THE REENTRY EXPERIENCE FOR STUDY ABROAD COUNSELORS-IN-TRAINING

By

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree

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ABSTRACT

Students often encounter difficulties upon returning home after a study abroad cultural immersion experience, but many counseling education programs provide limited or no reentry assistance. Despite this challenge, there is little research regarding the reentry process as students transition back into their home culture, as most research is focused on multicultural competency building. Thus, understanding the reentry processes can help students successfully navigate this important aspect of study abroad trips. To this end, a qualitative thematic analysis design was used to identify themes related to masters-level counseling students’ experiences upon returning home from a 3-week study abroad cultural immersion trip. The interviews were designed to answer the research question “What themes emerge when graduate counseling students describe the experience of reentry once the cultural immersion experience was complete?” Two sets of themes emerged from the analysis: impact themes and circumstantial themes. The impact themes were multicultural skills, pace and presser impact, relational impact, professional impact, and personal impact. The circumstantial themes, which gave context to the impact themes, were relational depth of the team and with the host country, comparative stance, and the influence of being a counseling student. The emerged themes were consistent with previous research and helped provide recommendations for future research.

Keywords: multicultural immersion, study abroad, reentry, reverse culture shock, multicultural competencies, repatriation
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my Papason, Arnold Arndt, though he waits for me at heaven’s gate, I know how proud he would be to see this complete. He always presented me with the other side of an opinion and what another person might have thought at the time. I learned more from that, than I ever realized while he was alive. Thank you.
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

The number of graduate counseling students who travel abroad for counseling internships, counseling courses, and professional development has steadily increased in the last decade (Brubaker, 2017; De Ricco & Sciarra, 2005; Gerstein, & Ægisdóttir, 2007; Hadges, 2012; Leong & Blustein, 2000; Leong & Ponterotto, 2003; Shannonhouse, Myers, & Barrio Minton, 2018). A recent survey of 62 Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP)-accredited programs indicated that 43% of the responding programs have cultural immersion programs designed to increase multicultural counseling competencies in their students (Shannonhouse et al., 2018). This increase has come partially in response to Arredondo et al.’s (1996) and Sue’s (1980) call for counselors to develop multicultural counseling competence. Domestic cultural immersion and international study abroad cultural immersion programs serve as important sources of training for counselors-in-training in cross-cultural perspectives and competencies (Alexander, Kruczek, & Ponterotto, 2005; Hipolito-Delgado, Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2011; Wathen & Kleist, 2015; Shannonhouse et al., 2018).

For counselor educators, cultural immersion experiences is one way to help their students address and challenge their biases and stereotypes, helping students with self-reflection. This helps ensure that their graduates meet the Association for Multicultural Counseling and Development Multicultural Counseling Competencies (Arredonodo et al., 1996) and the Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies (Ratts, Singh, Nassar-McMillan, Butler, & McCullough, 2016). These cultural immersion experiences create an environment where counselors-in-training come into direct contact with situations that challenge their worldviews and perspectives, changing perspectives regarding social justice or action and
multicultural competencies (Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011).

However, though counseling students gain skills while abroad, upon return they face different obstacles (Adler, 1981). Upon coming home, some returnees will become discouraged, feel unproductive and dissatisfied, and do not continue to use the skills learned while they were away (Adler, 1981). This can happen when returnees are not supported upon return home (Sussman, 2000). Problems arise when a student returns and expects to come home and fall back into their previous life and routines, but they are surprised that adjustment home is a difficult experience (Adler, 1981; Allen & Young, 1997; Brubaker, 2017; Cushner & Karim, 2003; Platt, 2012; Sussman, 2000). These complications are associated with the reentry process, which has received little attention in the literature or attention based on outdated models (Szkudlarek, 2010). Although these difficulties with reentry have been noted as potentially problematic since the early 80s (Adler 1981; Warren & Adler, 1977), there is still limited understanding and research of the overall reentry process (Brubaker, 2017; Kostohryz, Wells, Wathen, & Wilson, 2014). As such, counselor educators need to know how to help students as they transition so skills are not lost and struggling (Platt, 2012; Santos, 2014).

This section will review the historical context of multicultural counseling competencies and how these competencies relate to the increase of study abroad trips. It will also review current, relevant literature to understand both the multicultural aspects as well as the problems associated with reentry from these trips.

**Multicultural Competency in Counselor Education**

Counselor educators have been commissioned to design educational programs that ensure that students graduate with the multicultural and diverse perspectives needed for ethical practice. As such, program objectives and curricular design must reflect current knowledge and projected
needs concerning practices in a multicultural and pluralistic society (see CACREP 2016 Standards, Section 2.B). In addition, the importance of being able to work ethically in a multicultural and pluralistic society must be infused throughout the curriculum. Although the social and cultural diversity core curricular standards directly address multicultural competence (see Section 2.B.2), students are required to demonstrate ethical and culturally relevant strategies in practice within the other seven common core curriculum areas: CACREP 2016 Standards, 2.F.1.e; 2.F.3i; 2.F.4.j; 2.F.5.d; 2.F.6.d; 2.F.7.m; and 2.F.8.j. Thus, multicultural development and competency is an expectation in training counselors.

The ability of a counselor-in-training to work with culturally diverse populations is also grounded in the American Counseling Association (ACA, 2014) Code of Ethics. To practice ethically, future counselors must build multicultural counseling competency by working with diverse clients (see ACA Code C.2.a.), take into consideration the client’s cultural understanding of confidentiality and privacy, and consider all assessments and interventions in light of culture and diversity factors (see ACA Code E.8.). In addition, counselor educators must address multicultural and diversity in their curriculum (see ACA Code E.7.c.; E.11.c) and faculty supervision of practicum and internships (see ACA Code F.2.b) as well as demonstrate a commitment to diversity through recruitment and retention of their students (see ACA Code E.11.b) and faculty (see ACA Code F.11.a; ACA, 2014).

Given the ACA Code of Ethics and CACREP Standards, it is important for counselor educators to be mindful of multicultural training in every aspect of the curriculum through the entire training process of the counseling student. As such, the counselors-in-training learning outcomes must reflect their ability to attend to clients’ full range of concerns including cultural identity, privilege/marginalization, status, beliefs, cultural values in context, cultural heritage,
and inequalities with a recognition that multicultural intersectionality possibilities are endless (Ratts et al., 2016). Further, counselor educators must ensure that their students are aware of the four Domains of Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies endorsed by the ACA in 2015 and expanded in its conceptual framework a year later to address diverse clients (Ratts et al., 2016).

**Multicultural and Social Justice Competencies**

Given that racial minorities in America are projected to increase by 50% by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2004), counselor educators are mindful of the importance that counselors-in-training have the multicultural competencies needed to work with this diversity. Current multicultural competencies incorporate the ability to work with diverse groups that cover different races, ethnicity, genders, sexual identification status, socioeconomic status, age, religious differences, spirituality, and disability status (Ratts et al., 2016). These competences are used to understand those who have been marginalized as well as those from privileged backgrounds (Ratts et al., 2016).

The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies were developed in response to the growing awareness of the need to work more effectively with the growing diverse clientele and increase in diverse counselors. They expand the former understanding of multicultural competencies presented by Arredondo et al. (1996) and Sue (1980). The competencies fall into quadrants and domains. The quadrants reflect the relationship with the counselor and client, which falls into four areas: Quadrant 1: Privileged Counselor-Marginalized Client; Quadrant 2: Privileged Counselor–Privileged Client; Quadrant 3: Marginalized Counselor–Privileged Client; and Quadrant 4: Marginalized Counselor–Marginalized Client (Ratts et al., 2016). As competence grows, there are also four developmental domains that
correspondingly progress. The first domain is the counselor self-awareness. In this domain, the counselor is aware of personal biases and prejudices as well as ways they may help or hinder the counseling process. The second domain is when the counselor is comfortable discussing the client’s worldview and values and identity development. The third domain is the intersection of the counseling relationship in light of the four quadrants and the implications of that intersection. Lastly, the fourth domain of competency is when the counselor is able to use evidence-based, culturally relevant interventions as well as work to find other supportive systems for the client (Ratts et al., 2016).

A competent counselor in the four domains understands the client’s worldview, the interaction of culture and worldviews in the counseling relationship, and client needs. This means they understand the sociocultural systems affecting the client, and they use interventions from a system perspective as well as individual interventions. They advocate on behalf of the client in multiple ways to change systems as needed (Ratts et al., 2016).

The Multicultural and Social Justice Counseling Competencies expanded the original competencies presented by Sue (1980) and Arredondo et al. (1996), which were focused on developing attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and social justice, by adding action to work with the client (Ratts et al., 2016). Having competency in attitudes and beliefs means that counselors are aware of their values, beliefs, and biases regarding self and others. Having competency in knowledge means that counselors are aware of the many systems (including marginalization and privileged status) that interact with the client’s identity development, worldview, and the way these things affect the client. When a counselor is multiculturally competently skilled, they are able to work interventions within the client’s worldview. The action component recognizes that knowledge is not enough; the competencies must be consistently
used, as well as practiced alongside advocacy competencies (Ratts et al., 2016).

**Cultural Immersion**

One strategy used by counselor educators to enhance multicultural training and to build the established competencies (CACREP, 2016) is through direct contact with other cultures or cultural immersion (Shannonhouse et al., 2018). This allows educational programs to promote growth of multicultural diversity and to lessen cultural encapsulation in their graduates (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005). Cultural immersion experiences are designed to challenge students’ current perspectives as they experience diverse cultural circumstances, often resulting in the students reframing their worldview (Smith, McAuliffe & Rippard, 2014; Prosek & Michel, 2016). Cultural immersion courses and experiences are also designed to heighten self-awareness in biases and beliefs, which is accomplished when the facilitators and educators are focused on creating an environment that fosters growth in competencies (Alexander et al., 2005; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011; Ishii, Gilbride, & Stensrud, 2009; Jaoko, 2010). Cultural immersion trips create an environment where transformative learning is able to occur (Guth, McAuliffe, & Michalak, 2012), but only if facilitators deliberately address multicultural learning (Barden & Cashwell, 2014; Barden, Shannonhouse, & Mobley, 2015; Canfield et al., 2009; Choi, VanVoorhis, & Ellenwood, 2015; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; McDowell, Goessling, & Melendez, 2012; Smith et al., 2014). The cultural encounters and discussions help develop increased self-awareness as well as aid in decreasing bias (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010).

Immersion experiences vary from single assignments, where the student is involved in a local cultural experience, to semester study abroad programs. Recent research in cultural immersion experience has focused on students’ growth in advocacy, increased cultural
awareness, and knowledge and skills as experienced by the student within cultural immersion programs (DeRicco & Sciarr, 2005; Hipolito-Delgado et al., 2011; Ishii et al., 2009). The focus on experiential learning to develop cross-cultural sensitivity and multicultural competencies was the platform that led to two crucial studies in 1997 to emerge in the development of multicultural competencies. Allen and Young (1997) took a group of business students abroad to promote cross-cultural understanding, and Pope-Davis, Breux, and Liu (1997) designed a study abroad immersion experience to train on multicultural competencies for counselors-in-training. From this study, Pope-Davis et al. proposed the multicultural immersion experience (MIE) model, a 3-phase model designed to enhance the multicultural competencies of counselors-in-training. Though the model has rarely been used in immersion trips, aspects of these two studies have been recognized as essential components to cultural immersion study abroad programs. These studies encourage for pre-trip meetings, collaborative activities with the host nations, service opportunities, and cultural activities for better understanding of the culture in context.

**Multicultural Immersion Experience Model**

Despite the lack of the MIE model’s use, research has highlighted the value of the model in gauging how immersion programs match the environment conducive to developing competencies (Shannonhouse et al., 2018). Pre-trip planning and training, interaction with the host culture, duration of immersion, building relationships, and allowing for reflection are the important phases used in this research (Pope-Davis et al., 1997). Additionally, most studies have used some aspects of the MIE model even if the research was not based on the model (Shannonhouse et al., 2018).

The MIE model was designed to increase diversity training for students beyond the classroom. It involves three phases that work toward multicultural competencies. The first phase
involves pre-trip planning and cognitive immersion. In this phase, there is collaboration with the cultural group or host country. Students begin to learn about the culture through research, speakers, meetings with the focus on the history, social issues, and relevant information.

Students’ reflective process involve exploring and comparing the two cultures and their competencies (Pope-Davis et al., 1997; Prosek & Michel, 2016; Shanonhouse, 2013; West-Olatunji & Shanonhouse, 2013).

The second phase incorporates the immersion trip with reflective and educational meetings prior to, during, and after the trip. While the student is abroad, the student is fully engaged in immersion into the culture, visiting historical sites, engaging in service learning, speaking to locals, learning the language, and overall engaging in opportunities to serve and interact as they arise. During these activities, the student is guided into continuous reflection regarding what they observe, think, feel as well as their actions (Pope-Davis et al., 1997; Prosek, & Michel, 2016; West-Olatunji & Shanonhouse, 2013).

The last phase involves debriefing the experience and evaluating competencies gained. Counselors-in-training discuss their experience through a project, assessment, or discussion with peers and classmates about the meaning of the experience. The meaning-making is important for retention (Pope-Davis et al., 1997; Prosek & Michel, 2016; West-Olatunji & Shanonhouse, 2013). This last phase is the most neglected in research (e.g., Alexander et al., 2005; Briggs, Maycock, & Stine, 2010; Cordero & Rodriguezez, 2009). But it is in this phase that reentry problems are addressed. Further research is needed to determine whether the presentation and discussion with classmates may address the “outsider” feelings of reentry that are often expressed (Lester, 2000; Sussman, 2000).

In addition to these phases, Shanonhouse et al. (2018) identified critical components of
the MIE model, which provide the foundational environment for students to flourish while studying abroad. The MIE model emphasizes critical components for success in developing multicultural competencies: (a) pre-deployment training, (b) sustained time in the field, (c) interaction with culturally diverse others, (d) genuineness/depth of relationships formed, and (e) reflection (Pope-Davis et al., 1997). However, study abroad programs seldom use the model as a base for their programs, though they have used components that are effective in building cultural awareness, skills, and knowledge from the model (Shannonhouse et al., 2018). Out of a survey of 62 programs, only 21 held pretraining meetings, and just a third of the programs had long-term cultural immersion experiences.

Additionally, programs have not always focused on the depth of relationships. However, research indicates that the longer the stay has greater results with enhanced multicultural competencies (Boyle, Nackerud, & Kilpatrick, 1999). Thus, some programs have focused on interaction and depth of relationship with the host country. The depth of relationships is a broad category that incorporates the way students learn about the culture through activities, service opportunities, academic exchanges, visiting culturally relevant historical sites, attending festivals, and museums. In other words, the way they interact on any level in any way with the host country. For example, in Boyle et al.’s (1999) study, the students stayed with host families and they spoke Spanish in the homes.

Students can also receive valuable experience and genuineness depending on the location of the program. Often study locations have enhanced the experience by exposing students to situations they would not likely encounter otherwise. For example, Boyle et al. (1999) chose Mexico sites because it showed students the contrast of the poorest villages in comparison to the tourist areas of Mexico. Jurgens and McAuliffe (2004) chose Ireland due to the recent history of
oppression and violence, so students could experience that type of diversity. Further, Cordero and Rodriguez (2009) chose to have their immersion trip in Puerto Rico to focus on the Rescue and Development of Vieques Movement, which addressed concerns of U.S. military bombardment practices and its effects on the local residents of Vieques. The researchers designed these trips for students to encounter the struggles other cultures manage.

