

Group Mentoring for International Counseling Psychology Students: A Case Example

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Abstract

Despite the significant increase in international counseling psychology students, little attention has been paid toward effective mentoring for this population. Using Chan et al.'s (2015) multicultural, ecological, and relational model of mentoring as a framework, this article presents the content and the process of a mentoring group offered through the Korean Psychology Network (KPN) as an example of a culturally sensitive, relationship-focused, and strength-based mentoring group for international counseling psychology students. The content areas of the mentoring group included instrumental support for professional development, professional identity development, international competence, global job searches, compassionate witnessing of

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microaggressions, cultural invisibility, and empowerment and support for self-advocacy. The paper also describes how the reciprocal relationships between mentors and mentees, as well as peer mentoring, evolved over time. Implications for practice, advocacy, education and training, and research are discussed, and suggestions are made for creating an affirming mentoring community for international counseling psychology students.

Keywords

culturally sensitive, relationship-based, strength-based group mentoring, reciprocal relationships in mentoring, peer mentoring

Significance of the Scholarship to the Public

This article describes an example of a mentoring group for a subgroup of international students in counseling psychology. This mentoring group introduces various dimensions of a culturally sensitive, relationship-based, and strength-based approach to mentoring applicable to the mentoring of international students and other marginalized groups in higher education as well as culturally diverse populations in different work settings outside of academia.

Against the backdrop of internationalization efforts in counseling psychology since the early 2000s (Nilsson et al., 2019), the number of international students studying counseling psychology has increased correspondingly (Wang & Heppner, 2015). In a survey of counseling psychology doctoral programs, 77% of programs that participated reported having international students enrolled in the program (Norcross et al., 2018/2019). Counseling psychology training requires the development of widely divergent sets of skills as a researcher, a practitioner, and a social justice advocate (Goodman et al., 2018; Yang et al., 2023). International counseling psychology students going through rigorous training in their second language may experience difficulties in understanding the nuances of the contextualized and nonverbal communication ingrained in psychotherapy (Garrison et al., 2022; Park-Saltzman et al., 2012) and the various professional roles they assume during their training (Yang et al., 2023). To succeed in training programs emphasizing multiculturalism and social justice advocacy, international counseling psychology students face the daunting task of developing a deep understanding of sociocultural issues and the historical context of systematic and political issues in the United States (Hui-Spears & Park-Saltzman, 2022). Moreover, challenges of career planning and uncertainties of

the future fueled by visa restrictions may cause substantial stress and anxiety among international counseling psychology students (Lee, 2013).

Unfortunately, previous research shows that international counseling psychology students receive a mixed level of support from advisors and their domestic peers, who showed both culturally receptive attitudes and cultural insensitivity (Knox et al., 2013), resulting in experiences of misunderstanding, lack of support, or microaggression from faculty, supervisors, clients, and peers (Dominguez et al., 2022; Inman et al., 2008). Then, how can the field of counseling psychology create a fertile, supportive training environment that facilitates international counseling psychology students' professional advancement and growth through their unique challenges? What can faculty, supervisors, and peers do to form a community that affirms international counseling psychology students' strengths, makes them feel heard and seen, and prepares them to become thriving international counseling psychologists? We suggest building a *developmental network* (Higgins & Kram, 2001) for international students in and outside their training programs as one possible solution. A developmental network consists of a network of mentors who "[take] an active interest in and action to advance the [mentee's] career by providing developmental assistance" (Higgins & Kram, 2001, p. 268).

This paper presents a mentoring group offered by the Korean Psychology Network (KPN) geared to meet the needs of Korean international counseling psychology students as a viable example of such a developmental network. This mentoring group incorporated multiple types of mentoring (e.g., multiple mentors, peer mentoring) beyond the traditional form of one-on-one mentoring between an experienced mentor and a less experienced mentee (Schwiebert, 2000). In the following section, we briefly review the literature on the cultural context of mentoring, different formats of mentoring, and the specific issues on mentorship for international counseling psychology students.

