews with international students who reported dissatisfaction with their group participation or failed to consistently attend group for a full semester for other reasons.

Although efforts were made to recruit a broad representation of group members, this sample consisted primarily of international students from Asian countries. We do not know how the experiences of international student group members from other countries may differ. It is important to note that students from Asian countries comprise over half of the international students in the United States (Institute of International Education, 2014). Some of the participants from this study reported that their groups consisted only of students from Asian countries.

Some group members spoke English at an intermediate level and during the interviews verbalized their frustration that they were not able to fully communicate their experiences. These language barriers limited some participants and the interviewer from being able to investigate their experiences fully.

Implications for Practice

This study is relevant to practitioners in college settings with interest in international student concerns and the resulting themes can aid clinicians as they develop group interventions for international students. One of the primary goals of this project was to provide practical

information for clinicians who want to start or improve an international student support group. The structure of the results and discussion sections was designed to help readers understand the practical implications of the data. In summary, it is recommended that group leaders attend to the recruitment suggestions and considerations reported in this study as they relate to their university contexts. Group leaders should also work to understand how group members can be positively impacted by group participation and should look for ways to help group members exercise their ability to help other students. Group leaders should also attend to issues of stigma and group leadership.

Future Research

An important next step in the research would be to further investigate the barriers that prevent international students from joining international student support groups. It would be useful to know if these are the same type of barriers that deter many international students from using individual counseling services. This knowledge would be helpful for understanding why many groups have failed to thrive and should help counseling centers and group leaders learn how to more effectively recruit students.

Several group leaders from this study expressed that they departed from traditional notions of counseling when working with international students and when leading international student support groups; however, the nature of these departures was not investigated. Future research should explore how these international student specialists have adjusted their practice in order to more effectively work with international students in individual and group settings.

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APPENDIX A

Review of Literature

International students can be defined as those “who are pursuing a degree in [the] host nation, but are not citizens or permanent residents of that particular country” (Tran, 2011, p. 80). Many international students plan to ultimately return to their home countries, unlike other ethnic minorities, refugees, or immigrants (Mori, 2000). “They are thus people in transition who choose to live in a foreign academic setting to realize their educational objectives” (Mori, 2000, p. 137)”.

The number of international students studying in U.S. institutions of higher education reached a record high of more than 886,052 students for the 2013-2014 academic year, which was an 8.1 % increase from the previous academic year (Institute of International Education, 2014). The enrollment of international students has been steadily increasing over the past few decades, and it is expected to continue increasing over the course of the next several decades (Das, Chow, & Rutherford, 1986; Institute of International Education, 2014; Sandhu, 1995). International students now represent 4.2% of the total U.S. graduate and undergraduate enrollment (Institute of International Education, 2014).

At some universities international students constitute 5-17% of their student body. Brigham Young University, for example, enrolled 1,828 international students during the fall of 2014, which was about 6% of the entire student body (Brigham Young University, 2014).

While more than half of the international students in the United States come from Asia, the top ten producing countries are China (31.0%), India (11.6%), South Korea (7.7%), Saudi Arabia (6.1%), Canada (3.2%), Taiwan (2.4%), Japan (2.2%), Vietnam (1.9%), Mexico (1.7%), and Brazil (1.5%) (Institute of International Education, 2014). Male international student

enrollment has always been greater than female, but the discrepancy has been steadily decreasing with women making up 44% of the 2013-2014 enrollment (Institute of International Education, 2014).

International students select a wide variety of undergraduate majors and graduate disciplines; however, the majority of students choose business and management (21.2%). The other leading fields of study include engineering (19.2%), math and computer sciences (10.3%), social sciences (8.2%), physical and life sciences (8.0%), and fine and applied arts (5.8%). Recently, the number of undergraduate level international students (370,724) has surpassed the number of graduate level international students (329,854) (Institute of International Education, 2014). University counseling centers have been more likely to see international graduate level students than undergraduates (Berg-Cross & Pak, 2006).