The last critical component in the MIE model is reflection. Twenty-two of the responding programs in Shannonhouse et al.’s (2018) study incorporated reflective practices; most of these programs used reflective journaling as the primary reflective tool. Though most studies use journals, other types of reflection have been used. For example, both Boyle et al. (1999) and Ribeiro (2005) emphasized the need for the students to have supportive facilitators and debriefing process times for reflection through the study abroad experience. Boyle et al. found that these debriefing meetings helped students address the stresses experienced as they happened and build group cohesion. Continuous discussions regarding the cultural aspects can enhance cultural learning (Boyle et al., 1999). Additionally, Jurgens and McAuliffe (2004) used Kolb’s (1984) learning model, which incorporates reflective observations. Ribeiro (2005) also added reflective photographs and had students complete a narrative life story so they would better understand their own cultural identity; however, this did not include the impact of reentry, which might have given valuable insight. Some studies have also added a presentation project for students to complete at the end of the semester (Alexander et al., 2005; Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009; Fawcett et al., 2010).

**Study Abroad**

The counseling field has responded to the growing need for counselors to address the changing family structures, politics, and the groups that work in a global system. (Hohenshil,
Amudson, & Niles, 2015). Counselors must develop awareness, knowledge, and skills to work with a global perspective to meet the challenges of working with more diverse groups (Canfield et al., 2009). Counselor educators have recognized the value of study abroad trips as a potential to help counseling students to broaden their awareness in how cultural, economic, political, and social factors interact in ways that help resolve human struggling across the globe (Leong & Blustein, 2000).

Research over the last decade supports that cultural immersion experiences help build multicultural competencies and increase global citizenship concerns (Barden & Cashwell, 2014; Barden et al., 2015; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; McDowell et al., 2012; Prosek & Michel, 2016; Riberio, 2005), as well as global collaboration and relationships (Leung, 2003; McDowell et al., 2012). Direct contact with people within their culture is effective in confronting biases and sociocentrism when students are under the supervision of well-trained facilitators (Alexander et al., 2005; Ribeiro, 2005; West-Olantunji et al., 2011). It helps students understand their cultural identity in new ways (Heppner & O’Brien, 1994; Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004; Santos Figueroa, 2014). Counselors-in-training also learn the skills and the techniques of the countries visited when they work with local helping agencies (McDowell et al., 2012). These experiences also increase comfort for the student to interact with the more diverse groups upon return (Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009; Ishii et al., 2009; Santos Figueroa, 2014). Study abroad programs have the potential to train students for competency in teaching, advocating, and becoming leaders in the field (Cook, Avrus, & Bonham, 2011; Santos, 2014).

However, it is up to the counselor educators and facilitators to focus attention during the trip on ways to help students develop. It is important for facilitators to create an environment for students to obtain maximum outcomes during these experiences. This environment is one where
counselor educators and facilitators are comfortable with multiple teaching methods, understand group dynamics, and are prepared to support students’ strong emotions and reactions. It is also important for counselor educators to directly link the student’s study abroad experiences to competencies (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002). For example, guided discussions assist students to consider cultural aspects in service planning and express empathy for the country and its people.

Another concern to address in study abroad experiences is that despite the positive outcomes, students experience distress upon returning home from study abroad trips (Adler, 1981). With the attention of counseling trips primarily focusing on the multicultural growth, other outcomes have faded into the background. However, recently, researchers have started to give some attention back on the stress of returning from such trips during the reentry process (Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Fanar, 2018; Platt, 2012; Shannonhouse et al., 2015; Wathen & Kleist, 2015; Wright, 2017), though there is still a lack of research in this area. Returning to the country can be a time of strong emotions, which are not always resolved (Platt, 2012). Often students will ignore the difficulties not realizing fully what is happening (Ishii et al., 2009; West-Olatunji, Goodman, Mehta, & Templeton, 2011). Students have expressed emotions of guilt, sadness, anger, shame, fear, ambivalence and discomfort upon return (Alexander et al., 2005; Cushner & Karim, 2003; Ishii et al. 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Platt, 2012; Shannonhouse et al., 2015; Wright, 2017).

**Reverse Culture Shock and Reentry Difficulties**

Reentry is the adjustment process a traveler goes through after immersion in another culture (Musini, 2018). When counseling students return home, they often experience an uncomfortable or difficult resocialization process as they attempt to assimilate back into their home culture (Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Cushner & Karim, 2003; Fanari, 2018; Platt, 2012).
Reentry is also referred to as reverse culture shock (Adler, 1981), reentry shock (Christofi & Thompson, 2007), or re-acculturation shock (Kostohryz et al., 2014). This transition can leave counselors-in-training disoriented as they are unsure of how the growth that they experienced fits into their home context (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; Sue, 2001; Sue & Sue, 1999). Additionally, students become outsiders to what was once familiar (Lester, 2000; Sussman, 2000).

Although not all travelers experience adverse effects of returning home, many do. Lysgaard (1955) first proposed the U-curve to describe the process of adjustment during a cross-cultural experience. Initially, the student experiences excitement, but this excitement turns into depression as the student experiences culture shock. When the student recovers from this shock, they enter the recovery and adjustment mode, which helps them better understand the culture and adopt a role in it. Gullahorn and Gullahorn (1963) expanded the U-curve into a W-curve to include the return phase, which the student goes through upon returning home. The W-curve is a similar pattern to the U-curve, describing a honeymoon phase, culture shock, and recovery to home life a readjustment. Additionally, the U- and W-curve also primarily focus on culture shock. Culture shock involves attitudes, behaviors, mental constructs, and social interactions, which change and disrupt an individual’s state of identity and equilibrium as they immerse in a new environment (Martin, Slemón, Hiebert, Hallberg, & Cummings, 1989). Reverse culture shock is a similar experience that creates psychological and social changes. Returning students can experience several unexpected emotions upon return home (Arouca, 2013; Brubaker, 2017; Platt, 2012; Weber, 2009).

Despite Gullahorn and Gullahorn’s (1963) initial alert to the problems associated with reentry, this process remains an overlooked complication of study abroad experiences (Arouca,
2013; Brubaker, 2017; Kostohryz et al., 2014; Martin & Harrell, 2003; Platt, 2012). Though many consider the U-curve and the W-curve to be a simplistic view of a complex issue (Ward et al., 2001), the challenge of reentry has not been thoroughly addressed and multicultural competency outcomes and other priorities take precedence in research (Brubaker, 2017; Martin & Harrell, 2003). This leaves students to manage these difficulties on their own (Brubaker, 2017). Thus, students and facilitators need assistance from counselor educators to research, educate and learn ways to help manage this transition (Brubaker, 2017; Platt, 2012).

Reentry is a time where others may not understand the changes students experienced at the academic (Arouca, 2013; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Martin et al., 1989), professional (Gama & Pedersen, 1977; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Martin et al., 1989; Sussman, 2000), and family levels (Arouca, 2013; Kostohryz et al., 2014). It can be a period of grief and loss for the lost relationships and the status they had while abroad (Arouca, 2013; Kostohryz et al., 2014). Some students have described feeling depersonalization symptoms and a sense of disconnectedness (Arouca, 2013). They explain how the feelings of making a difference while away fade into feeling unimportant when they return home (Weber, 2009). They may also struggle with newly understood gender identity and racial identity (Arouca, 2013; Ribeiro, 2005). Student have reported increased insecurity and shyness, especially if the next semester started shortly after the trip (Weber, 2009). They also feel alienated, lonely, or have depressive symptoms (Gaw, 2000), and sometimes they feel guilt or anger over the United States (Arouca, 2013; Fawcett et al., 2010; Walling, Eriksson, Mese, Ciovica, & Gorton, 2006), or reevaluate U.S. values (Allen & Young, 1997; Arouca, 2013; Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009; Fawcett et al., 2014; Platt, 2012). Some have also been sick from being abroad (Arouca, 2013). Even factors that would seem small can make what was familiar to the returning student very different upon
return. The places may stay the same, but they now have different meanings or comparative aspects for the student. Things such as traffic patterns, noise, or lack of noise can take on new meanings in light of where they traveled, which creates a new understanding of home as it compares to where they were (Storti, 2001).

Though not all travelers experience these difficulties, for those who do the readjustment to home is not as easily patterned as the W-curve would suggest (Brubaker, 2017). Additionally, understanding reentry is complicated by the high variability of student programs (Gaw, 2000), which have changed significantly over time (Brubaker, 2017). Unlike going abroad in the past, today’s students may go on several study abroad programs instead of it being a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. But previous studies do not capture all these factors and changed perspectives (Brubaker, 2017). Further, for all the changes in the last decade, only 44% of CACREP-accredited programs responding to a survey noted that they had any system to help students navigate the reentry process (Shannonhouse et al., 2018). When they do have them, there is a low student turn-out (Brubaker, 2017). Research has shown that students do not seek help when it is available, as they do not anticipate the difficulty of adjustment or the potential benefits of the help (Adler, 1981; Weber, 2009). Additionally, the same survey indicated a lack of cohesive knowledge regarding overall cultural immersion outcomes (Shannonhouse et al., 2018). Given the potential for reverse culture shock, and its impact on counselors-in-training, continued research in the reentry experience and outcomes associated with the process is crucial.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to gain understanding in the reentry process when graduate-level counseling students return from a study abroad cultural immersion experience. Although there has been extensive research into the benefits of using international cultural
immersion experiences to enhance the development of multicultural competence of counselors-in-training, the limited research on the students’ reentry experiences suggests that they may experience a reverse culture shock or have difficulty assimilating into their home culture. Understanding of how students assimilate their international cultural immersion experiences once they return home will provide valuable insight for future students and counselor educators who facilitate study abroad experiences.

**Research Question**

What themes emerge when graduate counseling students describe the experience of reentry once the cultural immersion experience was complete?

**Assumptions and Limitations**

There are certain limitations to the study. First, participants of the study were from a single university and a single study-abroad experience. Thus, results cannot be generalized to all study abroad experiences. Additionally, while a significant amount of time had passed between the trip and the interviews, the researcher of the study was a doctoral supervisor for the students during the trip. Thus, it is possible that this could potentially affect the students’ descriptions and interpretation of their experiences.

**Definition of Terms**

*Cultural immersion:* Cultural immersion is defined as an experience where participants are placed in an environment that causes cultural dissonance as individuals interact with others from diverse backgrounds.

*Multicultural competence:* The counselor seeks to understand differences in other cultures to treat the individual from a culturally appropriate stance. Multicultural competence in counseling is achieved when counselors are aware of their own prejudices, biases, values, and
cultural standing and understands global citizenship (Sue et al., 1992).

*Social justice:* In the mental health field, social justice “reflects a fundamental valuing of fairness and equity in resources and groups of people who do not share equal power in society” due to varying races, socioeconomic status, and other society-imposed differences (Constantine et al., 2007, p. 24).

*Study abroad:* Study abroad is defined as a form of cultural immersion programs where students go to another country for an amount of time (usually 1-week up to a full semester) in order to gain credit towards their degree (Brockington, Hoffa, & Martin, 2005; Canfield et al., 2009).

*Reentry:* Reentry is the process of returning home after a study abroad experience.

**Significance of the Study**

The purpose of phenomenology is seeking essential meanings and significance from the experiences of people as it relates to their everyday lives (Schneider, 1998). It is used to enrich lives, culture, and environment by the questions researched. This study was conducted to explore the often missed challenges and successes counselors-in-training may experience in the reentry process as they adjust to home from studying abroad. With the increased use of study abroad programs to meet multicultural counseling competencies, it is important for counselor educators to be aware of concerns and potential problematic areas as they arise. Therefore, this study is significant because it illuminates underrepresented aspects of the reentry process.

**Organization of the Remaining Chapters**

Chapter 1 introduced the study and provided background information on the importance of cultural immersion study abroad programs as they relate to multicultural counselor competencies. The chapter also introduced the difficulties associated with the reentry process
that some students experience. Chapter 2 will review relevant literature through time to show how multicultural competency has driven counseling focused study abroad research. Relevant multicultural theories and pedagogical theories are also reviewed as they relate to research in study abroad programs for counselors in training. Chapter 3 will review the methodology of the study, including research design, research questions, and participant selection. It will also review the process of data collection and analysis of data. Chapter 4 will review findings using the participants’ own words, and present emergent related themes. The coding and analysis of data will also be explained. Finally, Chapter 5 will include the results of the study and suggestions for future research.
CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Multicultural Competency Background

Racial disparities during the 1970s led counseling research to expose ethnocentric biases in counseling (Robinson & Morris, 2000). Further, in the 1980s and 1990s the increase of immigrants, refugees, and asylum seekers to the United States raised awareness of marginalization and oppression complexities for groups from other countries (Lee, 2010). A shift in terminology in the early late 1980s early 1990s reflected the broader focus for minorities that crossed ethnic and race concerns. The literature replaced terms such as minority counseling with cross-cultural counseling and multicultural counseling (Jackson, 1995; Robinson & Morris, 2000). But graduates from counseling programs at the time still expressed feeling unprepared to work with the growing diverse clientele resulting from these changes. They voiced a lack of knowledge regarding skills to work with cultures different from their own (Heppner & O’Brien, 1994).

In response to the growing need to address this lack of training, Sue et al. (1982) presented a proposition paper that presented three cross-cultural counseling competencies of beliefs and attitudes, knowledge, and skills. In a later paper, Sue et al. (1992) further defined the notion of multicultural counseling competencies, presenting a framework of counselor characteristics that reflect multicultural counseling competencies, including (a) counselor awareness of their own assumptions, values, and biases; (b) understanding client worldview as culturally different; and (c) using appropriate interventions for culturally different clients. Additionally, these characteristics each have three dimensions: (a) beliefs and attitudes, (b) knowledge, and (c) skills. The characteristics in combination with the dimensions total nine competencies which describe a multicultural counselor (Sue et al., 1982). Because previous
attempts to have universal approaches for multiple demographic clients were harmful as well as unrealistic (Robinson & Morris, 2000; Sue et al., 1982), counseling education needed to increase multicultural competency by integrating multicultural competency standards (Sue et al., 1992). An important step was the American Association for Counseling and Development endorsing these guidelines in 1993, which was followed by the American Psychological Association (1999) Division 17 and 45 endorsing the guidelines.

The cultural, economic, political, and societal factors increased the diversity of those who sought help in counseling offices during the 80s and 90s (Leong & Blustein, 2000). The literature during the 80s and 90s reflects the exploration of counselor education application of multicultural skills in practice and training programs (Brown, Yonker, & Parham, 1996; Chau, 1990; Holcomb-McCoy, & Myers, 1999; Lee & Bailey, 1997; Mio, 1989; Nwachuku & Ivey, 1991; Ponterotto & Casas, 1987; Ridley, Mendoza, & Kanitz, 1994), the perceptions of students and new counselors in relation to multicultural competency counseling (Heppner & O’Brien, 1994; Martin, Slenon, Hiebert, Hallberg, & Cummings, 1989), and the introduction of teaching sensitive methodology regarding multiculturalism (Chin, Cancela, & Jenkins, 1993). Significantly, it included the first attempt to incorporate, as an outcome objective, multicultural competencies into a study abroad trip (Pope-Davis, et al., 1997). Yet even into the 2000s graduates still complained of lacking skills and perspectives to work with culturally different groups (Canfield et al., 2009; Constantine et al., 2007). Sue (2001) responded with another version of the multicultural competencies, which became the multiple dimensions of cultural competence model. This model became the accepted standard and is discussed next.

Multiple Dimensions of Cultural Competence Model

The American Association for Counseling and Development endorsed Sue et al.’s (1992)
multicultural competencies as standards to achieve. Sue (2001) continued to expand the competencies and eventually presented a model in a new matrix format: a 3 (awareness, knowledge, and skills) × 4 (individual, professional, organizational, and societal) × 5 (African American, Asian American, Latino/Hispanic American, Native American, and European American) factorial combination (Sue, 2001). Sue used the description from the attitudes/beliefs, knowledge, and skills described in the 1992 guidelines and expanded these three areas to incorporate an understanding of the five prominent cultural groups found in the United States at the four interactional levels.