Mentoring in Context

The numerous benefits of mentoring have been well documented in facilitating academic success, career advancement, personal growth, and the development of a support network for the mentee (e.g., Curtin et al., 2016; Ragins & Kram, 2007). Many authors highlighted the transformative, relational aspect of mentoring in which the mentor serves as "a counselor–friend" (Inman, 2020, p. 113) and a role model who provides a safe and affirmative space for the mentee to develop their own competence and professional identity and validates each mentee's unique journey, responding to the mentee's changing needs over time (Benishek et al., 2004; Stanley & Lincoln, 2005).

Given the multifaceted nature of the mentoring relationship and the complexity of power dynamics between the mentor and the mentee, the mentoring outcomes may vary depending on various contributing factors (Benishek et al., 2004). For example, research on the impact of a gender and race match between the mentor and the mentee reported mixed results, particularly related to academic and career outcomes (see Eby et al., 2013 for more details). Interestingly, factors such as similarities in values (González-Figueroa & Young, 2005) and the mentor's investment in the mentee's career success (Blake-Beard et al., 2011) were reported to play more important roles than the race or gender match for the mentee's career advancement or professional opportunities. It has also been noted that professionals with minoritized status tend to value mentoring (Curtin et al., 2016), where they could have a safe space to process their experiences as a minority professional (Constantine et al., 2007) and prefer a mentor with similar identity (Blake-Beard et al., 2011).

Like other relationships, mentoring does not take place in a vacuum. A mentoring relationship is heavily influenced by multiple contexts which shape the values, belief systems, cultural identities, and lived experiences of the mentor and the mentee as well as their positionalities in their institutional, professional, and sociocultural settings (Benishek et al., 2004; Chan et al., 2015). Thus, there is a need for culturally sensitive, relationship-focused, and strength-based mentoring that goes beyond instrumental support for academic and professional advancement, attends to the intricacies of power dynamics and sociocultural contexts within the mentoring relationship, and facilitates the mentee's progression in their career trajectories while maintaining authentic expression of their personal and cultural values and identity (Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016; Inman, 2020). In addition, many mentoring experts have called for broadening the traditional form of one-on-one mentoring to better accommodate changes in career trajectories, work relationships, and the needs of workers—propelled by substantial societal and organizational changes and increased diversity in the workforce (Schwiebert, 2000). According to Ragins and Kram (2007), alternative forms of mentoring, such as group mentoring and peer mentoring with more specific objectives, have become more prominent in mentoring practice.

Mentoring Formats

Group Mentoring

Compared to the traditional form of dyadic mentoring, group mentoring between one or multiple mentors with multiple mentees can maximize mentees' access to mentors' knowledge and expertise and facilitate

interactions among mentees (McCauley & Guthrie, 2007). Group dynamics also enhance retention and engagement (Dorgo et al., 2013) as well as reciprocal learning relationships, which are crucial for personal and professional development (Huizing, 2012; Kroll, 2016). Multiple mentoring, a mentoring format with multiple mentors (Schwiebert, 2000), allows mentees to access varied viewpoints and instrumental and emotional support from diverse mentors in addition to reducing the burden on mentors.

However, group mentoring has limitations in meeting each mentee's unique needs, resulting in mentee dissatisfaction (Geesa et al., 2020). To optimize group mentoring programs, literature suggests adopting best practices such as designing meetings around topics that resonate with participants, thereby improving the likelihood of practical application in their roles (Emelo, 2011) or establishing clear expectations and goals for both mentors and mentees (Németh et al., 2020).

Peer Mentoring

Although mentoring between an experienced mentor and a less experienced mentee dominates the mentoring literature, some early experts in the mentoring literature identified peer mentoring as one of the essential lateral relationships in the constellation of developmental networks needed for career advancement (e.g., Eby, 1997; McManus & Russell, 2007). Peer mentoring occurs between individuals with similar roles or duties in an organization or similar levels in their career stages. According to Kram and Isabella (1985), peer mentoring relationships can be classified into the following three types depending on the peer mentor's functions and varying degrees of closeness with the mentee: (a) the information peer whose primary function is information sharing, (b) the collegial peer who provides career-related support and feedback, and (c) the special peer who has a close bond with the mentee and provides validation and emotional support for both career and personal issues.