International Students and Adjustment to College

It is probably safe to assume that all students, international or domestic, face significant challenges as they adjust to life as a college student. Yarris (1996) asserted that most college students face challenges in the following developmental categories: (a) adjusting to a new environment, (b) deciding a major and future career, (c) establishing self-identity as an individual separated from his/her parents, (d) building the study and time management skills necessary for the increased level of academics, (e) establishing intimate interpersonal relationships, (f) exploring sexual identity, and (g) clarifying life values. There is a significant body of research that discusses the importance of social, academic, and emotional adjustment for success in college life (Arnett, 2000; Chickering, 1969; Chickering & Reisser, 1993; Credé & Niehorster, 2012, Hays & Oxley, 1986; Tinto, 1993; Ward & Kennedy, 1999), and some

research that suggests that social adjustment is just as important as academic adjustment in predicting students that drop out of college (Mallinckrodt, 1988; Pantages & Creedon, 1978).

While all students face adjustment challenges, the challenges facing international students are compounded, more complex, and often very different than those of their American counterparts. A qualitative analysis of international student interviews conducted by Tseng and Newton (2002) outlined four specific categories of challenges international students faced: (a) general living adjustment to life in America, such as food, housing, environment, and transportation; (b) academic adjustment to the American university system; (c) sociocultural adjustment, such as cultural norms and behaviors; and (d) personal psychological adjustment, such as homesickness, loneliness, or feelings of isolation and lost identity. The following are a few of the most cited challenges that international student face: language difficulties (Fritz, Chin, & DeMarinis, 2008; Lee, Abd-Ella, & Burks, 1981; Lin & Yi, 1997; Sakurako, 2000; Smith & Khawaja, 2011), cultural adjustment (Constantine et al, 2005), employment restrictions and financial concerns (Cadieux & Wehrly, 1986; Lin & Yi, 1997; Thomas & Althen, 1989), discrimination and prejudice (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Lin & Yi, 1997; Halpern, 1993; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Poyrazli, & Lopez, 2007; Robinson & Ginter, 1999), accommodation difficulties (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Lin & Yi, 1997), homesickness (Heggings & Jackson, 2003; Wehrly, 1988), adjustment to the American university system (Aubrey, 1991; Zhai, 2002), lack of support from American peers (Heggings & Jackson, 2003), loneliness (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Wehrly, 1988), and dietary restrictions (Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Lin & Yi, 1997).

International Students and Psychological Concerns

Due to increased adjustment challenges, international students are considered a high-risk group and may experience more psychological problems than their American peers (Dillard &

Chisolm, 1983; Sandhu & Asrabadi, 1994). International students who do seek counseling have a wide variety of presenting concerns. Nilsson, Berkel, Flores, and Lucas (2004) reported that most of the international students who sought counseling at an American university presented with concerns about depression, assertiveness, anxiety, and selecting an academic major. Yi, Lin, and Kishimoto (2003) reported that anxiety (83%), academic problems (82%), and depression (74%) were the most frequently reported presenting concerns for international students at a different American university counseling center. Another study that surveyed first-year Chinese international students found that 86.6% reported perceived high stress in their academic life, 55% in their social life, and 32.5% with their finances (Fan, 2000).

Other studies have also documented that many of the psychological concerns of international students were related to adjustment concerns such as acculturation stress, homesickness, language barriers, cultural isolation, lack of support, and loneliness (Choe, 1996; Furnham & Bochner, 1986; Heggings & Jackson, 2003; Olivas & Li, 2006; Pedersen, 1991; Smith & Khawaja, 2011; Wehrly, 1988). In a meta-analysis of international student adjustment concerns, Zhang and Goodson (2011) showed that the main predictors for psychological symptoms were stress resulting from academic pressures and problems, acculturation difficulties, perceived discrimination or prejudice, and cultural adjustment concerns. Other predictors of psychological symptoms shown in this study were social support, English proficiency, length of residence in the United States, acculturation, and personality.