The attitudes/beliefs dimension focuses on the counselor’s need to have awareness of their own racial/ethnic heritage, cultural attitudes, values, and biases and of how these aspects influence their practice in counseling diverse clients (Sue et al., 1992). The knowledge dimension focuses on the counselors’ needs to continually broaden understanding of the ways race, societal expectation, biases, culture, heritage, and ethnicity interact with the formation of an individual’s racial/ethnic/cultural identity, life/vocational choices, psychological manifestations. This dimension includes the counselor’s training of appropriate techniques to use with culturally different clients. Additionally, the dimension emphasized the importance of counselor self-awareness and willingness to learn how societal racism and discrimination as well as their personal perspectives on things such as racist attitudes and beliefs affect the counselors’ professional lives (Sue et al., 1992). Finally, skills reflect the counselors’ abilities to use appropriate intervention techniques while considering the clients’ values, cultural heritage, and life experiences (Sue et al., 1992). The competent counselor would incorporate the combination of these matrix qualities. Until recently the multiple dimensions of cultural competence model (Sue, 2001) was the standard for understanding multicultural counselor development. In 2016 the
attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action discussed under the Multicultural and Social Justice Competencies discussed in chapter one became the new standard.

**Multicultural Development in Study Abroad Experiences**

As colleges and universities perspectives changed toward a greater focus on globalization, counselor educators became interested in ways study abroad travel could potentially meet multicultural counseling competencies. Additionally, research in counseling during the early 2000s started to focus on ways that cultural immersion trips could help reach more cultural diverse individuals and confront racism (Collins & Pieterse, 2007; De Ricco & Sciarra, 2005; Marshall & Wieling, 2000), help build cultural competencies (Alexander et al., 2005; Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Burnett, Hamel & Long, 2004; Diaz- Lázaro, & Cohen, 2001; Jurgens, & McAuliffe, 2004), and increase intercultural sensitivity (Medina-Lopez-Portillo, 2004). The research explored the specific benefits study abroad and cultural immersion trips provided to counseling students. This led to an increased collaboration with international mental-health agencies for study abroad experiences (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Gerstein & Ægisdóttir, 2007; Hodges, 2011; Leong & Blustein, 2000; Leong & Ponterotto, 2003). Counselor educators searched for ways to incorporate service-learning cultural immersion projects across the curriculum to enhance multicultural opportunities (Pope-Davis et al., 1997).

Research in the 2000s revealed benefits when counseling students encounter other cultures while studying abroad. Counseling students develop a deeper understanding of the culture in knowledge and in affect (Alexander et al., 2005; Canfield et al., 2009; Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Ishii et al., 2009; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). Students confront their perspectives on racial tensions and explore their biases when they study abroad (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010), and express an understanding of the host
culture, people, and sociopolitical/economic context in new ways (Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004). Students learn about the cultural values, history, and practices of the country (Cordero & Rodriguez 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). They gain an understanding of oppression and privilege as they witness the struggles of people in other countries, which often results in an increased desire for social justice and advocacy (Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010) and improved sensitivity toward other cultures (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Pope-Davis et al., 1997). They learn transferable counseling skills from local agencies (Cordero & Rodriguez 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004) and develop increased self-efficacy at working with clients from diverse backgrounds (Alexander et al., 2005; Burnett et al., 2004; Canfield et al., 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Ishii et al, 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Tomlinson-Clarke, 1999).

Factors that Foster Multicultural Learning in Cultural Immersion Experiences

To maximize these multicultural benefits, counselor educators need to understand the methods and factors that foster the growth of the benefits during cultural immersion experiences. For example, Pope-Davis et al.’s (1997) MIE model emphasizes critical components for developing multicultural competency: (a) pre-deployment training, (b) sustained time in the field, (c) interaction with culturally diverse others, (d) genuineness/depth of relationships formed, and (e) reflection. Pope-Davis et al. offer phases to plan immersion trips. The first phase is pre-trip planning which includes cognitive immersion, where students research the culture they will be visiting. In this phase students can participate in meetings to discuss their research and if possible, listen to speakers from the culture they will visit. The second phase focuses on meetings that continually reflect and discuss the service-learning experience, as the students
engage the culture and all other aspects of the trip. The last phase is a final debriefing that takes place after the trip is over to share its impact (Pope-Davis et al., 1997).

The key to building cultural sensitivity is allowing the students to reflect and process their feelings and experiences while helping them to incorporate how they will work with future clients differently as an outcome of the trip (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). To do this, the students need to feel safe enough to confront their biases (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Barden & Cashwell, 2014; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005). The safe feelings of these groups influence the participants’ openness during the trips (Barden & Cashwell, 2014). The more supportive the meetings are, the more open the students tend to be (Boyle et al., 1999). Thus, facilitators need to be comfortable with multiple teaching methods, able to support students, and understand the dynamics of groups (Arthur & Achenbach, 2002). Facilitators set the tone of the meetings. It is recommended that facilitators have international experience (Allen & Young, 1997; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005). It is also important to understand the internal process that happens, which helps develop multicultural skills and competencies. Several theories address what takes place to change biases. Transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1997, 2000) captures several factors that are relevant to study abroad trips designed to enhance multicultural counseling competencies.

**Transformative Learning Theory and Study Abroad Cultural Immersion**

Transformative learning offers a theory of how changes in learning during immersion take place. Counselor educators are increasingly using transformative learning theory to address the current concerns surrounding multiculturalism and diversity (Barrio Minton, 2014). The conditions for transformative learning are met with well-facilitated study abroad programs.

Transformative learning theory is an adult learning theory developed by Mezirow (1997),
which focuses on an adult’s need to challenge beliefs they assimilated in childhood. When childhood entrenched beliefs are challenged, through meaningful experiences, the adult can make better informed decisions related to experiences. (Mezirow, 2000). When childhood beliefs are unchallenged, adults often rationalize new information to conform to existing beliefs (Mezirow, 2000; Taylor & Cranton, 2013). Transformative learning involves a critical reflection of childhood experiences and assumptions for the purpose of reevaluation (Fuhr, Laros, & Taylor, 2017).

Transformative learning describes the process of effecting change in frames of reference (Mezirow, 2000). Mezirow (1997) explained that people develop frames of references that help them internally to explain the world. These frames of references are the assumptions created over time and experiences. “They are culturally bound and involve habits of mind and resulting points of view” (Mezirow, 1997, p. 5). Habits of mind—filters that have developed from experience—act as funnels for new information. These habits of mind protect existing world views by highlighting supportive evidence for that view while filtering out contrary evidence of existing preconceptions. The more times someone filters information, the more entrenched the belief systems become In time the assumptions become increasingly difficult to change. The resulting point of view encompasses the attitudes, beliefs, perspectives, judgments, and biases developed from the frames of references experienced over time.

The four processes of learning that move a person from an ethnocentric perspective to a broader perspective follow a general pattern (Mezirow, 1997). First, the person seeks evidence to support an existing point of view about a group. Second, they develop biases that others are inferior and look for evidence to support this view. Third, the individual has an encounter that causes a critical reflection on misconceptions/assumptions about a group or groups. The
experience challenges and disrupts deep-rooted frames of reference. The resulting feelings of guilt and shame cause the person to go through a self-examination process in which he or she critically reflects on personal assumptions and tries to negotiate current frames of reference. Fourth, after several of these encounters, they begin to realize that others have experienced change in their beliefs. They are challenged by encounters to negotiate changes in their biases and comforted by the recognition that others have negotiated similar changes, and are empowered to drop their existing filters rather than resist the new information (Mezirow, 1997).

In addition to these four processes, individuals (a) explore new roles, relationships, and actions that result from the challenge of biases. In this exploration phase, the person seeks to apply the new learned behavior and skills. (b) They begin to plan a course of action to incorporate the new understanding. At this point, they accomplished the incorporation of new perspectives and begin to seek how to apply what they have learned. The last steps include (c) acquiring knowledge and skills to implement the plan, (d) provisional trying of the new roles, (e) building competence and self-confidence in the new roles and relationships, and (f) a reintegration into a person’s life based on conditions dictated by new perspectives (Mezirow, 2000).

Counseling students who experience abroad cultural immersion and build relationships with people in other cultures and countries experience three advantages that relate to this transformative learning process (Pederson & Leong, 1997). First, the experience challenges counselors’ biases and assumptions. Second, they discover new perspectives, worldviews and are more open to other cultures’ ways of life. Lastly, they learn more skills in counseling practices when they work with other cultures (Barden et al., 2015). Cultural immersion trips expose the counseling students to new environments that create disorientating dilemmas as students
experience diverse cultures that challenge their biases (Barden & Cashwell, 2014; Barden et al., 2015; De Ricco & Sciarra, 2005; Guth et al., 2012; McDowell et al., 2012; Prosek & Michel, 2016; Ribeiro, 2005). A key to incorporating these experiences are the meetings which are held during the trip. These meetings encourage students to reflect on experiences through discussions, journaling, and other methods that foster transformation in biases (Barden & Cashwell, 2014; Barden et al. 2015; Canfield et al., 2009; Hoshmand, 2004; McDowell et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2014; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010).

The reflection and discussions are an essential component of the transformative process in study abroad cultural immersion trips. Without it, students may continue to look for evidence to keep their existing points of view. Without reflection and dialogue, integration of new perspectives may not happen due to the students’ fears of the unknown. Fear blocks the empathy needed in the transformation process (Lindsey, Carlozzi, & Eells, 2001). The counseling students develop critical thinking when dialogue and reflection are available helping them process. Dialogue and reflection create an environment where the adaptation of new understandings of power, privilege, and oppression intersect with students’ personal identities (Hoshmand, 2004).

**Other Models and Theories**

The other models discussed in this section have been used in the last two decades of research to describe the process of how change on study abroad trips occur. There are common factors in the models that are relevant to cultural immersion experiences. In general, these theories and models have student groups working collaboratively with a variety of members from the host nation. This methodology complies with Allport’s (1954) original intergroup theory and Freire’s (2018) pedagogy of the oppressed. Additionally, Sussman’s (2000) cultural identity and transition theory are dependent on the type of contact a traveler has with a host country in
combination with the internal motivation of the traveler to change.

Previous research in study abroad cultural immersion experiences incorporates common factors from various models and theories which describe or explain how students change biases, perspectives and gain multicultural skills and competencies. There are common factors in the models that are relevant to cultural immersion experiences. In general, these theories and models have student groups working collaboratively with a variety of members from the host nation. This methodology complies with Allport’s (1954) original intergroup theory and Freire’s (2018) pedagogy of the oppressed. Additionally, Sussman’s (2000) cultural identity and transition theory are dependent on the type of contact a traveler has with a host country in combination with the internal motivation of the traveler to change.

They explain the conditions needed for change, such as Allport’s (1954) contact hypothesis or intergroup theory ideas of equal status and common goals of students and host group (DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Diaz-Lazaro & Cohen 2001; Ishii et al. 2009; Kim & Van Dyne, 2012). A focus on relationship as described by Freire’s pedagogy of the oppressed (1973, 2018) and Miller’s relational cultural theory (1976) which both focus on building relationships that exposes power differences, shame, disconnectedness and isolation with the intent to give voice to the marginalized.

Study abroad cultural immersion trips create environments for key factors in these theories and pedagogical methods. For the oppressed to rise out of oppression, they must change the consciousness of the oppressors. It requires the marginalized to choose to integrate into society, and not see themselves as outside of society (Freire, 2018). Cultural immersion study abroad trips have helped to create the relationships needed to expose oppression and allow counseling students to work with marginalized (Boyle et al.’s, 1999; Medina López-Portillo,
2004; Platt, 2012). Similarly, relational cultural theory is an ideal framework to incorporate in study abroad programs (Avent Harris, Dietz, & Crumb, 2019). Focus during the trip is on growth-fostering relationships that deliberately work toward connectedness among participants, facilitators, host country partners, all of which have different powers and influence (Avent Harris et al., 2019).

**Summary.** Study abroad experiences facilitate self/other understanding as students examine their cultural knowledge within the context of a different cultural context. The context of immersion into another culture enables the process of questioning beliefs and assumptions (Alvarez, 2001; Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Burnett et al., 2004; Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009). The theories and models in this section explained the process during these excursions that allow situations to build into multicultural counseling competencies. However, only Sussman (2000) addressed what happens when travelers return home. There remains a lack of research for the way students confront changes once home again, though there is research that has highlighted some of the challenges students face upon reentry.

**Reentry Problems and the Effect on Multicultural Competencies**

In the early days of study abroad research, Adler (1981) noted that different attitudes and actions affected the long-term effectiveness of skills acquired when students studied abroad. More recent research has shown that upon reentry home after a study abroad experience, students had an increase in cultural sensitivity (Recisen, 2013), the ability to appreciate differences in other cultures and respond and communicate effectively with other cultures (Chen, 1997). However, this increase reversed 4 months later, which may be due to students initially viewing the country of study as superior, then readjusting that belief in time (Recisen, 2013). Cushner and Karim (2003) cautioned that returning students may need help integrating what they learned
abroad into their careers and academics. Sometimes the students return with an inflated sense of cultural sensitivity, believing that they understood the culture fully from their limited observations of the local areas they visited. This sometimes resulted in students no longer developing their understanding of culture without further prompting (Medina-López-Portillo, 2004). In addition to these concerns, problems during reentry may decrease the long-term gains of competencies learned while the students were abroad (Kostohyrz et al., 2014).

**Student Reentry Experiences**

There is limited literature regarding students’ responses to reentry. Furthermore, very few examine reentry of cultural immersion experiences of students engaged in counseling activities. This section focuses on previous findings related to study abroad cultural immersion experiences.

**Platt’s (2012) Findings**

Platt (2012) surveyed past participants of a Mexico-city based program designed for cultural immersion of students in various US graduate counseling programs. The purpose of the experience was to increase understanding of Latino communities (Platt). While participating in this 5-week program, students stay with host families and worked in various counseling agencies. The results of the study found that there were several themes that emerged from the analysis as follows:

**Increased awareness of personal culture.** Platt (2012) found that students looked at the United States with a new perspective after experiencing the Mexico City program. Platt and other researchers have found that study abroad returnees have an increased awareness of differing and similar values in both their immersion cultures and their home cultures (Canfield et al., 2009; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004; Platt, 2012; Ribeiro, 2005; Santos Figueroa, 2014;
Wilson & Taylor, 2013). Platt also found that some students expressed an increase in the desire to know more about their personal backgrounds, which increased conversations with family members. Understanding some of the similarities increased a desire in those surveyed to connect more with groups that differed from those known to the students (Canfield et al., 2009; Platt, 2012). Additionally, several of the students in the Platt study experienced shame, anger, and shock when they were seen as privileged, and they felt and understood the privileges of being an American in new ways.

**Challenges resulting from immersion education.** Students talked about experiencing dramatic changes in their worldviews, which they found difficult to communicate with others once they returned home (Platt, 2012). They saw the poverty and the different standards of living in other countries and compared it to their experiences in the States. They felt the power differentials of opportunity between the States and the host country. Many of them resented or were angry at the United States after coming back. Some used this anger, turning it into social action. The participants’ return thus created a dissonance as their worldview changed, which was at times emotional and tumultuous. There is a concern for the polarizing views some students felt after returning to the United States (Platt, 2012).

**Increased complexity in how students understand host culture.** Students also expressed moving beyond stereotypical and shallow understandings of the host culture (Canfield et al., 2009; Platt, 2012) into a critically conscious development involving the ability to use critical thinking and broaden their understanding to implement problem-solving techniques (Ishii et al. 2009; West-Olatunji et al., 2011), an overall increased understanding of other cultures (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004), and increased empathy for individuals of that country (Ribeiro, 2005). Many students in several studies expressed having new understandings of power
differences, poverty, and oppression after visiting other countries (Ishii et al., 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Medina-López-Portillo, 2004; Platt, 2012; Ribeiro, 2005; Santos Figueroa, 2014; West-Olatunji et al., 2011).