Peer mentoring has distinctive advantages over traditional mentoring between a more experienced mentor and a less experienced mentee. For example, the proximity between peer mentors' and mentees' experiences can make it easier for a mentee to identify with and relate to their mentor, thus enhancing the mutuality in the mentoring relationship (McManus & Russell, 2007; Pidgeon et al., 2014). Also, peer mentors may have more relevant and up-to-date career-related information than mentors in a more advanced career stage. They can provide more practical advice on career-related issues based on their recent experiences (Preston et al., 2014; Snowden & Hardy, 2012). On the other hand, peer mentoring may also result in competitiveness in the mentoring relationship or feelings of inadequacies in a mentee if the exchange of information and feedback is not

done in a validating and respectful manner (Schwiebert, 2000; Swadener et al., 2015).

Mentoring International Counseling Psychology Students

Considering the unique challenges faced by international counseling psychology students, building a network of culturally sensitive mentors is essential for their success (Park-Saltzman et al., 2012). Many international counseling psychologists have highlighted that psychological support (e.g., empathic understanding of their challenges as international students, genuine interest in learning about their cultures) and instrumental support (e.g., feedback on writing, introduction to the mentor's professional network) from their mentors in dyadic mentoring played a pivotal role in their career advancement (Consoli et al., 2022; Inman, 2018, 2020). The results of Knox et al.'s (2013) qualitative study examining the advising experiences of 10 participants from seven different countries painted a nuanced picture of international counseling psychology students' experiences with their advisors—who often played the role of mentors. Although some participants had advisors who showed a welcoming and supportive attitude and cultural sensitivity, others had advisors who expected them to have the same abilities as domestic students without considering their language barriers and acculturative stress, and showed little interest in learning about the students' cultural contexts.

Even though it was not explicitly labeled as “peer mentoring,” the literature illuminated the vital role of peers in international counseling psychology students' professional experiences. Inman (2018, 2020) shared that the significant impact of peer support on her professional career broadened her preconceived assumptions about mentoring sources coming only from more experienced mentors. Similarly, international counseling psychology faculty in Consoli et al.'s (2022) study reported that their peers, especially those with international backgrounds, helped to build a sense of community for them. Participants in Knox et al.'s (2013) study reported receiving inconsistent treatment from their domestic peers—exclusion from social activities and a lack of interest in learning about their cultures mixed with a welcoming and supportive attitude.

Despite its valuable insights, the existing literature on mentoring for international counseling psychology students is limited. Most research focuses on conceptual discussions of mentoring for specific subgroups of international students (e.g., Asian international students; see Park-Saltzman et al., 2012) or on their experiences in one-on-one advising and mentoring relationships within their program (e.g., Consoli et al., 2022; Knox et al., 2013). Published work documenting the importance of having a network of mentors in the

career development of international counseling psychology students is limited to faculty members' retrospective accounts of their graduate school experiences (e.g., [Consoli et al., 2022](#); [Inman, 2018, 2020](#)). To the authors' knowledge, the lived mentoring experiences of international counseling psychology students have not been addressed in the literature so far.

Purpose of the Paper

The primary purpose of this paper is to fill the gap in the literature on the mentoring experiences of international counseling psychology students as well as describe a mentoring group offered through the KPN as an example of group mentoring for this population. This mentoring group addressed the unique cultural needs of the mentees and adopted a relationship-focused and strength-based approach ([Alvarez & Lazzari, 2016](#); [Benishek et al., 2004](#); [Inman, 2020](#)) that morphed over 4 years, from 2016 to 2020. It also incorporated mentoring by two mentors at more advanced stages of their careers than the mentees as well as mentoring among peers who went through the career transition from graduate students to early career professionals. Another purpose of the paper is to illustrate the major themes of the mentoring group and its process using the multicultural, ecological, and relational model of mentoring ([Chan et al., 2015](#)) as a framework. This model aligns well with the mentoring program's culturally sensitive, relationship-focused, and strength-based approach, which will be further elaborated in the next section. We aspire to invite faculty, supervisors, and graduate students from all backgrounds to use this example as a catalyst to deepen their understanding of the experiences of international counseling psychology students; build competence in mentoring and supporting them, either as a more experienced mentor or a peer; and brainstorm ideas for creating a more affirming training environment.