Pedersen (1991) said, "International students are likely to experience more problems than students in general and have access to fewer resources to help them" (p. 24). One potential resource for international students who are experiencing adjustment difficulties and psychological concerns is university counseling center services.

International Students Use of Counseling Center Services

It is well documented that international students utilize counseling services less than their American student peers (Bradley, Parr, Lan, Bingi, & Gould, 1995; Hyun, Quinn, Madson, & Lustig, 2007; Mitchell, Greenwood & Gugliemli, 2007; Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991; Yakushko, Davidson, Sanford-Martens, 2008). For example, a recent study at a large university in the eastern United States revealed that only 2.6% of the clients seen in the university counseling center were international students, even though about 8% of the student body was international students (Nilsson et al. 2004).

There are a number of reasons why international students might utilize counseling services less than American students. Mori (2000) suggested that they may be less familiar with the notion of counseling and be less aware of the availability of counseling services. International students might also lack information about counseling services and how these services might be useful (Idowu, 1985; Sue & Sue; 1999). Mori (2000), and others (i.e., Arthur, 1997; Lin, 1996), point out that international students may also fear stigma attached to counseling. Some have also suggested that cultural beliefs regarding disclosing personal problems to a professional may inhibit many international students from seeking counseling (Fernandez, 1998; Fouad, 1991; Hayes & Lin, 1994; Mau & Jepsen, 1990; Siegel, 1991) and that international students may be uncomfortable with the cultural differences of meeting with a counselor (Leong & Chou 1996; Pederson, 1991). Another reason might be that they prefer to seek help through family and other support sources (Hayes & Lin, 1994; Pederson, 1991). For example, Setiawan (2006) suggested that students from collectivistic cultures may feel discouraged from seeking help from sources outside the family.

The Western values and assumptions embedded into most counseling theories and methods in the United States are another factor that may deter many culturally diverse international students from seeking out and using services. Sue and Sue (1999) outlined the following potential value differences: (a) emphasis on individualism, (b) use of English, (c) use of non-verbal communication, (d) valued emotional and behavioral expressiveness, (e) openness in disclosure, and (f) expectations to actively participate in an ambiguous situation. These differences in values and assumptions might also account for the large number of international students who discontinue using counseling center services. Nilsson et al. (2004) found that one-third of international students did not return after the intake session.

Yoon and Jepson (2008) compared Asian international students' attitudes and expectations towards counseling with those of American students. Overall, Asian international students reported having less exposure to counseling, less self-perceived need for counseling, greater discomfort and shame with counseling, less openness to counseling, a greater preference for a directive style, and a greater preference for a flexible counseling format. A recent study showed that Asian international students who endorsed more traditional cultural values reported less positive attitudes and lower help-seeking attitudes towards counseling compared to Asian international students who endorsed less traditional values (Yakunina & Weigold, 2011).

Group Work with International Students

While considerable literature is focused on international students' use of individual counseling services, very little formal research is related to group work with international students. An extensive literature search using EBSCO resulted in eight articles and two book chapters that discuss international student groups. All of the found literature has been based on authors' personal clinical experiences with one or more international student groups at their

institutions of higher education. Four of the articles addressed support groups for international students that are in some way connected to a university counseling center (Carr, Koyama, & Thiagrajan, 2003; Dipeolu, Kang, & Cooper, 2007; Smith, Chin, Inman, & Findling, 1999; Yakunina, Weigold, & McCarthy, 2011) and one article reports pre-post data from an group intervention (STAR Programme) led by two clinical psychology graduate students at an Australian university. Another article was an ethnographic study that described a self-created social group of international students in a metropolitan area close to a large state university (Sobre-Denton, 2011). The remaining article discussed a group intervention for Asian international students who were enrolled in counseling psychology graduate programs (Delgado-Romero & Wu, 2010). The two book chapters drew attention to the fact there is very little research on international student support groups and explained that their recommendations were based primarily on personal experience (Walker, 2007; Yau, 2004).