**Implications for participants’ clinical work with the people of the host culture.**

Because the students had new understandings of the people from the Latino community, they expressed becoming more aware of the importance of understanding a client’s context and learned caution around imposing their values onto clients. The participants of Platt’s (2012) survey had a better understanding of the situational factors surrounding the Latino community in Mexico City. Additionally, they expressed understanding immigration issues into the United States in new ways. Platt also recorded that students expressed several emotions which they experienced as they returned home, encouraging a reentry component to immersion experiences because much of the learning in cultural immersions takes place after the students have returned home.

**Martin and Harrell’s (2004) Findings**

In addition to Platt’s focus on students’ study abroad experience, Martin and Harrell (2004) focused on students’ emotions and behaviors students during the reentry process. Research has shown that various types of student and business travelers express difficulty when they return to a home environment, regardless of times the person has traveled (Black & Gregersen, 1999; Gaw, 2000; Martin & Harrell, 2004; Storti, 2001). From their research, Martin and Harrell suggested three different domains from which to understand the reentry process: affective (emotional), behavioral, and cognitive. A review of experiences in existing research is explored through the lenses of Martin and Harrell in the following sections.

**Affective dimensions of reentry adjustment.** The affective domain stresses returning
students’ feelings and the degree of satisfaction as they adapt back to their environment. It includes the psychological turmoil and discomfort that a student experiences upon returning home (Lester, 2000; Martin & Harrell, 2004; Sussman, 2000), which involves emotional and psychological stress. Returnees experience perplexity and confusion regarding the disorientating feel of returning home (Martin & Harrell, 2004). Research concurs with this type of response in several different emotional areas.

**Grief and loss.** Students from various studies describe experiencing some kind of loss and grief (Butcher, 2002; Doka, 1980; Kostohryz et al., 2014; Lester, 2000). For example, Kostohryz et al. (2014) explained that students experience loss over friendships they made while they were abroad. They have other losses as well including loss of adventure/experience, loss of a structured lifestyle, loss of purpose, loss of old values, and loss related to no longer understanding of their home cultures the same way (Arouca, 2013; Kostohryz et al., 2014). Butcher (2002) also discussed the disenfranchised grief that resulted from students who lived in New Zealand and studied in East Asia. Disenfranchised grief is a grief not shared and recognized by those surrounding the mourner (Doka, 1980). Lester (2000) also observed this grief, explaining that students expressed frustration and sadness because others did not understand their longing for a return to the host culture, which made them feel alienated and detached. Issues of psychological distress that mirror grief symptoms have been widely documented among different returnee groups (Arouca, 2013; Cox, 2006; Gaw, 2000; Platt, 2012; Raschio, 1987; Thompson & Christofi, 2006).

**Depression.** The relational difficulties that students experience also results in the students’ withdrawal and feelings of sadness (Ishii et al., 2009). Some students will isolate themselves upon returning home because they feel alienated (Platt, 2012). Some students have
talked about crying every day after they returned from being abroad (Walling et al., 2006).

Additionally, 42 students out of 66 students from Gaw’s (2000) study stated experiencing some type of depression after their return from studying abroad. Various research describes similar findings (Akhtar, Kamal, Hayee, & Imitaz, 2018; Butcher, 2002; Ishii et al., 2009; Szkudlarek, 2010; Thomas, 2009; Walling et al., 2006; Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010).

**Anger/shame.** Some students return and experience anger and shame in two primary realms: toward American privilege (Platt, 2012) and anger/shame due to not being accepted back home. Not feeling accepted at home relates creates feelings of powerlessness and rejection (Austin, 1986; Cushner & Karim, 2003; Ishii et al., 2009; Platt, 2012; Sussman, 2000). Students also become frustrated and even angry as they encounter other people’s expectations of them (Westwood et al., 1986). In one study, students were also angry at the disregard the United States had for a Puerto Rican town, which suffered due to naval practices nearby (Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009).

**Behavioral dimensions of reentry adjustment.** Behavior changes, at one level, reflect the way people are trying to present themselves in social situations (Goffman, 1978). Different cultures have different cues and different gestures, and these movements mean different things in different cultures. Students adopt new habits and feel different regarding their race and ethnicity (Ribeiro, 2005). Unfamiliar cultural context can cause conflict in a student’s identity framework (Sussman, 2000). Initially changes take place when entering another country, but identity changes also happen upon returning home (Szudlarek, 2009). Behaviors that were unconscious before the student left suddenly become noticeable and awkward. When students return, they have adopted new behaviors and home feels different physically, and they need time to adjust back to what was once normal (Martin & Harrell, 2004).
The students also learn new environmental cues, which can change the way they experience what was familiar (Ishii et al. 2009; Shannonhouse et al., 2018; Wright, 2017). The amount of readjustment or distress caused by behavior changes may depend on the similarity or differences between the cultures (Storti, 2001; Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2005). Some of these behavior changes result in the isolation and withdrawal when family and friends are not expecting the change in the student, nor the student in the family and friends (Adler, 1981; Thomas, 2009). Students must decide if they will return to old behaviors and responses, potentially losing newly acquired skills, or resist conformity to the former ways (Martin & Harrell, 2004). According to Adler (1981), the more likely the behaviors are accepted, the easier adjustment is for the returnee. Adler found factors that effected positive or negative reentry depended on the individuals’ needs for validation of the things learned while the person was away. Additionally, sense of self-efficacy relates to what was learned when they were abroad. Practicing and discussing skills participants are learning during the trip on the trip can increase the likelihood of use upon returning home (Arthur, 2003).

**Cognitive dimensions of reentry adjustment.** As the student returns home and faces changes in themselves and others, it creates a cognitive dissonance because home is not quite home (Storti, 2001). Their perceptions of what was once normal are changed by the new experiences they faced. But when they return home, often the people at home expect them to be the same which causes inner and relational conflict (Raschio, 1987; Weaver, 1994). Part of the needed processing of reentry is a discussion on how the student plans to incorporate the changes and what they have learned while abroad (Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Ishii et al., 2009).

**Expectations.** Returning individuals usually believe that they will be able to return with little change or difficulty (Arthur, 2003; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Kostohryz et al., 2014;
Lester, 2001; Sussman, 2000). However, when they return, they experience cognitive, affective, and behavior changes often resulting in experiencing confusion. They do not understand why they feel like outsiders in a previously familiar environment and in relationships that should be familiar and routine (Arthur, 2003; Kostohryz et al., 2014; Lester, 2001). Additionally, both the home environment and the returning individual may have changed during the period of studying abroad (Szkudlarek, 2010). These unmet expectations create internal conflicts in the returnees as they work to understand the changes while feeling they are part of the home country and the study abroad country (Christofi & Thompson, 2007).

Reentry difficulties vary depending upon if expectations are fulfilled or unfulfilled (Martin & Harrell, 2004). If the returnee’s expectations are accurate or reentry is better than expected, the returnee’s evaluation of reentry is more positive than if the expectations are not met, but if it is worse than expected, the reentry process is described as a negative experience (Martin & Harrell, 2004). However, the negative experience may not necessarily create psychological distress. Psychological distress depends more on how different the expectation is from the reality experienced once home along with the person’s readiness to go home (Martin & Harrell, 2004; Ward et al., 2005).

Comparisons. Researchers have consistently stated that students return and make comparisons often in their responses and contrast the differences of their home culture versus the culture of the host country (Arouca, 2013; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Medina López-Portillo, 2004; Platt, 2012, Prosek & Michel, 2016). These comparisons cause internal conflicts in the returnee, as their perspectives on their home cultures’ values change (Arouca, 2013; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Medina López-Portillo, 2004; Platt, 2012).

Values and beliefs. Students also confront different sets of values and beliefs, either
consciously or unconsciously when they travel abroad. This confrontation causes students to reevaluate their values (Storti, 2001; Westwood et al., 1986). As mentioned previously, several students have returned to the United States with a different understanding of power and privilege, which led to shame, guilt, and anger regarding the power differential. Sussman’s (2001) cultural identity model describes the way self-concepts change for sojourners and the difficulties they face upon returning home when they have incorporated new aspects into their identity.

**Academic dimensions of reentry adjustment.** Further, students have expressed feelings of fatigue, especially if the next semester started shortly after the trip (Gaw, 2000). Even when some programs offered reentry assistance, students did not anticipate the difficulty to be so severe, so they did not go to the programs. Others occupied themselves by becoming over-involved with school to hide from the emotional, spiritual, and relational issues that developed upon reentry (Weber, 2009). Returnees have expressed feeling like their coursework had increased (Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010). The closer the students who traveled were to their return of the next semester, the more they felt their academic work was more demanding. However, as time passed, the intensity of the workload decreases (Wielkiewicz & Turkowski, 2010).

Counselor educators need to consider these student perceptions and experiences when planning study abroad trips to decrease the likelihood of problems that may develop during and after the immersion experience. For example, ongoing meetings before, during, and after the trip allows facilitators of the trip to address expectations and stay aware of each student’s personal experience, increasing the likelihood of retaining multicultural cultural competencies and other skills as well (Alexander et al., 2005; Allen & Young, 1997; Boyle et al., 1999; Cushner & Karim, 2003; Pope-Davis et al., 1997).
Global Reentry Adjustment Model

Research has acknowledged that students transition from studying abroad to returning home can be a difficult process. Yet despite decades of research in cultural immersion programs, there is no consensus on how to enhance competencies after the experience. Additionally, there is not an agreed-on pedagogical approach, theory, or model to follow for these programs (Shannonhouse et al., 2018; West-Olatunji & Shannonhouse, 2013). However, counselor educators do have one model to consider that discusses the transition process—the global adjustment model (Lester, 2001).

The global reentry adjustment model is a 3-phase model designed for processing the transition home (Lester, 2001). In Phase 1: acknowledgment, it is important to create a positive environment for the returnee. One way of doing this is to inform family members of the trip’s purpose and changes that might happen in the student while away. Meetings with the traveler discuss concerns they may face at work, school, and home. In Phase 2: impact of reentry, the returnees are allowed to express their loss, fear, and other feelings to their families and others. An open atmosphere of sharing and processing, where they can explore the emotional aspects and relational losses, memories, and other details, is present. Last, Phase 3: transformation happens when sojourners reinvest back into their home cultures. They process both the fantasies and the realities of their experiences, and they adopt their new identities accepting the changes within themselves.

In addition to this model, Martin (1984) urged educators to begin to look at learning models and coping styles as frameworks to understand the process of reentry. Because the problems of reentry are often unexpected for the student, they need help identifying their feelings and obtaining help (Martin, 2004). A starting point to work with students at reentry is to address
their expectations of coming home. Other variables include demographic factors, relationship factors, readiness, and willingness to return home (Martin, 1984).

**Other Findings and Variables and Recommendations from Research**

There are several individual factors in the reentry process. Circumstances before the trip (Adler, 1981), personality of the student (Ward et al., 2005), social support the student has at home (Martin & Harrell, 2004), degree of immersion (Sussman, 1986), and style of coping mechanisms (Adler, 1981; Christofi & Thompson, 2007; Thompson & Christofi, 2006) can affect planning the reentry assistance for a student. Therefore, increasing awareness about the reentry process for the students as well as for organizations that send or host students is important (Kostohryz et al., 2014). Additionally, pre-departure meetings and journaling can help students as they return home (Kostohryz et al., 2014). Counselor educators and other facilitators, as well as counselors who work with returnees, can also use creative and experiential interventions formed around each student’s presenting needs. Further, advocacy is important through continued education in the process of reentry (Kostohryz et al., 2014).

**Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented a review of the history of multicultural counseling competencies and the way cultural immersion study abroad trips help to build these competencies in counseling students. The chapter reviewed theories and models relevant to counselor educators concerning study abroad trips. Additionally, this chapter reviewed reentry difficulties that students have experienced and current research recommendations to maximize the benefits and reduce the difficulties associated with reentry. The information reviewed reveals the importance of understanding the reentry process.
CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

In this chapter, I provide the qualitative methodology used to examine the reentry experiences of graduate counseling students returning from a cultural immersion study abroad experience. The study involved phenomenological analysis to analyze the details of the participants’ shared phenomenon (McLeod, 2011; Moustakas, 1994), which involved thematic analysis to explore the experience of the participants. The chapter includes a summary of the process of thematic analysis (Braun, Clarke, Hayfield, & Terry, 2019), participant selection, and sample size in addition to the rationale and procedures for data analysis, the role of the researcher, and verification procedures assessing and ways of addressing trustworthiness following Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for trustworthiness.

Research Purpose

Current research acknowledges that students may experience adjustment difficulty in the transition home after studying overseas; however, there is little research detailing the experiences of those who have made this transition. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to expand knowledge in an area that is not currently adequately explored. I conducted this inquiry to identify the common themes that arise from the students’ narratives about their personal experiences when coming back home from a cultural immersion study abroad practicum/internship.

Research Question

The principal research question for this qualitative study is “How do graduate counseling students describe the impact of the reentry once the immersion experience was complete?”
Research Design

The research design for this study was a phenomenological thematic analysis. I took this approach due to its power to draw the common meaning found in the shared experiences of various individuals (Creswell, 2017). This method allowed me to better discover themes from the students’ experiences after they returned home from participating in a counseling practicum or internship in a foreign country.

Thematic analysis allows for flexibility in methodology while allowing for rich detail and description (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Thematic analysis is not a passive process, as the researcher plays an active role in identifying and reporting the themes of interest. Although themes emerge from the data, the researcher is still choosing the narrative descriptions about the themes discovered (Braun et al., 2019). Thematic analysis uses an inductive or a deductive approach to code and theme, though no study is fully one or the other (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). The deductive method uses existing concepts or ideas as a framework to interpret the data. I chose the inductive approach, which derives the themes and codes from the content of the data. The inductive approach is used to find the voice and meaning that arise naturally from the data (Braun et al., 2019; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). This method may result in themes that vary from the questions that asked during the interviews (Braun et al., 2019).

My main criteria for selecting an approach was its ability to help find the common meaning among individuals who had a shared experience or phenomenon. Phenomenological thematic analysis is a method that is used to look for meaning across mutual or shared experiences or phenomenon. It helps find commonalities or patterns in the research topic (Braun et al., 2019; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Thematic analysis also expresses the value of participants’ unique viewpoints, which can only be fully understood from their experience and
worldview (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018). Therefore, this phenomenological approach allowed the study abroad experience and the reentry process to be understood through the personal stories of the participants.

I considered other qualitative methods but felt that using a phenomenological thematic analysis was the best approach for this study (McLeod, 2011). I initially considered interpretive phenomenological analysis as an approach for this study. However, this approach tends to focus more on understanding how people are experiencing a phenomenon in everyday reality (McLeod, 2011), so it did not fit the purpose of this study. I also eliminated grounded theory methodology because I did not intend to develop a new theory (Holloway & Tordes, 2003). Further, because I wanted to hear the common themes from analyzing multiple participants’ voices, I excluded a case study approach, which would limit the study to a single participant’s experience. Finally, I eliminated an ethnographic approach because I was not examining cultural characteristics of the participants. Given these limitations, I determined that these approaches were not adequate to answer the research question.