Theoretical Framework

Multicultural, Ecological, and Relational Model of Mentoring

Based on a qualitative study with ethnic minority doctoral students and their mentors in counseling and clinical psychology programs, [Chan et al. \(2015\)](#) identified the following five themes of multicultural, ecological, and relational model of mentoring using grounded theory: (a) career support and guidance tailored for the needs of ethnic minorities, (b) relationality between mentors and mentees, (c) significance of contexts, (d) interconnections across contexts, and (e) multidirectionality of interactions between the contexts. This model also classifies dimensions of mentoring and functions into the individual dimension (e.g., career and personal support tailored to the needs of ethnic minority mentees), the relationship dimension (e.g., relationship and trust

building), and the institutional and social dimension (e.g., protection, validation, network building, giving access). This model focuses on mentors' and mentees' multilayered contexts, which include family and community, institution, field and profession, and societal and cultural contexts. In this model, mentors' and mentees' contexts are conceptualized to have a reciprocal and bidirectional relationship.

This model provides a fitting framework for an illustration of this mentoring group in that it was developed to provide career and personal support (i.e., the individual dimension of mentoring); emphasize relationship and trust building among members over time (i.e., the relationship dimension of mentoring); and focus on professional navigations in their programs, clinical training environments, and the profession for burgeoning international psychologists (i.e., the institutional, professional, and societal dimension of mentoring). On a broader level, this model's emphasis on mutuality in the mentoring relationship and ecological context of mentoring dovetails with the communitarianism identified as one of the core values of counseling psychology in the most recent version of the Model Training Program (Scheel et al., 2018) that focus on interconnection among professionals, mutual accountability, and community building.

Method

Mentoring Group Participants

The mentoring group consisted of two mentors and four mentees born and raised in South Korea. They all identified themselves as cisgender females. During this mentoring group, one of the mentors worked at a university counseling center (UCC) and transitioned into private practice, and the other mentor worked at a UCC. Both mentors were heavily involved in training and supervision and had expertise in working with international students. All mentees were trained in APA-accredited counseling psychology programs and completed their predoctoral internship at UCCs. Although some mentees had a clear initial career goal of becoming a professor, others showed openness to exploring various career opportunities within the practitioner-scholar model. After completing their doctoral program, all mentees found employment in the United States—two postdoctoral fellows, one staff psychologist at a UCC, and one faculty member in an APA-accredited counseling psychology doctoral program. Out of two mentees who completed their postdoctoral fellowship in the United States, one became a permanent employee at a UCC, and the other returned to South Korea for a faculty position.

Formation and Structure of the Mentoring Group

Initially, the mentoring group was designed as a three-part support meeting for internship applications offered annually for 3 years as part of the mentoring initiatives of the KPN. The two mentors in charge of these mentoring initiatives sent an open call to the KPN listserv, and four mentees responded. Three mentoring meetings for internship application support were delivered synchronously via Skype (audio only) following the internship application cycle with three separate themes, including (a) internship application preparation, (b) interview preparation, and (c) ranking decision. In addition to the mentoring team members, one or two psychology interns who had applied for predoctoral internships the previous year also attended these meetings, depending on their availability. These psychology interns made valuable contributions to the support meetings by sharing practical tips on maneuvering through the internship application process. All four mentees were matched successfully for the internship.

Although the internship support meetings held in the 2016–2017 academic year had a predetermined structure (i.e., internship matching), support meetings during the mentee's internship year in the 2017–2018 academic year and their early career phase (e.g., postdoctoral fellowships and the first full-time permanent jobs) from 2018 to 2020 evolved organically based on the mentees' needs. There was no predetermined structure or timeline in place. Instead, the support meetings during the internship grew out of the members' collective desire to maintain a space for mutual support and exchange of information. At the end of the internship, the members made a similar decision to preserve the support space as the mentees launched into a new phase of their careers. As the program's structure flexibly morphed over time, support meetings focused on the mentees' successful progression from one phase of their careers to the next. [Table 1](#) provides information on the content and the practical strategies used during the support meetings across the internship application, the internship, and post-internship phases.