The existing articles on international student groups are based on the authors' personal clinical experiences with support groups, counseling groups, psychoeducational groups, and outreach groups for international students. These articles discuss the potential benefits of a group approach to counseling with international students which include increased social support, decreased isolation and loneliness, increased interpersonal learning, a safe normalizing environment, opportunities to learn practical information about living in the United States, a chance to learn new coping strategies, and provide a non-judgmental place to practice language skills (Carr et al., 2003; Dipeolu et al., 2007; Smith et al., 1999; Walker & Conyne, 2007).

These articles also provide valuable insights regarding how the authors approached their group formation and development and such issues as advertisement and recruitment, group formation and development, group format and agenda, ethical considerations, discussion topics,

group states and process, and group supervision. Some key contributions of these articles are reviewed in this section.

Smith et al. (1999) were among the first to propose the potential benefits of an outreach support group for international students and outlined several helpful suggestions for recruitment, retention, and how to improve group facilitator competency based on the success of such groups at two large northeastern universities over a two-year period. They note the importance of cooperating with campus organizations that have a vested interest in international student concerns (e.g. international student services, English-as-a-Second Language (ESL) departments, campus cultural centers), and propose that it is important to minimize the potential stigma of counseling services by holding the group outside of the counseling center

Carr et al. (2003) discussed their development of a women's support group for Asian international students and articulated the backstory, goals, and details of their group while also pointing out some important ethical and professional dilemmas they faced. They reported that group members completed anonymous feedback forms, and the authors summarized that group members indicated:

[they] enjoyed speaking English without fear of judgment and appreciated the opportunity to express their feelings, share experiences, and have them validated by others. The group, they said, created an atmosphere of free discussion and was an opportunity to have fun (p. 3).

The authors added “[A] major limitation of this program is the lack of data demonstrating its effectiveness.”

Dipeolu et al. (2007) noted, “a review of the literature with respect to international students revealed little information regarding efforts to support and facilitate adjustment of these

students on college campuses” (p. 66). Based on the available literature resources, they articulated an argument including four rationale points for why a group counseling approach may have important advantages over individual counseling with international students:

First, it would provide a supportive context for students to discuss adjustment concerns, thus normalizing these concerns and reducing feelings of isolation (Mori, 2000; Smith Chin, Inman & Findling, 1999). Second, a support group would promote the development of a social support system to provide a critical buffer against adjustment stress (Hayes & Lin, 1994). Third, given that language skills have been found to be a critical element in adjustment (Mori, 2000; Pedersen, 1991), it would provide international students with a supportive and non-evaluative environment in which to practice English skills. Finally, it would foster information sharing between students regarding problem-solving and resources around campus and the community. In sum, group support offers advantages over individual counseling because groups can instill hope, modify feelings of being alone, impart information, assist students to feel needed and useful, help them to develop socializing techniques, promote interpersonal learning, and provide a sense of community and group cohesion (Carr et al., 2003, p. 66).

These authors then described their “successful effort to deliver support group counseling services to international students in a large public university” (p. 63). Based on their experience, the authors provided several noteworthy considerations and suggestions along four dimensions of their group experience: Getting Started, Group Structure, Group Stages and Process, Group Supervision. The group leaders invested significant time and energy into advertising the group and reported little success with “traditional methods” (p. 67) such as posting flyers around campus and in residence halls, redistributing flyers translated flyers (in Chinese, Arabic, Korean,

and Japanese) in the campus and community, and setting up tables in dining halls. The most referrals came after they received an e-mail list from the International Student Center and sent personalized invitations from group co-leaders.

Smith and Khawaja (2014) conducted a pilot study in which they developed and trialed a brief group psychological intervention—the STAR Programme (strengths, transition, adjustment, and resilience)—for international students attending an Australian university. Sixteen international students attended this four-week group, with 2-hour sessions, and were administered measures on coping self-efficacy, social self-efficacy, psychological adaptation, and psychological distress at three times: (a) pre-intervention, (b) post-intervention, and (c) 1-month follow-up. Results showed a significant increase in psychological adaptation and coping self-efficacy from pre to post, and—although not statistically significant—there was an increase in social-self efficacy. Participants reported minimal psychological distress in the pre-intervention data and did not show a decrease.