**Selection of Participants**

The target population for this study was comprised of nine master’s level clinical mental health counseling students from a CACREP-accredited institution. The students were enrolled in a practicum or internship that took place during a 23-day international study abroad trip. All the students were enrolled in a faculty supervision course taught by one professor. Institutional review board approval was obtained (4/25/2019, Exemption 3775.042519) prior to contacting any participant along with permission to record and publish the findings.
Role of the Researcher

In this qualitative research, I was the human instrument through which all data were collected and analyzed (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). As the human instrument, it is important to identify my role in the research and potential bias that could have manifested in data collection and analysis (Corbin, Strauss, & Strauss, 2015). For instance, I was also an intern supervisor to the participants during the study abroad trip. The internship fulfilled my supervisory internship requirement toward my PhD. These interviews, however, began 11 months after the return from the trip. During the semester I was supervising the participants, neither the participants nor I was aware of the later developed study. Additionally, there has been no further interaction with the participants since the semester ended. To address any potential biases, I also used bracketing in the process of analyzing the findings and writing the results according to the notes and mapping I made while collecting data. As the researcher, I was a facilitator of the students’ stories and recounting of their reentry experiences.

After developing themes, I checked with the participants’ statements during the interview to capture their voice. I also followed Moustakas’s (1994) epoche process, approaching the data openly and bracketing off my assumptions and expectations during the interview to make room for the participants to fully engage in their experience. Additionally, I maintained close contact with my committee to help be self-aware, unbiased, and accountable. I also gave the participants the option to journal their thoughts or reflect on the interview questions prior to the interview. This lessened the chance of my inadvertently biasing them with my unchecked bias.

Research Procedures

Semistructured interviews took place through video conference and were audio recorded. The interviews lasted for approximately an hour and a half (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The
interview questions are available in Appendix B. The questions were open-ended and allowed the participants to reflect fully on the experiences explored. Once the interviews were complete, I carefully transcribed each interview separately. To verify the accuracy, I read the transcripts while listening to the recorded interview.

**Preparing to Collect Data**

I initially brainstormed a list of potential interview questions that would help to draw out the experience of the participants. I gave these questions for my committee to review. After considering committee suggestions, I removed questions not focused on the participants’ experience. After committee review, 10 questions were determined (see Appendix B).

After receiving institutional review board approval, I contacted the participants via e-mail to invite them to participate in the study. If they chose to participate, they responded with a signed consent form. The next step was to arrange an interview either in person or by video conference. After contacting the participants, they agreed to a video conference. I recorded the interviews with two audio recording devices in case one malfunctioned. I then transcribed the interviews verbatim.

**Analysis**

I used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) 6-phase approach of thematic analysis: familiarization with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. I also used Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) criteria for trustworthiness to develop strategies to go with these six phases (Nowell, Norris, White, & Moules, 2017). I adopted these strategies and listed the criteria through the stages described in the following paragraphs.
The first stage of Braun et al.’s (2019) analysis prescribed the way to familiarize myself with the data. I read the data while listening to the recording, then I reread the data without taking notes or making observations (Riessman, 1993). During the next reading, I made notes about my observations and reflections while looking for comments of significance. I continued to reread to begin to understand the depth and breadth of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I highlighted relevant texts and commented on each transcript any themes that emerged. I wrote these themes into an Excel worksheet, where I also I documented my initial observations with reflective thoughts about potential code/themes (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

The second stage of Braun et al.’s (2019) analysis is when I began to find meanings, commonalities, and things of interest such as the language or phrases that stood out (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). I coded individual data as they emerged and my observations from the first stage. I used no previously established coding—only what arose through the process (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Howitt, & Cramer, 2007; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). I also generated an audit trail of code generation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by copying the Excel sheets and making changes on the new sheet, keeping a single for the codebook to increase trustworthiness.

The third phase involved creating themes by examining how different codes naturally combine to form different themes (Braun et al., 2019). Themes are broader categories of significance into which codes fit (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). I looked at topics of conversation, frequency, and context (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017), documenting these as themes. I then combined findings on a new spreadsheet. I only extracted direct statements from the participants. To address trustworthiness, I kept track of the hierarchies of concepts and themes by notes of explanation and comments (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
In the fourth phase, I reviewed the themes (Braun et al., 2019). I reviewed how the data were starting to tell a story and revised the data as needed. I discarded what was not directly related to the story or classified as potential subthemes. I mapped the data to assure the data made sense. To increase trustworthiness in this phase, I tested for referential adequacy by returning to the initial transcripts and checked the themes fit the context (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017).

The fifth phase required defining and naming the themes (Braun et al., 2019). In this phase, I began to create an overall narrative. I reviewed the breadth of each theme and gave a critique describing each chosen theme. After completion, I reviewed the data again to increase trustworthiness. I also increased trustworthiness by asking members of my committee to review my findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Additionally, I sought feedback from the participants. Three of the five participants responded with feedback that I incorporated into the narrative. Based on feedback from my committee members, I reorganized and renamed the themes for better clarity, combining some of the themes for better accuracy. When this was complete, one of my committee members triangulated the new themes against the research question by using the original relevant quotes and matching them against the new condensed themes. Though there was general consensus on the findings, this committee member discovered a new potential theme; however, a closer examination of the quotes in context revealed that the existing themes were adequate to fit with the quotes. When there was an occasional difference in subtheme, I considered the quote in context and adjusted the categorization of quotes as needed.

Finally, the last phase was the production of the report (Braun et al., 2019). This final report tells the story of all the data across all themes and subthemes. I then used Braun and Clarke’s (2006) 15-point checklist to verify the accuracy of the thematic analysis.
Ethical Considerations

I obtained consent from the participants (see Appendix C) in a form that included a detailed description of what the study would entail with instructions on how to respond. In the e-mail I informed participants that their participation would be anonymous. I repeated this during the interview. With the intent to eliminate and reduce all possible risk to the participants, I adhered to all the guidelines set by the institutional review board. The data collected are used only for the purposes of this study. All data was password protected and stored on a secure drive. As the principle researcher, I had sole access to all data.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the phenomenological thematic analysis methodology used to answer the research question. This included participant selection, the 6-phase process of thematic analysis, the role of the researcher, and the process of establishing trustworthiness. In the next chapter, I will provide a detailed description of the analysis and themes that emerged.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

In this chapter, I provide the description of the participants, an overview of the procedure used for preparing and analyzing the data, and the results of the analysis. The process of identifying the themes and sub-themes, and the subsequent themes and subthemes that emerged from the data as presented. I provide verbatim statements from the participants to support the emergent themes and subthemes.

Process of Thematic Analysis

Participant Selection

Participants for this study were master’s level counseling students who fulfilled part of their practicum or internship experience through a 3-and-a-half-week study abroad trip. All the students were on the same trip from the same university in the Mid-Atlantic United States. I contacted the nine counseling students from the trip. Out of the nine, five students responded and were subsequently interviewed. These students represented a diverse group, which included four female students (one African/Black, one Caribbean Islander, and two Caucasian), and one Caucasian male student.

Interviews were completed by video conference during May and June 2019. These video conferences were audio recorded by two different devices. However, one of the interviews was disrupted by technical difficulties, so it was continued by phone only and recorded by a single recording device. I then transcribed all the interviews verbatim, which led to all the themes and subthemes. Themes were not necessarily derived as answers from the interview questions; the themes emerged freely as the participants expressed their experiences, which may or may not have directly answered the interview questions. I followed the procedures of thematic analysis as developed by Braun et al. (2019), which are described in the following sections, with suggestions
for trustworthiness by Lincoln and Guba (1985).

**Step 1: Become Familiar with the Data**

To become familiar with the data, I read through the material several times. After transcribing the interviews, I listened to the interviews while reading the transcriptions to verify accuracy. I then reread the material to become familiar with the data corpus; no marks or comments were written or noted during this initial reading (Braun et al., 2019). My next reading involved creating guiding notes on the side of the transcript and initial highlighting statements that represented emerging themes.

**Step 2: Generate Initial Codes**

I then extracted the transcripts into an Excel sheet with highlights and initial coding numbers next to the pasted information. I created a separate coding worksheet to keep track of the emerging themes. I then removed all irrelevant material. Only the quoted material that represented the themes remained (see Braun et al., 2019). These initial themes were reviewed by the participants for accuracy of representation and verification of meaning. Out of the five participants, three gave feedback regarding the themes (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

**Step 3: Search for Themes**

Because the themes emerged inductively from the data, coding did not necessarily reflect the interview questions. Thus, accurate representation was important to the findings. Upon receiving feedback from the participants (see Lincoln & Guba, 1985), I proceeded to further define the themes. I reviewed the remaining data line-by-line and coded the information by themes and subthemes (Braun et al., 2019). I used an open-coding method, meaning there were no pre-set codes. I developed the codes solely by order in which the themes emerged. Through the analysis and rereading, codes changed, and modifications were made as needed.
Step 4: Reviewing Themes

According to Braun et al. (2019), a theme is what stands out by significance. It is something that reveals pertinent information regarding the experience of the participant. After following Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) suggestion to check the themes and extractions against the original text and context, I determined that some themes might have similar subthemes. For example, initially it appeared there might have been a separate subtheme under the over-arching value enhancement/clarification theme for how to treat the client in their space. However, upon further examination and consideration, the extracted quotes fit more comfortably under a relational subtheme.

I then extracted the remaining information and arranged it by code. At the same time, I started to map on a separate worksheet the themes and subthemes (Braun et al., 2019). I extracted all the quotes from the transcripts to review the data and verify the themes made sense. Codes were reviewed and revised as needed to capture the essence of the emerging themes.

Step 5: Define and Name the Themes

In this final stage, I reviewed the themes alongside participant feedback for accuracy. I verified that the theme captured the essence of the students’ experiences. Additionally, I clarified the names of each theme as well as each subtheme. I also questioned whether the themes and subthemes made sense and fit together. To increase trustworthiness, I discussed the themes and shared the map with a member of my committee (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This committee member triangulated the themes by checking all the relevant quotes against the research question. Most areas agreed with the original assessment. There were some areas of discrepancy between subthemes, which were then reviewed, discussed, and placed a final time based on feedback and context.
**Step 6: Write up Findings**

At this point, I reviewed Braun and Clarke’s 15-point checklist (Braun & Clarke, 1996, 2006) to see if I missed any steps (see Appendix C). The checklist is a way to verify that the resulting themes accurately reflect the participants’ experience by analyzing, interpreting, and continuously checking findings against the original context. I followed the checklist by clarifying the consistency and seeking feedback from the participants and my committee. After verifying that themes were consistent and an accurate representation of the students’ experience, I was able to present the findings. In the findings, I present current data as it relates to the themes found in this study. Because this is a study focused on the students’ experiences, the students’ experiences are described as much as possible through their quotations. In cases where quotations are longer, I made sure to use participants’ actual words rather than my summary of what they said. Additionally, all names are pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. The themes are discussed in the following sections.

**Emergent Themes**

Two sets of themes emerged from the analysis: circumstantial themes and impact themes. The circumstantial themes gave context to, or helped to create, the conditions for the impact themes. The impact themes describe the several ways participants reported being influenced or impacted by the reentry transition. These also included what they learned from the study abroad trip as a whole. Finally, these impact themes described how they incorporated what they learned while abroad once they returned home.
Table 1. Thematic diagram.

The five impact themes are impact with multicultural skills, impact of pace and pressure, impact on relationships, professional impact, and personal impact. Each theme also had subthemes that I review in this chapter. The circumstantial condition themes that emerged from the interviews are RELATIONAL DEPTH OF THE TEAM AND RICH INTERACTIONS WITH THE HOST COUNTRY, comparative stance and counseling student framework. For clarity, I review the impact themes first, starting with Theme 1, which is the impact of multicultural skills.

**Theme 1: Impact with Multicultural Skills**

Most participants expressed gaining some skills, a new way of thinking, or motivation in multicultural skills. The skills they learned came from encounters of many types—some skills were learned directly from counseling experience while some came from simply interacting with the people of the host culture. Sidney expressed,

I think each person I worked with or talked to or I’ve been around while there [on the study abroad trip] has influenced me some way . . . it was really refreshing to be
immersed in a culture that is really more about everybody else a lot of ways.

One student, however, expressed some hesitancy in claiming to gain enhanced knowledge in counseling and understanding culture. This student explained not being sure skills were enhanced in any way “as we were students who are just learning how to counsel in the first place.”

**Subtheme 1.1: The competencies (attitudes/beliefs, knowledge, skills, action).**

Students learned different perspectives from the host country’s people, especially because the host country was a more collective society and not as individualistic as the United States. Morgan learned that “It was more community-oriented; you know people need one another to survive. . . Let alone anything else.” Observing this difference, Harley recognized the importance of considering the context of a client’s community: “this person is part of this community as a whole and the community that is being affected by this person . . . my mind was broadened much more, especially in relation to the counseling field.” Zephyr also expressed learning how to extend grace into brokenness toward clients: “grace you wouldn’t have had before if you didn’t have any understanding of that brokenness.” These comments reflect increased multicultural knowledge.

Students also understood an individual in the context of community differently. Sidney remarked how observing differences in the people within the host country helped create a better understanding of the way individuals can be from the same place but be different. Sidney realized that no matter what context a client was in, the individual is always unique:

Whether it was in [names several villages]. The host country’s men and women, you know across the spectrum Christian, Hindus, you know the Buddhist like it doesn’t matter . . . their culture has implications in their life and you have to consider [a client] . . . the way the family has responded to it [home culture/society] is going to be
different from person to person. Additionally, some students noted that the resources were different from place to place and how these different resources created different protective factors. It broadened their thinking in ways to help clients, as they learned to look beyond just the client.

Overall, students expressed several ways that their thoughts and beliefs of different cultures expanded. They confronted American ideas of individualism and success and recognized preconceived notions about different cultures. The students gained an understanding of how different cultures have different circumstances, responses, needs, and resources. As Morgan put it,

I guess the biggest thing was just to connect and relate and have relationships with the people in the culture. . . until we really, truly connect with people . . . in a particular culture. . . it can’t compare to what you read in a textbook.

Adding to the sentiment, Harley stated,

There’s no way you can, I’ve opened a lot of books, social studies, history, you know you can read about the culture, you can study about it, you can write a paper you can get A+’s but to experience it is different. There’s no one that can give you that.

Skylar added,

I’m more aware that, that, we want things differently, we do things differently . . . Seeing that it’s different. Like your eyes are open to how different it is. ’Cause, you read from books, you hear from people, that the struggle is different.

They also discussed the way they incorporate what they learned into their counseling sessions. Harley captured a common sentiment among the participants in this statement:

Just being able to see the different needs of different cultures and to think about
independently rather than exclusively. Rather than you putting those expectations on
different cultures. . . .and knowing that everyone has different, each country has, different
experiences, different history, different needs, different ways that we can address those
needs.

More specifically, Skylar remarked,

It allowed me to have the person have the space to be themselves, to trust me in the
processes as well . . . I learned to not assume things, so even more of those skills, to take
a step back to ask questions.

Through their study abroad experience, the participants learned to see the client
differently and to consider the client’s whole context (multicultural knowledge). These
multicultural aspects were evident throughout the interviews, even when participants did not
directly state them. For example, one student talked about having a conversation with a guide
about the Quran that challenged the students and left impressions about their preconceptions.
Morgan explained that when asked whether they had read the Quran, the group responded in a
“no, of course not sort of way.” When this happened, Morgan faced her inner assumptions, which
left her contemplating the implications of their experience (i.e., multicultural attitudes and
beliefs). One student, Zephyr, also pondered if the view they held regarding the host country was
accurate: “I think my perception of our culture is more shallow, this could also be because we
were in [host country] with an intent and purpose. So, does that mean that the [host country’s]
culture isn’t shallow?”

**Subtheme 1.2: Desire to advocate.** As the participants reflected on the study abroad trip
upon returning home, they expressed understanding other cultural needs differently. Students
discussed being motivated to seek opportunity for future involvement to be advocates of change.
Sidney described,

I think it’s kind of built up kind of, that that desire for social justice. Because it is very unjust in the States in a lot of ways. And also a desire for more understanding. And to kind of more advocacy for the folks who aren’t, you know, that don’t have a voice, guess that’s the best way to put it.