Mentoring meetings during the predoctoral psychology internship and the postdoctoral fellowship years were held once per semester using Skype. Topics covered in these meetings included relocation challenges, adjustment to a full-time clinician during the internship year, relationship building with their internship cohort, navigating through training environments at internship programs and home programs, career decision-making, work-life balance, self-care, and visa issues. The frequency of virtual support meetings during the early career phase varied from once in 2 weeks to once in a few months, depending on the needs and availability of the members. Transition from a student to an early career professional as well as professional identity development as an international psychologist in the global context became one of the recurrent topics of these meetings,

Table I. Content and Practical Strategies for Support Meetings.

Internship application support meetings	Internship applications • Reframing the mentees' perception of their international background as a potential weakness and assisting them in writing essays to highlight their bicultural navigation skills and bilingual skills as strengths and potential assets to the training program • Assisting the mentees to clearly outline a fit between the training site and their goals for internship and long-term career in their essays and cover letter • Encouraging the mentees to highlight their "trainability" (e.g., willingness to learn, openness to feedback, reflections on challenges during their cultural transitions as resources of growth and learning)
	Internship interviews • Reconceptualizing interview as a bi-directional process (e.g., using interview as an opportunity to assess the site, work culture, and staff) • Strengthening the mentees' comfort level with self-promotion needed for the interview process to counterbalance the humility emphasized in Korean culture • Coaching interview strategies to better align nonverbal cues (e.g., eye contact, tone of voice, posture) to demonstrate professionalism and confidence expected in the American context • Providing guidance on how to address visa issues as an international student during the interview process
	Ranking • Processing the mentees' experiences during the interview and their reassessment of training sites after the interview • Assisting the mentees to clarify their training goals for their internship year within the context of their long-term professional goals and consider the transferability of their training in their home country if needed • Providing support for developing the mentees' clinical competence and professional identity as an international psychology intern • Examining the surrounding environment of internship sites (e.g., accessibility to cultural resources)

(continued)

Table 1. (continued)

Support meetings during internship	• Providing support for developing the mentees' clinical competence and professional identity as an international psychology intern • Advocating for training opportunities in a culturally congruent way to meet their training goals for the internship year • Processing the mentees' stress regarding maximizing desirability for possible job opportunities in the United States and their home country
Post-internship support meetings	• Taking the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology and obtaining license • Facilitating a discussion on the challenges of navigating family expectations from their home culture and pursuing their professional goals • Assisting in discussing issues of transition from a psychology intern to an early career international psychologist • Facilitating a discussion on the complexities of career planning and job search as international psychologists (e.g., academic vs. clinical settings, home country vs. the United States) • Discussing visa issues and decisions regarding returning to home country

along with work–life balance and visa issues. At some point in the process, the meetings were held using a video function on Skype instead of an audio-only format. During the COVID-19 pandemic, these meetings took place using Zoom.

Analysis Procedure

As the mentoring group organically evolved and the relationships deepened, the mentors and mentees collectively decided to present a case example of developmental network building for international counseling psychology students. After discussing various methods, the mentors and mentees chose the community narrative approach (Rappaport, 1995, 2000), which focuses on discovering the common stories of community members. This approach uses tools such as observation, description, and critical analysis of a collection of individual stories to find alternative narratives unique to a community differing from the dominant narratives in mainstream society (Rappaport, 2000). The main goal of finding alternative narratives is to bring a community's implicit narratives to the surface and make them explicit as a form of empowerment (Rappaport, 1995).

To minimize biases, the mentors and mentees bracketed their prior experiences and preconceived ideas regarding mentoring and virtual mentoring, and examined their expectations regarding the analysis outcomes, using the prompts the first author had generated. Next, the identification of broad themes was conducted using a summary of mentor practices (i.e., mentoring activities or behaviors), the mentor function (i.e., the purpose of mentor practices), and the dimensions (i.e., the targets of mentor practices) in the multicultural, ecological, and relational model (Chan et al., 2015) as initial prompts. This process involved group discussions via 19 Zoom meetings—which typically lasted 60 to 90 minutes—from February 2020 to September 2022, in addition to exchanges of written comments and feedback on a Google document between meetings. Analysis was a reiterative process that focused more on what Rappaport (2000) conceptualized as indirect and subtle narratives hidden underneath main themes with each round of reanalysis. Reflexive memoing was also a collective process. The first author kept meeting notes, which the rest of the team reviewed to ensure accuracy and identify any gaps in the content. The members also reflected on how each member's positionality and the team's collective lens may affect the narrative-finding process.