Yakunina et al. (2011) noted the relative lack of literature on the topic of international student counseling groups stating that their literature search, “yielded only three published clinical examples (Carr et al., 2003; Dipeolu et al, 2007; Yau, 2004) and one book chapter (Walker & Coyne, 2007)” (p.70), and yielded no empirical studies that studied the process and outcome of international student groups. Their review addresses important practical, ethical, and cultural considerations based on information from the cited articles and on the authors’ personal experiences working with international students.

It is important to note that some authors argue that these types of groups should be designed for international students only. Dipeolu et al. (2007) asserted that groups that are comprised only of international students help establish a safe and non-evaluative place for group

members to practice language skills, and Johnson & Sandhu (2007) added that international students with low perceived English fluency may feel shame and experience difficulty communicating with American students in a group setting. Yakunina et al. (2011) stressed that international students may have difficulty connecting with American students in typical college counseling group and would benefit more from meeting only with international student peers.

Yau (2004) stated, “There is a dearth of research studies on group counseling, support groups, or psychoeducational group programming with international students” (p. 255), and therefore based his chapter on literature about psychoeducational workshops for international students, cultural exchange programs, intercultural communication workshops, and multicultural groups. In addition to the lack of research, Yau also asserted that very little professional consensus and conceptual clarity exists regarding groups with international students, and agrees with Leong and Chou’s (1996) statement, “It seems quite clear that the practice of counseling international students cannot wait for the fruits of scientific research” (p. 238). Yakunina et al. (2011) stressed that this lack of research emphasizes the need for clinicians and researchers to evaluate international student groups and demonstrate their efficacy.

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APPENDIX B
Recruitment Letter and Sign-Up Sheet

To be read, or summarized, at a group meeting.

My name is Nate Page and I'm a Counseling Psychology Doctoral student at Brigham Young University. I am collecting data for my dissertation which is looking at international student groups and how it impacts the group members. I plan to interview up to 30 students that have participated in a group for international students for at least one semester. The interviews will be conducted through Skype, or on the telephone and should last anywhere between 45 minutes and 90 minutes. Compensation will be provided for each interview in the form of \$30.

If you are interested in being interviewed about your experience with an international student group, please sign this sheet and include your name, e-mail, phone number and country of origin.

I will be conducting the interviews over the next few months.

Thanks so much!

Nate Page

nate_page@byu.edu

801-471-8851

Please include your name and information if you are interested in being interviewed about your experience in the international student group. Thanks! ☺

APPENDIX C

Consent to Participate in Research – Group Member**Invitation to Participate**

Nate Page, a Counseling Psychology Ph.D. candidate at Brigham Young University, is conducting research exploring the impact of international student groups on group members. You were invited to participate because you have been participating in an international student group at your university.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

You will be asked to complete a short survey which gathers demographic data (age, gender, country of origin, etc.). You will be interviewed via Skype for approximately sixty (60) minutes about your experience with the international student group. Nate Page will conduct the interview. You will be asked to complete the interview from a personal computer in a private setting. The interview will be confidential. The interview will be recorded and transcribed for analysis, and all your identifying information will be removed.

Upon completion of the interview you may contact your group leader to receive your compensation.

Risks/Discomforts

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this program evaluation. It is possible that answering questions may make you feel a little uncomfortable. Skype uses an AES (Advanced Encryption Standard) which is considered very secure; however, there is a slight possibility that someone could break the encryption and listen to the interview. If, for any reason, you desire to stop the interview you may do so without any consequence to you.

Benefits

Although there is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, we feel your participation will likely help increase the standard of practice of international student groups.

Confidentiality

Interview recordings will be password protected and kept safe. Only the research team will listen and transcribe the information you give us. The recordings will be erased or destroyed once the data analysis is completed. At no time will your information be linked to your name, address, or other identifying information.