Zephyr added, “I’m right where I’m at for a reason and that I’ve been positioned in a place to be an advocate.”

**Subtheme 1.3: Multicultural value exploration.** Some of the students confessed to initially having negative feelings toward certain clients once back in their own country—clients who complained despite their relative comfortable living compared to the poverty in the host country. As Sidney stated,

. . . because [the host country] is the second poorest country in the world, and we often complain about how little we have in America. You know that even impacted my perception of some of my clients at points. Because they’re in a bad place you know they have had a lot of hardship and a lot of difficulty but in comparison to some of the host country’s people that I visited the homes. You know they have air conditioning a lot more opportunity in some ways . . . But as time came you know I had to remind myself that this is what they know.

Harley noted, “I became a little, maybe a little bit more judgmental . . . when I came back.”

Students also talked about clients being “self-centered” and “shallow.” Some judged themselves as well: “I was self-judging myself. Like, oh, I’ve bought two cups of coffee, and I could have put one dollar for an African country. You know I could give to an organization” (Harley).

Some of the same students who struggled with initial judgments learned to turn that into a
tool in the counseling session:

One of the things that I do [now] with my clients is value sorts. And kind of helping to bring the values that they have to the surface. Because I think that in the values and in those principles that we hold . . . we find meaning . . . I kind of advocate for simpler things is just bringing those values to light. (Sidney)

Sidney further expressed learning the value and

. . . power that even a smile or a greeting on those . . . that so often are missed in day-to-day life. And I think that’s pretty powerful in the context of therapy as well because a lot of our clients are pretty much in the same way . . . missed by the people that should care about them the most.

Additionally, Skylar discussed learning skills from holding groups and being part of the debriefing group:

It gave me insights into group dynamics. It gave me insight to paying attention to how people communicated. . . . it allowed me to be, even more, aware of my own values, and how that might impact the client. And it allowed me to be more, more consistent in paying attention to the client’s cues rather than placing my own things on them. So in that way, I believe I learned more about the impact of culture, about the impact of the role of the therapist in the room, and just allowing the client to be the client. So just having the client have more of a voice in those sessions. So, for me that, that really affected how I view my client in the room.

Others applied what they saw from the people in the host country to help them through their reentry struggles. Skylar, when discussing how difficult it was to return to studies, explained how the example of the host country people in facing the obstacles they faced
strengthened her resolve:

Um so when I returned, I was much more grateful . . . for what I’ve been given—even with much less the [host country] has been given. They still pushed through, still work hard. And I look at myself and I think, okay, I’ve been given a little, why can’t I be as strong as, as resilient as they are?

Upon reentry, the students overall appeared to value the way their biases were challenged when they were abroad. They did not want to lose what they recognized would make them better counselors. They observed the interactions of the culture and connected it to ways to view future clients as individuals in a unique context. They learned that every client is a multicultural client.

**Theme 2: Impact of Pace and Pressure**

When the students were in the host country there was a predictable routine and predetermined schedule. This made the day “a little bit easier and just more relaxed” (Skylar) and as Harley noted, “I had become used to a routine over there.” Skylar stated, “I felt free.” But when they returned, they experienced the loss of structure, as Skylar commented, which resulted in a difficult adjustment. This difficulty revealed itself in two primary ways: they fell behind in their continuing practicum or internship, and they felt overwhelmed by the pace of the U.S. culture in general.

**Subtheme 2.1: Academic difficulties.** When students returned, the stark contrast of going from a structured environment where the plans were made for them to being on their own was a difficult transition, especially related to continuing practicum/internship or school in general. Sidney explained, “To back home with like the normal taking care of young kids, and being a spouse, and trying to get some schoolwork done. . . . You know there is not even almost a second breath after I returned.” Harley stated,
It was more of the school stuff. That everything was due and not having enough time to ease into it . . . just recalling last year when we got home it was tough to adjust. The environment was different . . . because coming back, I went straight into the internship.

One specific difficulty that the students faced was the completion of their practicum/internship hours. The trip was 3 weeks of the 16-week semester. As a result, students still had hours to complete for their practicum/internship upon returning home. This meant that the students returned with an immediate demand to enter a second practicum/internship site. One student had difficulty finding another site, and others struggled to adjust to the new demands. Sometimes students expressed a sense of being behind in learning some basic skills, as Skylar remarked,

So, in terms of the one-on-one client experience of being in the office, um in terms of diagnosis and treatment planning, that kind of thing. It was, I missed out on that . . . most people they started their practicum earlier in the summer . . . And I felt out of place. Zephyr added, “I would have done practicum differently . . . because I feel that I did not get the experience. I feel it didn’t prepare me for an internship.”

**Subtheme 2.2: Struggle with finding their equilibrium.** The participants also expressed being overwhelmed when they returned to the pace of the United States. For example, Skylar commented about the semester after returning from abroad:

. . . you’re encouraged to keep going, but then you’re also, kind of struggling . . . Because even though, you’re supposed to have that self-care . . . if you are a full-time student, if you have another job, and you’re doing your internship, there’s not much room to care for yourself.

Stating similar struggles, Harley remarked,
It seemed very busy very fast-paced . . . it was more tiring. I didn’t know, in the beginning, I thought it was just jet lag . . . But, over like a month passed by and it was still the struggle to get stuff done.

Sidney added, “in a way, it [being abroad] was a break from, it was kind of a slowdown . . . compared to being at home . . . you just kind of had to jump back in.” Morgan explained how the futility of the fast pace was exhausting “The biggest challenge was just having to jump into a structure and routine and a life and recognizing . . . some of those energies that I was using and pouring out into things weren’t . . . valuable.” Zephyr also stated,

. . . life slowed down a lot for those three weeks. And so I think slowing down um and being able to focus on the day to day like just what’s in front of you for the day in [the host country]. Um and then coming back and, having life just be a whirlwind again was pretty tough.

The students expressed a difficult transition as they attempted to readjust into a normal routine. It was an additional challenge if the hours for practicum/internship were not completed upon return. Adding to these complications was the students’ beliefs that they may have missed additional training that was covered earlier in practicum/internship sites—training that occurs while caseload building is taking place. These were not the only pressures, as life included other routines, regular jobs, and day-to-day activities felt different than before the trip. Life was “fast-paced,” and they had to “jump into things,” which made the reentry process difficult to manage.

**Theme 3: Impact on Relationships**

During the time the students were in the host country, they worked together, and they played together. They were “a close-knit group” and this helped to create a “sense of peace” and “deeper connections” with their peers. They were also moved by their interactions with the
people of the host country. They described the host country as “having a deep sense of
goodness” and “they showed a joy in service.” This warm acceptance resonated deeply with
the students, and some of them described becoming “more aware of how meaningful it is to have
relationships.” This renewed emphasis on relationships manifested in two ways: The students
saw the trip and the interactions they had while on the trip as “a gift,” but many also felt at a loss
on how to describe why the trip was such a gift.

Subtheme 3.1: Debriefing created bonds. During the trip, the students met every
morning and evening to prepare for, or debrief, the day. When they returned to the States the
students missed the ability to convey what they were feeling and experiencing with their peers.
Students learned the value of debriefing meetings and how debriefing together can strengthen
relationships. But they did not know how to recreate that same safe environment upon return.
Zephyr put it this way:

... we were striving for a common goal. And so, I think that was um, powerful and hard
to adjust to not having a group to debrief with, and a group to come before the Lord
within the mornings and um to share your troubles and burdens with.

Skylar explained only finding help during the difficult transition from talking with peers or
faculty from the trip. This processing also gave students insight into coworker relational
dynamics, as expressed by Sidney:

I think that taking the time to hear what’s going on with teammates was also extremely
helpful deepening that appreciation, cause sometimes I think we forget; we get busy yet,
going through our own things. But forget that our colleagues in spite of their training and
everything else they’re still human just like us.

However, some of the students were able to easily reconnect with their spouses or
families and friends:

I had my other friends who were also available to pray with me. And my church, some people in my church knew what was going on so I had that support. People were praying for me. If I didn’t have that, I feel like it would have been -that protective factor helped me do it. Helped me. (Zephyr).

Skylar also commented,

It’s where I learned to emphasize that that person is valuable . . . Learning to take the person as they are in the room. No matter what’s going on with me, this is their time. And I learned that on the trip. To recognize that every person is valuable. Because I think, the team taught me that, but also the people we were around [the host country’s people] taught me that. Just by their interactions.

But this was not the norm for the group, which will be highlighted in further participant responses and themes. In line with previous research (Lester, 2001), many felt like “outsiders” upon returning home, even if they felt a sense of home while abroad.

**Subtheme 3.2: A sense of home.** All the students expressed gratitude for the opportunity to be able to attend the study abroad practicum/internship, each expressing warm feelings for the host country’s people. The interactions they experienced by the host country people were open, kind, and warm. Students felt genuinely personally welcomed, and they felt “cared for” by the natives of the country. For the two international students who were on the trip, both expressed that the host country in some ways reminded them of their home country: “You realize that home becomes different. It’s—there’s home-home, and then there’s home that you make it. And then even studying abroad, I felt at home. Because the people allowed me to feel at home in that atmosphere” (Skylar). The other international student put it this way:
The sense of community that I’m experiencing and the resemblance of back home. So, having that opportunity to have that taste of home, even though I wasn’t home. . . . And so, I’d say the biggest thing was just a sense of gratitude irrespective of everything that happened. From the beginning to the end of the summer. Um the opportunity to go to [host country] in the first place and coming back, with the provision and support from everyone else, just added on to; the sense of gratitude. (Harley)

In addition to these international students, all the students voiced how welcome they felt while traveling in the host country. To such a degree, Sidney expressed wanting to emulate the hospitality felt while in the host country upon returning home:

   So, we’ve made more effort, especially this summer of having people over to the house again. Reaching out to those . . . in the community with our friends and things so it just made me more appreciative of those, those connections that I have here.

Echoing this sentiment, Skylar remarked, “I think I felt humbled, I felt humbled by what I had, and I realized that there were things that I was blessed with that I wasn’t aware of. I was more appreciative of just one-on-one contacts as well.” Skylar further summarized how the interactions of the host country created that sense of home. For example, a taxi driver invited a small group of students to a restaurant that the taxi driver also owned:

   . . . listening to his story he basically said “I was given a small portion. I stood in that time that place. And I built it, I created what I needed to create. And here I am ministering to you.” He wasn’t a Christian, but he was giving of what was given to him.

Adding to why they felt welcomed, Skylar described interactions participants had with the natives of the host country:

   They touched a lot more. They and it wasn’t just the women, they had a male in my
group as well. But they touched a lot more, they would sit. Just their interaction of sitting and listening and nodding they waited for each person to talk. There wasn’t as much overlapping in talking. So, there was a part of me that felt heard, and I was able to engage in that kind of connection as well.

These warm interactions left an impression on the students.

When students left the routine and the structure of the debriefing and the morning groups, they felt the lack of what the relationships in those situations provided. They missed processing with the group, and they missed the way they experienced the people from abroad. As they returned home, they looked for similar connections. Some found it with their spouse, church group, professors, or they stayed connected to peers from the trip. But in general, they were impacted by the closeness, which helped them reprioritize relationships personally.

**Theme 4: Professional Impact**

Four of the five students commented that they returned with a sense of purpose, wanting to do similar types of service in the future. The remaining student mentioned a desire to be an advocate and living a lifestyle of awareness. However, participants felt frustration with these feelings of not knowing how to move forward with the sense of purpose.

**Subtheme 4.1: Finding meaning, but now what?** All the students expressed feeling motivated to do more in their profession. But with this motivation, there was also a sense of feeling lost on how to move forward with the desire. Zephyr noted,

> . . . a bigger desire just to make the difference in that area. And I think I walked away from [the host country] wondering “how can I do anything about this?” . . . it makes me want to do something and I feel stuck. I remember leaving [the host country] feeling very stuck. And feeling like I can’t do anything about this. Like on a large-scale level. I know
that’s not true. I could. It would take a lot of work that I’m not even aware of where I would start.

Morgan mentioned, “I guess that was one thing, you know it stirs up a passion in me to wanna, to wanna connect with God on a deeper level and to go in that direction [to do more trips like this].” But Skylar further explained that wanting to do similar travels in the future seemed like a distant reality:

And so that was also part of the sadness—I’m not there yet, I’m not there, how do I get there? It seems a long road. It feels like a long road, but if I had a choice that would be part of my main career. Be able to travel, to be a part of a team that could offer the practical skills of care.

Sidney also reflected, “I mean I just want to go back to [the host country] honestly . . . I want to do more of that sort of thing. But doesn’t look like that’s going to be happening in the near future.”

Despite the frustrations of not knowing how they could make something like this happen again, students felt a confirmation of their chosen field. A student offered this opinion:

I felt like the trip made it clear to me that that, um, that I’m right where I’m at for a reason, and that I’ve been positioned in a place to be an advocate of hope and to take that seriously. And then, on the other hand, um I felt even more confused, because I’m like what am I supposed to do, where am I supposed to be going with all this? . . . just to take it seriously. . . I thought I came back more changed. Like I couldn’t be that same person that I was when I left. I feel like just generally my sense of just purpose and meaning in life was just broadened. I also just felt an um sense of just hope and purpose . . . Though standing up for the truth is very difficult sometimes. (Morgan)
Additionally, Skylar expressed,

I realized the kind of counselor I wanted to be. If, I was if I was going to continue along this line. And I also realized the kind of leader I would want to be if I was offered that opportunity. So, I think more than other people, it was more of how it changed me. How I saw myself . . . it gave me a taste of ideally that’s basically what I would want my ministry to be my calling. A part of that is to go from place to place teaching these skills that I’m learning. And still doing ministry. But, how?

The participants also described feelings of validation that added to the sense of purpose. Skylar expounded,

You don’t always realize that your gifts are valuable or important . . . it’s easy to doubt and it’s easy to kind of question what is your place in here? . . . I think everyone, well, I felt as if I had a value a place, a role to play.

Harley also expressed:

And we’ve done groundbreaking stuff. That even if we don’t see the results now . . . I’m reminded that we had a connection back there, and we poured a lot into it. When I was helping them start their program, you know the sex traffic safe house, or um, just being with them through it. And through the aftermath of what they’ve been through. That was a lot that we did. And so yeah, that sense of pride and hopefulness for them continues to grow.

**Subtheme 4.2: Sense of helplessness.** When the students were in the host country, they assisted in facilities that worked with trafficking victims and drug addicts. They also held discussions with the staff of various types of facilities. Through these experiences, they came face-to-face with helpers who experienced vicarious trauma, and they learned the weight that
trauma helpers carry. They also saw a country in poverty. Upon returning to the States, they were motivated, but the realities they encountered also haunted them. Morgan put it this way:

Something I’ve still pondered on for a while, is just coming back to here and just seeing everyone um in the United States I mean, just the way that they go about and do things just really kind of wondering on the thought like how many of us go through life never knowing who we were created to be? . . . um. Just running around doing things you know meaningless things I guess that was one thing. . . . um just glamorizing you know physical attributes and just things like that that contribute to the evil that’s taking place [in places like host country], and we don’t see that part as being evil though it’s a really heavy contribution to the evils.

But more than this, some of the students saw specific situations that left them feeling helpless when confronted with the extent of the problems plaguing the host country. Zephyr shared a situation:

I still remember after a site one day, just seeing this little girl, she was like maybe 9 or something, just playing across the street. And I thought I could literally do nothing to protect her right now. From the potential of trauma and I guess I walked away from that going okay “what can I do?” . . . I thought about her the other day and thought, okay, it’s been a year is she still okay?