Compensation

You will receive \$30 for completing the survey and interview; compensation will not be prorated.

Voluntary Participation

Participation is voluntary. If you agree to be interviewed, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide you do not want to participate.

Questions

If you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact me *Nate Page*, at *nate_page@byu.edu*; 801-471-8851. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this program evaluation, you may contact the IRB Research Administrator *Debbie Silversmith*, at 801-422-2970; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; *deborah_sliversmith@byu.edu*.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Participant's Name

Date

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

Consent to Participate in Research – Group Leader

Invitation to Participate

Nate Page, a Counseling Psychology Ph.D. candidate at Brigham Young University, is conducting research exploring the experience of group leaders of international student groups. You were invited to participate because you have led or co-led an international student group at your university.

Description of Procedures

If you agree to participate in this research study, the following will occur:

You will be asked to complete a short survey which gathers demographic data (age, gender, etc.).

You will be interviewed via Skype for approximately sixty (60) minutes about your experience with the international student group. Nate Page will conduct the interview. You will be asked to complete the interview from a personal computer in a private setting. The interview will be confidential. The interview will be recorded and transcribed for analysis, and all your identifying information will be removed.

Risks/Discomforts

There are minimal risks associated with participation in this program evaluation. It is possible that answering questions may make you feel a little uncomfortable. Skype uses an AES (Advanced Encryption Standard) which is considered very secure; however, there is a slight possibility that someone could break the encryption and listen to the interview. If, for any reason, you desire to stop the interview you may do so without any consequence to you.

Benefits

Although there is no direct benefit to you for participating in this study, we feel your participation will likely help increase the standard of practice of international student groups.

Confidentiality

Interview recordings will be password protected and kept safe. Only the research team will listen and transcribe the information you give us. The recordings will be erased or destroyed once the data analysis is completed. At no time will your information be linked to your name, address, or other identifying information.

Compensation

You will receive \$50 for completing the survey and interview; compensation will not be prorated.

Voluntary Participation

Participation is voluntary. If you agree to be interviewed, but later change your mind, you may drop out at any time. There are no penalties or consequences of any kind if you decide you do not want to participate.

Questions

If you have any questions about this study please feel free to contact me *Nate Page*, at *nate_page@byu.edu*; 801-471-8851. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in this program evaluation, you may contact the IRB Research Administrator *Debbie Silversmith*, at 801-422-2970; A-285 ASB, Brigham Young University, Provo, UT 84602; *deborah_slilversmith@byu.edu*.

I have read, understood, and received a copy of the above consent and desire of my own free will to participate in this study.

Participant's Name

Date

Participant's Signature

Researcher's Signature

APPENDIX D
Demographic Questions

Name:

Age:

Country of Origin:

Approximate number of group sessions you have attended:

Ethnicity:

Year in school:

Gender:

Major or emphasis:

APPENDIX E

Interview Questions

Interview unstructured open-ended questions (for group members)

1. What has been your overall experience with the international student group?
2. What was your experience with joining the group? (How did you find out about it, why did you choose to go, did you have any reservations, were there things that made the process of joining difficult, etc.)
3. How has the group impacted you?
4. Why were these things impactful?
5. What things did you find helpful?
6. What things were not helpful?
7. Why did you decide to keep going (or stop going) to the group?
8. What value differences did you notice between yourself and the group leaders?
9. Can you describe a specific experience that tells me about _____?
10. If you were in charge of the group, what would you do differently?
11. What advice would you give to group leaders?
12. What advice would you give to other international students considering joining the group?
13. What questions should I have asked?

Interview unstructured open-ended questions (for group leaders)

1. What has been your overall experience with the international student groups?
2. How has the group impacted you?
3. How has the group impacted the group members?
4. Why were these things impactful?
5. What things did you think were helpful?
6. What things were not helpful?
7. What value differences did you notice between yourself and group members?
8. Can you describe a specific experience that tells me about _____?
9. What things will you change if you run a future international student group?
10. What advice would you give to group leaders?
11. What advice would you give to international students considering joining the group?
12. What questions should I have asked?

APPENDIX F

**Qualitative Analysis Guide
International Student Support Group Study**

Team members

Analysis Coordinator: Nate Page, 801-471-8851, nate_page@byu.edu

Analysis team member: Alex Johnson, 801-859-5772, alexblj@gmail.com

Analysis team member: Phoebe Kung, 808-392-1263, forever.kimi@hotmail.com

Analysis team member: Melissa Tingey, 719-369-2434, mtingey4@gmail.com

Analysis team member: Zhen Li, , lizhen89101@gmail.com

Analysis team member: Lisa Takara, 801-414-6694, haisailisa@hotmail.com (Illinois)

Auditor: Mark Beecher, 801-367-8077, mark_beecher@byu.edu

Study 1: Group Leaders

Study 2: Group Members

Steps in Analysis:

1. Each team member makes a journal entry that assesses personal biases about the interview transcripts (what do I expect to find, what do I think the themes will be, where might I go wrong, etc.)
2. Broad review of transcripts to become familiar with them in written form and to identify any rather obvious themes.
 - This process consists of an unfocused reading of the transcribed interviews and notation of salient meanings as they relate to the research questions
3. Regular team meetings to discuss/compare/refine/define/etc. the resulting themes. Thursdays 11am?
4. Subsequent re-readings of the transcripts, record emerging themes and condense where appropriate to succinct statements. (this is the ‘hermeneutic circle’ part of Kvale’s method.)
 - Attempt to make the transcript quotations more amenable to analysis by removing superficial material (e.g., repetitions, transitions, tangential directions, and digressions).
 - As themes re-appear throughout, make notations of their **prevalence** and **salience**, in order to draw out the most meaningful themes by the end of the analysis.
 - Also highlight/note any representative **quotes** that correspond to those themes, for possible use in presentation/write-up
 - Find language that accurately conveys the findings. Here the ultimate goal is precise description of the meaningful themes—avoid losing any of the richness and depth of meaning.
 - Also, keep note of things that don’t seem to fit. In other words- things contradictory to the themes you are finding.

- Check and re-check to make sure that your understanding of what is emerging fits with what you're interpreting and reading from the participants' responses.
 - Make a quick "journal entry" of 1. what you expected to find? 2. what surprised you? 3. what do we think we're right about? 4. What do you think we were/are wrong about?
5. Continually return to the interview data, re-evaluating throughout the entire analysis stage with repeated 'hermeneutic circles'.
- Check and re-check transcripts to make sure that your understanding of what is emerging fits with what the group of analyzers are interpreting and reading from the participants' responses
 - If necessary have a 3rd reviewer check for discrepancies between the results of the original pair of transcript analyzers, and attempt to resolve disagreements. (This might be Lisa Takara's role or maybe Mark's).
 - Work to reveal deeper levels of meaning from the text of the interviews
6. Themes that continue to be supported in further readings of the data are retained, while those that do not have broad support are removed.
- Analysis coordinator (Nate) shares this process with team so as to get consensus and help protect against any individual bias
7. At this point in the analysis an auditor (someone NOT involved in the analysis) reviews the analysis process
- Look at how the team arrived at themes by tracing the process
 - The auditor and researcher dialogue about the auditor's perceptions of the trustworthiness of the analysis procedure
8. Member check. To further triangulate the trustworthiness of the qualitative analysis, several interview participants are given the opportunity to review findings and comment on the accuracy and consistency of these with their own perspectives. (There was one group leader (NH) who already volunteered to do a member check.)
- E-mail a few interviewees the drafted themes and ask them to provide any feedback and corrections that might enhance the reliability and validity of the interpretations.
9. Compile emergent themes, any other relevant findings, representative quotes
10. Develop oral/poster presentation, and prepare manuscript for publication.