Similarly, Sidney observed a situation of a roughly 11-year-old boy sleeping on the street and was deeply moved by the sight:

That was the first time like I had seen a child sleeping out on the street. And my mind was a little, a little bit spinning as far as like. . . . What was that kid’s story? . . . and should I wake him up? Should I go get him some food? I kind of found myself like—not
wanting to engage that for whatever reason. I . . . I talked with a couple of people when I
got back to the hotel. You know I think I just kind of rationalized not doing something.
Despite feeling helpless, the participants also discussed practical ways of helping and advocating
by “being a voice,” or “praying and giving now,” or by focusing on “the client before them.”
Still, the longing for a similar experience remained, as did the haunting feelings.

**Theme 5: Personal Impact**

The students witnessed poverty and contrasted that with the comfort in which they live. This brought mixed feelings of gratitude for what they have, humility in response to the kindness of the host country’s people, and a renewed commitment toward focusing on those things they found valuable. At the same time, these experiences also raised uncomfortable feelings for the way they felt regarding American culture. They made statements such as “calls evil good and good evil,” “walks around in their own bubble, clueless,” “seeks after the latest and greatest,” “pushes numbers and productivity,” or “is involved in meaningless activity . . . never knowing who they were created to be.” The students expressed their feelings in different ways when they returned. For some, it created mixed feelings for working with clients. But they also returned learning how to apply the values that had been kindled or rekindled into the counseling office.

As seen through the previous themes, when students returned home, they had several areas to process, yet they lacked time to process due to the immediate demands of life’s routines. Although they arrived with new motivations, they could not connect how to move forward from this point. Additionally, they saw relationships in a new way but did not always bridge the distance with those around them. Some of the students kept in touch with each other or had church groups where they were able to express reentry struggles. However, every student expressed having feelings and experiences when they returned that they were not able to share
with others or others did not understand.

**Subtheme 5.1: Outsider feelings.** Sidney was one of the few who felt supported well upon returning home; however, she faced a baby who experienced “attachment loss” and would not interact with her. The relationship needed time, effort, and attention to be repaired. Most participants also found it hard to share their feelings with others. Morgan recalled, “I don’t even remember sharing that much about it because . . . like no one could fully grasp what we experienced what we walked through. So, I guess that was a challenge too.” Harley concluded,  

> It took me a lot to process it, I literally did not process the trip until afterwards. Because I was just, it was so heavy to deal with. Like everyone kept asking me ‘How was the trip?’ . . . I did feel out of place for a while. It took me a while.

Using similar words, Zephyr stated,

> I think getting home, it was the rush of seeing family again and seeing friends again and going back to work and all this the process I think gets lost . . . people are asking me repeatedly, “How was the trip? How was the trip?” . . . It’s so hard to communicate the depth of it at that moment . . . they [family] also didn’t know what questions to ask, they just didn’t fully get I guess what the experience meant for me.

Skylar shared the sentiment:

> . . . a sense like a sense of being out of place. So not quite fitting in. So, I think with here, that life goes on, the motions go on . . . When I came back it was more of the okay—I have to get back into this routine. I have to do these things. I have to make these things happen, and I must complete my assignments, and I wasn’t feeling it.

Skylar’s statement reveals not only the sense of not fitting in upon returning home but also the feeling of sadness that was often expressed.
Subtheme 5.2: Sense of grief and loss. Reentry to the States also brought grief to the students. They bonded well with their peers, but upon return, many lost those relationships. As described by Skylar, “I felt cared for talking to each person and I felt just connected. When I came back, I just realized I didn’t really have that kind of connection.” Skylar also explained, “It was difficult coming back from that trip and then being disconnected from everyone . . . I experienced that with.” And even though they had a renewed sense of purpose, they entered into things that did not seem as purposeful. Zephyr explained,

Yup, here you go to church every Sunday, you live your life you pay your bills, you do dishes, you take out your trash, you hang out with your friends, you know and it’s like what is the point? What am I doing here?

When Harley returned, the feelings were difficult:

And so, it was hard. It was hard emotionally. It was emotionally draining in the fact that it was different . . . I can’t really point out, like pinpoint exactly what caused it, it just was it was hard.

Even at the time Harley explained that the emotions did not find words: “I did not have words to express, I did not have words to express.” But in time Harley said it became easier to talk about: “[Initially] I probably held it so dear, too, hoping it wouldn’t escape me, or leave me you . . . it’s still a part of me. And I find joy in just sharing.”

Subtheme 5.3: Value clarification/exploration. As mentioned, the students experienced a process of value clarification. This created discomfort yet helped them clarify personal values as well. For example, Skylar mentioned learning to appreciate individuals more and giving time and respect to them: “So I did that when I got back here as well, I would wait a lot longer to hear people, instead of talking over them.” Zephyr also discussed becoming closer to God “It just
enhanced my need for God.” Harley recognized the importance of paying attention to what is happening in other countries and how to respond on a more personal basis:

Um, and it caused me to be more generous, and more open-minded. More, more accepting of the fact that the things going on outside of the country and also around the world, that I should be proactively be seeking . . . what’s going on, this is you know, I’m praying for this country, you know I’m reaching out and giving to organizations, charities.

The participants also struggled with things that the United States puts a value on compared to the people of the host country. Sidney described that “it can be kind of tough to be patient with the culture as a whole. Because of the emphasis on material things and kind of a lack of empathy for, I guess you could say in quotes ‘the oppressed.’” Harley expressed almost a despair:

Um—(sighs) uh, you don’t know what’s going on, you just wanted to tell everybody that there is more to it than what the TV is showing. Or what media is portraying . . . like coming straight from the [host country] and landing in the streets . . . Oh yeah, like everyone I was just watching . . . and thinking that everyone is for themselves . . . but everyone is just in their own bubble and no one is really aware of what the next person is going through or the next person needs.

Sidney added,

. . . it’s also easy . . . with culture in the States to kind of get wrapped up in here and the latest and greatest and that kind of thing. So it just kind of built up more of an appreciation for using what I have. And I think that juxtaposes with the culture as well. Kind of what I was saying about materialism, we so often see.
Subtheme 5.4: One more debriefing please. Students either directly stated that they needed a debriefing meeting after the trip, or they requested something similar such as a prayer time. This was a need on a personal level, but it also helped them realize the importance of debriefings professionally. For this study, it was important to hear the students’ expressing a need for a sense of closure, which could have come from a debriefing meeting after reentry. For example, Zephyr stated, “You know these questions I wish I’d done a year ago. . . I’m just saying if more debriefing or processing and talking through after the fact.” Harley expressed a similar sentiment:

You know I wish we had come back and had more like prayer groups like all of us together in regards to just breaking forth from that shared experience into trying to figure out just ease into our individual lives. I think that would have been helpful if we had that. Sidney did not express needing a debriefing group directly but suggested similar advice: “having someone who experienced similar things to be able to like connect. That would be another piece of advice, stay connected with the people you went with. Um, so you can process things together.” Morgan also suggested, “I would say and then um, It’s hard to say because everyone is different you know whether it’s journaling, um having a couple of people that you can stay connected with just to talk about things.” Skylar took things further and stated, “so the debrief thing was a positive I think if we employed that more, in just daily life, it’s more, it’s more beneficial for each person to be successful.”

Further, Morgan was able to compare the debriefing process over different trips. On the first trip, there was no debriefing, and Morgan was left to manage witnessing burdensome events without any processing upon return home:

I had an experience that didn’t go so well before I went [on the trip of the study] . . . the
topic of debriefing came up a lot. And I learned about it but didn’t really, like I didn’t really know what it was. Until I connected with other people on these kinds of trips. I remember coming back from a [study abroad] trip where I went to … a brothel. . . . And then I literally just came home like right after that and didn’t talk to anybody about it. It wasn’t brought up, didn’t even think to myself that I needed to maybe do that. . . . So when I got home it just really hard because um, I had gone through feeling just like and, um, a lot of emotions but I remember primarily anger and then not feeling like I’ve had anybody to even talk to about that, like anybody I would have had to talk to about that wasn’t anywhere around.

However, when the trip of the study took place, things were different. One student expressed appreciation of all the debriefing meetings and verbalized the value of such meetings: . . . but in the morning [meetings] . . . I think we talked about the lies that we had going on in our head and in the evening we would talk about um the feelings that come up through the day . . . we did it every day. and that was a huge difference um; so I think, I guess that’s the answer, like it’s very important I would say to the faculty to implement that, um, ’cause I’ve experienced a time where it wasn’t implemented and it wasn’t implemented and it was really ugly, you know, so I’ve learned a lot from that and (pause) and to use that time that you have to while you are there to do that. (Morgan)

But others also noted they learned the value of debriefing meetings more after the trip. Skylar asked for feedback during the internship and found it was not always easy to get honest feedback:

So, I think from my experience with being abroad and with a team and a team that has to adapt on the flow to other things. I recognized that it’s better to have that immediacy in
feedback. Um, and, the debriefing. Because, it allows you to, to adjust to push harder, and to do better, to be resilient through it [the transition back to routine].

Harley also requested more meetings “before and after. I think that would have been very helpful. We had about 2-3 groups honestly, I think we needed more than that.” Harley suggested having a transition group upon returning home to discuss the transitional aspects to it. That would be helpful, just be more aware of what, what can happen, what the consequences are to go on to this trip. What do you miss out on? So maybe having, even and it might not be possible. But, kind of having more help with that, the second site if you need more hours.

**Summary of Impact Themes**

The impact themes that emerged from the interviews reveal several ways the participants experienced the reentry process. They were impacted by the way the trip challenged them, unified them, and taught them. The students contemplated these things as they returned. They had new understandings and perspectives, which left them unable to describe what they felt to those around them. They changed personally and professionally as they experienced gains and losses of the trip. They also strived to apply and remember the things they learned and reevaluated their values. But several aspects converged, creating a disturbance that led to them expressing that they wanted and needed to process in a group. Most of them stated they wanted that group to be the people from the trip. All students stressed how important it was to find somebody to talk to, even when they “had no words to describe [their experiences].”

The powerful experience was not created without certain conditions that made this study abroad trip have the impact it did. There were circumstances and relevant conditions that cultivated the possibility for the experience. These are the circumstantial conditional themes and
are discussed next.

Circumstantial Conditions Themes

The impact themes captured the participants’ experiences, and behind these experiences were aspects that connected the impact themes or created the environment and conditions in which the impact occurred. The contextual background and importance of these themes was not initially evident but was apparent after I reviewed my findings with my committee then reviewed all findings again. Throughout the impact themes was a set of three circumstantial conditions that arose from out of the interviews. First, the relational depth of the team and rich interactions with the host country with the team and the rich interactions with the host country, which the students encountered with the natives of the host country, created a safe and warm environment. It was within this environment that students were impacted in the way they were. Second, when the participants came back to the States, they held a comparative stance, reviewing what happened in the host country to their experience of returning home. Lastly, when participants spoke about their different experiences, they spoke from a counseling student framework. In other words, it was not just the moments of counseling types of activities where they learned or reflected, it was a continuous filter they used in their reflecting.

Circumstantial condition 1: relational depth of the team and rich interactions with the host country. Most of the impact themes showed the relational depth the team felt and experienced with each other as well as things they learned from their interactions with the people of the host country. For example, Theme 2 revealed how the students missed the processing with the team: “As I came home . . . I guess a sense of peace a deeper connection to . . . I guess I’ve just been more aware of how meaningful it is to have relationships . . . with people” (Morgan).

It was because of the depth of relationships with team members, and the things they
learned from their interactions with the host country, that relationship impact (Theme 3) occurred. The interactions students had with each other and the host country also affected them professionally (Theme 4) and personally (Theme 5) as they learned to value the client’s values” and “made more time for people.” And finally, with Theme 1: Impact with multicultural skills, the students’ expressed learning more about different cultures from interacting with the host country people and “connecting with them” (Morgan). Morgan further expressed, “until we really, truly connect with people . . . in a particular culture . . . it can’t compare to what you read in a textbook.”

**Circumstantial condition 2: Comparative stance.** During the interviews, the students were also constantly comparing the United States to the host country. They compared what they had relationally while abroad with relationships they returned to (Theme 3), especially related to grief and loss: “I felt cared for talking to each person and I felt just connected. When I came back, I just realized I didn’t really have that kind of connection” (Skylar). Additionally, every aspect of Theme 2 (impact of pace and pressure) had a comparative aspect behind it. For example, students compared the structure of what they left behind in the host country with what was suddenly in front of them, which was part of why they academic difficulties. One participant stated, “The biggest challenge was just having to jump into a structure and routine and a life and recognizing [back to how things were before leaving]” (Sidney) They also compared and reevaluated their values, which affected them professionally and personally (Themes 4 and 5). As they compared the two cultures, their multicultural understanding grew as well (Theme 1). For example, they contrasted the poverty of the host country with their situation and the prosperity of the United States, and they felt motivated to change things.

**Circumstantial condition 3: The influence of being a counseling student.** It is difficult
to know how counseling students may have interpreted events from a particular framework. Yet the students continually discussed how events that took place in the host country changed the way they interact in the counseling office. The filter was clearer on some and perhaps subdued in others. Many of the students explained that the interactions with the host country helped them think about their clients differently (Theme 1: Impact with multicultural skills and Theme 4: Professional impact). They reflected on interactions and made decisions to “be advocates,” “give voice to,” “to accept others values,” and to “create a safe place for the client,” which related to Themes 1 and 4. For example, if they recognized relationships were important, then they realized how important it was for the client such as one who was “missed by society to be heard and accepted” (Skylar).

From these things they found meaning and purpose, as demonstrated by Skylar’s statement: “I think I just gained a deeper appreciation for humanity . . . I think that truly valuing the people around you is really important as a believer, but even more so working in the context of counseling and working with people or hurt.” Related to Theme 4 regarding a professional impact, students had the desire was to grow within the counseling field (and sometimes in ministry). Additionally, if they felt like they were served and cared for (Theme 3: Impact on relationships), they wanted to know how to bring that back to the clients they served. Therefore, for most of the themes, the filter of being a counseling student was present, directing them to think about counseling ramifications. Intentional or not, students mentioned the way the study abroad trip intersected with their counselor identity.

Summary
In this chapter, I presented the qualitative thematic analysis used, as described by Braun et al. (2019), to answer the research question. The results of the thematic analysis found two clusters of emergent themes: themes describing experiences that had a direct impact on participants and themes describing the circumstantial condition that facilitated the development of the impact themes. The impact themes are Theme 1: Impact with multicultural skills, Theme 2: Impact of pace and pressure, Theme 3: Impact on relationships, Theme 4: Professional impact, and Theme 5: Personal impact. The circumstantial condition themes are relational depth of the team and rich interactions with the host country, comparative stance, and counseling student framework. I discussed these themes in detail, along with the students’ quotations for clarity of understanding. The next chapter will include an evaluation of the findings, how the findings are related to current literature, how the findings advance knowledge in the field of counselor education, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from the research question: What themes emerge when graduate counseling students describe the experience of reentry once the cultural immersion experience was complete? Chapter 5 builds on the data analysis and results presented in Chapter 4 with a comparison of findings in this study to current literature. Next, I review the implications of the findings for researchers, counselors, and counselor educators. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the study, make recommendations for future research, and state my conclusions.

Summary of Findings and Implications

In this study, I explored how participants answer the research question: How do graduate counseling students describe the impact of reentry once the immersion experience was complete? The interviews contributed further insight into students’ reentry experience. Two sets of themes emerged from the interviews. The first set of themes were contextual or the conditions that allowed the second set of themes, the impact themes developed in the participants. The five impact themes are: impact of multicultural skills, impact of the pace and pressure of returning home, impact on their profession and personal impact. The contextual condition themes are: Relational depth of the team and the host country, comparative stance, and the influence of being a counseling student.

Discussion

There has been recent concern for the lack of known outcomes for cultural immersion trips and the process of reentry (Shannonhouse et al., 2018). This study acknowledges the importance of this concern. It is important to explore reentry outcomes to increase the existing
knowledge base. This portion of the study will relate the outcomes of the participants’ experience against previous findings in the reentry process.

**Participant Experiences of Reentry**

Several of the themes found with this study’s participants were consistent with prior research on student reentry (e.g., Martin & Harrell, 2004; Platt, 2012). In this section the themes found in the current study are discussed comparative to findings from previous studies. Overall, the current literature on reentry suggests that students’ experiences fall along three domains: affective, behavioral, and cognitive. These domains will form the foundation for the discussion of the themes presented as this study’s findings.

**Theme 1: Multicultural Skills Impact**

Counselor educators use cultural immersion experiences to place counseling students in an environment where the multicultural skills and competencies of attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action are able to grow. Because the enhancement of skills in these areas is a primary motivation for cultural immersion study abroad experiences, I will address the topic focusing on attitudes and beliefs, knowledge, skills, and action then more generally to multicultural skills as an emergent theme.

The multicultural immersion experience model is important, yet under-utilized (Pope-Davis et al., 1997). The key components within the model that build multicultural counseling competencies: (a) pre-deployment training, (b) sustained time in the field, (c) interaction with culturally diverse others, (d) genuineness/depth of relationships formed, and (e) reflection. The participants of this study discussed meetings that happened before and after the trip, as the model suggests. These meetings allowed for reflection and discussion of what the students experienced each day. Additionally, the participants discussed opportunities for service while they were
abroad. Four out of the five participants stated gaining multicultural skills. The other participant stated that multicultural skills were “not enhanced,” as they all skills learned were new to new counselors in the field.

As part of developing multicultural skills, participants noted that they confronted their preconceived notions they held about other countries. This confrontation is needed for the process of developing multicultural attitudes/beliefs and knowledge changes in counselors.

This is consistent with Platt (2012), who found an increase in students’ awareness of their own culture and increased cognitive complexity in how students understood the host culture from cultural immersion experiences in the Mexico City-based program.

Regarding multicultural awareness, many participants also expressed having a deeper understanding of cultural values and practices. Previous studies have shown similar results (see Alexander et al., 2005; Canfield et al., 2009; Cordero & Rodriguez 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Ishii et al., 2009; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010). These different values were reported by the participants as they began to view their home culture against the backdrop of other country’s poverty. This contrast of values and values reclarification that occurred in response to observing the poverty in other places was often a catalyst for students’ desire to make changes in society as advocates (action). This corresponds to findings in previous literature (Cordero & Rodriguez 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Martin & Harrell, 2014; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke 2010; Platt, 2012).

Also relating to multicultural knowledge is the participants indicating several times how they understood themselves and others better after the trip. This is also consistent with previous findings (Burnett et al., 2004). However, this was not the shared experience of every participant. Some students expressed some concern that they did understand the host country people any
better beyond the fact that everyone is a unique individual. However, participants noted that they still felt that they would be a better counselor by using what they learned in the counseling office as well as the desire to give to causes. Students also expressed wanting to be a voice for the voiceless and trying to make themselves available for God to use.

A couple of the participants also noted that they had the opportunity to learn skills from the facilities they visited, and from the process groups they lead with the staff of different agencies. Previous studies have revealed an increase in multicultural counseling skills directly due to the practice of those skills while abroad (Cordero & Rodriguez 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Martin & Harrell, 2004; Platt, 2012). In the current study, one student reported increased self-efficacy in skills, consistent with multiple studies where students expressed increased self-efficacy upon reentry (Alexander et al., 2005; Burnett et al., 2004; Canfield et al., 2009; DeRicco & Sciarra, 2005; Ishii et al., 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Tomlinson-Clarke, 1999), which was also associated with maintaining skills upon reentry.

**Theme 2: Pace and Pressure Impact**

The participants of this study experienced confusion and were disorientated upon resuming their responsibilities when they returned home. This was heightened when they had to complete their practicum/internship at a second site. They expressed feeling they missed out on client building and valuable trainings. Additionally, they had felt the pressure of scheduling assignments, which became a difficult task for these experienced students. They also felt the United States just felt more rushed and hectic.

There is little discussion in previous research regarding the sense of returning to fast-paced demands in their home culture. One study found that returnees feeling overwhelmed by expectations and responsibilities upon return (Weber, 2009), while Kartoshkina, 2015 found that
some students noted the unnecessary speed of American culture while others appreciated the precision and efficiency and fast pace of the States. Wielkiewicz and Turkowski (2010) found that returning students held a different perspective of the workload, noting that their academic load felt heavier when they returned from studying abroad, even though their peers confirmed that it was not heavier for them.

**Theme 3: Relational Impact**

The participants of this study felt a deep warmth for their teammates and for the people from the host country. In response to this, the participants examined their own relationships and priorities. Previous research has also shown that students conveyed making close relationships with host families while studying abroad (Wathen & Kleist, 2015). Students have found new friends in their team, the community, and the host families (Wathen & Kleist, 2015). These friendships have been deep and meaningful and created a similar appreciation for the host country and warm sentiment for its people (Wathen & Kleist, 2015). Similar research has shown an expressed a love for the culture and people (Platt, 2012).

**A sense of home.** The two international students in the current study mentioned how the host country reminded them of home in unexpected ways. Viewing home is described along three levels: familiar places, familiar people and routines, and familiar patterns (Storti, 2001), this phenomenon describes a unique aspect of the reentry process. Though the places were not familiar, the people, and their interactions or the economic struggles and the communal approach of the host country were familiar. These were the students who often spoke of receiving what was precious and a gift from the host country. The land looked different from their home countries, but other aspects not fully realized were familiar. A student in at least one previous study expressed a comparable surprise that he found many similarities with people in a country
that was different from his own (Platt, 2012). This is an area in need of further exploration.

After spending time with the host country’s people and learning new routines and new patterns, the participants developed a new sense of home (see Storti, 2001), feeling that it was a warm, relational safe place. But as they returned to the States, it felt different. The sense of having a home away from home was lost, and they grieved the loss and they struggled with emotional reactions to their home being somehow different. These participants experienced a type of homelessness described by Storti (2001), as their sense of feeling at home has assimilated aspect of the host country, creating a new type of home. As a result, their original home will now always be missing these new aspects of hominess for them. This is an aspect of the shock of reentry that is overlooked for international students, that can be further developed in future research.

**Theme 4: Professional impact.** Participants found areas of challenge and purpose on a professional level. Students reported feeling a deeper sense of purpose and meaning in life as they developed a more global perspective. Additionally, on a professional level, the participants experienced clinical and social situations that helped them later in their counseling practice.

Previous research has also shown students feeling a new sense of purpose upon returning home (Walling et al., 2006), particularly in terms of social advocacy (Alvarez, 2001; Arthur & Achenbach, 2002; Boyle et al., 1999; Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009; Goodman & West-Olatunji, 2009; Guth, McAuliffe, & Michalak, 2012; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke, 2010; West-Olatunji et al., 2011).

**Theme 5: Personal impact.** Participants reported several different ways that reentry processes impacted them on a personal level. The greatest shared struggle expressed by the participants of this study was a sense of grief and loss upon returning to the States. Some of the
participants felt a degree of disenfranchised grief that they felt was not recognized by the people surrounding the participants. The participants also spoke of not being able to communicate the impact of their experiences with those around them. As a result, they felt that they were not able to connect to the emotions that they were experiencing. These findings are consistent with prior studies that found students experienced sense of grief and loss upon reentry (Kostohryz et al., 2014; Martin & Harrell, 2014), unrecognized disenfranchised grief by others (Butcher, 2002; Doka, 1980; Lester, 2000), and inability to share their experiences with others (Sussman, 2000; Lester, 2001).

There were deep positive aspects also reported in regard to personal impact. The participants talked about the trip being “too precious” to discuss. They also reported that there was a rich depth of the experience, which they found difficult to convey to those who did not share the experience. This sentiment was shared by some students in previous studies who could not capture their experience in words and simply remained silent about their experience when asked (Platt, 2012; Wathen & Kleist, 2015).

Additionally, participants of the study experienced an internal value reassessment, which ranged from changing habits or adjusting behavior to spiritual growth, this was consistent with prior findings (). (Adler, 1981; Martin et al., 1989; Martin & Harrell, 2004; Platt, 2012; Storti, 2001; Thomas, 2009; Westwood et al., 1986).

Furthermore, all the participants were struck by the poverty of the host country compared to U.S. privilege, which was a consistent finding in several previous studies. However, the participants of this study did not show the same kind of intense emotions reported in other studies, such as anger, shame, resentments, ethnicity challenges (Cordero & Rodriguez 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Platt, 2012; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke 2010; Platt, 2012).
contrast, the participants in this study expressed more disappointment with the values the United States embraces, or they were overwhelmed by the pace of everything. Some of them also had to face the challenge of judging their clients, whose discomforts and problems seemed minor when compared to the poverty of the host country. This was a theme that I did not find in the previous literature. This is an area that requires further investigation given the importance of value clarification and awareness needed to not impose their values on clients. Otherwise, a counselor-in-training who has observed third world poverty could struggle with working with a client facing a problem that would seem insignificant in contrast. Though the participants expressed that they resolved their initial judgment, supervisors and counselor educators should continue to be aware of this possibility.

Circumstantial Conditional Themes

The themes which emerged are relational depth of the team and with the host country, comparative stance, and the influence of being a counseling student. Regarding the comparative stance, it is important for students to reflect on the differences between cultures and discuss these differences as well as similarities during debriefing meetings to facilitate the multicultural counseling competencies (Pope-Davis et al., 1997). Before the cultural immersion trips begin, students can research the culture and have speakers come in to discuss the culture. Then through the trip, it is important for students to visit historical sites and observe relevant cultural traditions, if possible (Pope-Davis et al., 1997).

The comparisons that the participants used throughout the interviews were common with previous research (Pope-Davis et al., 1997; Prosek & Michel, 2016; Shanonhouse, 2013). Students compared what they remember about home with what has appeared to change. Students tend to struggle with wanting how their new understandings fit their context (Arouca, 2013;
Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Medina López-Portillo, 2004; Platt, 2012, Prosek & Michel, 2016; Storti, 2001). Many studies have been focused on cultural immersion sites that expose students to areas different than the United States so they can engage in the comparison process and increase cultural understanding. Researchers have found sites that contrasted poor villages with tourist areas in Mexico so that they could feel the impact of such contrasts (Boyle et al., 1999). Students have also been to places with a history of oppression and violence (Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004), and countries have been chosen to show the injustice of the United States on its territories (Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009). These experiences have led to were increased advocacy after the students returned (Boyle et al., 1999; Cordero & Rodriguez, 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004). Therefore, a comparative stance is a tool for developing advocacy and other multicultural counseling competencies.

The themes interacted uniquely for this team in this study. Even so, several of the themes as well as topics corresponded to what has been found in the aforementioned studies. The increase in the knowledge base will continue to help counselor educators prepare for future cultural immersion study abroad trips. Additionally, exploring the reentry experience can help study abroad trips process reentry to be a more productive time.

**Implications for Counselor Educators and Recommendations**

Several of the participants stated that they needed more debriefing groups when they returned. Furthermore, the participants expressed the wish that they had some type of final meeting to help them transition back home. However, only 44% of CACREP-accredited programs have said they had reentry programs (Shannonhouse et al., 2018). Even when programs are available, students do not always use them (Brubaker, 2017). Often students will not seek help from programs because they do not initially recognize the benefits of them (Adler, 1981;
Weber, 2009). But discussing reentry from the first pre-trip meeting may alleviate problems at reentry (Martin & Harrell, 2004), as well as help students understand the need for utilizing help upon return (Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke 2010).

Although students may not initially realize they will need this help, counselor educators can anticipate this need. Future research can explore different methods of preparing students for common transition difficulties and closure processes, offer assistance with the grief that follows reentry, and help with family meetings if possible. Holding meetings with loved ones can help with the disorientation feelings associated with any family changes that might have happened while the traveler was away. Often the family supports the traveler before they leave but not when they return (Young, 2014). Several of the participants expressed not being able to discuss the trip or that the people around them did not understand. Counselor educators can provide resources to key family members understand ways to be supportive and even develop education packets and assistance for spouses and close relatives of the student. Positive intervention by counselor educators can help students who feel that their home is no longer home (Storti, 2001). As one of the participants explained, home was their country of origin, their country of study, and the host country for the study abroad trip. This multilayered understanding of home is an area for interventions. Additionally, future research can further develop understanding for international students who may experience a home-likeness in the host country, then return to a country that feels foreign when they come back.

The participants also specifically asked for more meetings, both before and after the trip to discuss potential consequences and implications of going on a study abroad trip. These meetings are an opportunity to discuss the ways to incorporate new mannerisms, skills, and other things they may have learned while away. These changes in the student are the building blocks to
increase knowledge and skills in multicultural competencies. Many of the participants learned from the culture and applied aspects of what they learned in several different areas. Counselor educators and others can discuss aspects of this in meetings.

The participants in this study also expressed the difficulty of transitioning from a familiar routine to an unstructured environment. Two of the students were grateful to the faculty (counselor educators) who helped them create structure for the remainder of the semester. This indicates that small steps to come beside students after a study abroad trip might help future students with reentry transition. These students were at the end of their program at a graduate level. They were familiar with balancing academics and life in previous semesters, yet the encouragement they received was both helpful and appreciated.

Future research could also focus on the topics of debriefing meetings to learn what factors or variables make a difference in participants’ feelings and intense emotions. Previous studies have indicated that students often return from nations that suffer extreme poverty, then experience intense emotions (Cordero & Rodriguez 2009; Jurgens & McAuliffe, 2004; Platt, 2012; Tomlinson-Clarke & Clarke 2010). Although the participants mentioned feeling emotionally moved by what they witnessed regarding poverty, and they expressed frustration toward the States upon return, they did not have intense emotion. The participants focused more on feelings of admiration for the resilience shown by the host country's people. Even in the two stories where participants observed children on the streets, these participants expressed a sense of helplessness and not the anger or hostility. Their reactions both, grieved and motivated them.

All these observations and emerged themes indicate that reentry is a complex transitional experience—an experience where the participants of this study wanted more help to process through it. Yet the cost of reentry did not negate the value of the study abroad trip to them. Most
expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to have attended such a trip, and several expressed wanting to do similar trips in the future. This desire to engage in future counseling abroad trips is an unexplored area that may be rich in opportunities.

**Limitations**

There are limitations to the study and its findings. I used qualitative interviews to explore the participants’ reentry experience and offer the findings using thematic analysis. The interview process may have been limited by the participants’ memory, as a year had passed since their initial return. Additionally, in any study, the participants may attempt to answer in a socially desirable manner. This may have been increased because I attended the trip as their practicum/internship supervisor. Finally, in thematic analysis, interview questions are used as a guide and may limit the potential comments that participants may have otherwise discussed.

**Research Bias**

My involvement in the trip as the students’ supervisor may have influenced my interpretations of the information given. To help overcome this, I reviewed the themes with the participants. Three of the five participants offered feedback, which I incorporated into the findings. Additionally, my committee reviewed the information with one member triangulating the data for strengthening the study (see Creswell, 2009).

**Summary**

This chapter helped further tie the themes together, connecting the findings to the current literature and showing why these findings are important to the counselor educator. This study was conducted to examine master’s level counseling students’ perceptions of the reentry process after studying abroad. Findings showed that although students incorporated valuable lessons from their experiences, they struggled with challenges such as judging clients’ worldviews and
being able to connect with others. Based on the findings of this study, more assistance such as debriefing meetings may help future students in their transition from a study abroad program.
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