The mentors and mentees were all keenly aware of power differences and the potential impact of hierarchical cultural values ingrained in the team members' backgrounds in the analysis process. The team members were equally invested in creating a collaborative analysis process and working together to uncover narratives and reach consensus on emerging themes. The

mentees took the initiative in sharing their experiences and reflections, whereas the mentors facilitated discussions to deepen the conversation and highlight subtle narratives. However, these roles were fluid, with both groups occasionally switching roles to contribute collectively to the narrative-finding process. For the mentors, the emphasis on the reciprocal and bi-directional relationship between the mentors and the mentees highlighted in the multi-cultural, ecological, and relational model of mentoring (Chan et al., 2015) anchored them in their mindful attention to the power dynamics. Also, in retrospect, exchanging written comments on a Google document gave the members a personal space to reflect on the content and share their opinions without the pressure of the in vivo power dynamics of a group discussion.

Themes of the Mentoring Group

In this section, the main themes of the mentoring group are presented using three dimensions, namely, (a) individual; (b) relational; and (c) institutional, professional, and societal dimensions identified in the multicultural, ecological, and relational model of mentoring (Chan et al., 2015) as a framework.

Individual Dimension

Instrumental Support for Professional Development. As mentioned earlier, this mentoring group started with instrumental support for the mentees with their internship application process. According to Garrison and Keum's (2019) needs assessment survey results for international counseling psychology students, the predoctoral internship application was the top area where participants needed the most support in their training. Instrumental support for internship application ranged from practical tips on internship essay writing, development of self-promotion skills appropriate in the U.S. context for successful interviews, and coaching on advocating for the mentees' unique training needs as international counseling psychologists-in-training, such as developing intercultural competence and support for visa issues during their training. During the mentees' internship and post-internship phases, instrumental support focused on information on visa issues related to full-time employment, the transferability of U.S. training, and job opportunities in both the United States and the mentees' home country.

For the mentees, developing self-promotion and self-advocacy skills set forth a significant transformation in their self-perception as international psychologists-in-training. This result aligns with the affirmation and confidence-building component highlighted in the individual dimension of Chan et al.'s (2015) mentoring model. During the initial phase of the internship application process, the mentees often voiced their hesitation about drawing attention to their international background and their unique needs as

international psychologists-in-training, worrying that doing so may put them at a disadvantage against their domestic peers in the internship application process. The mentoring group focused on replacing the mentees' cultural deficiency framework with a cultural proficiency framework (Yoon & Portman, 2004). The main goal was to help the mentees reframe their international background and bicultural navigation experiences as assets and opportunities for growth rather than obstacles in their professional development. Such reframing at the internship application phase laid seminal foundations for the mentees' confidence building during their internship and postinternship years.

Professional Identity Development. Another vital component of this mentoring group revolved around the mentees' professional identity development as the mentees made a transition from students to early career professionals. The mentors and mentees discussed how their upbringing in South Korea, which emphasized adherence to expected responsibilities for socially prescribed roles (Cho & LoCascio, 2018), strengthened their propensity to use external expectations as anchor points in their professional identity development process. Consistent with the findings in Wang et al.'s (2023) study, the mentees shared the rewards and challenges of bilingual therapists either as interns or senior staff. The mentees also faced challenges of coping with the pressure to conform to values and various life roles prescribed in the Korean culture which sometimes clashed with the values they adopted through their exposure to American culture (e.g., individual freedom, self-expression) and their socialization to the field of counseling psychology training in the United States (e.g., liberalism, social justice, and multicultural sensitivity; Scheel et al., 2018).

These complex layers of professional identity development, at times, left the mentees feeling some sense of anxiety, shame, or confusion. Consistent with reports in the existing literature (e.g., Domínguez et al., 2022; Inman et al., 2008; Knox et al., 2013), the mentees reported receiving mixed levels of support from their home program, internship program, and employers. Many of the mentoring discussions centered on feelings of invisibility in the mentees' respective institutions due to limited understanding from supervisors, administrators, and colleagues about the struggles that international counseling psychology students commonly experience during their student-to-professional transition period, such as visa issues and developing a professional identity as bicultural international counseling psychologists. Considering that individuals' professional identity development is leveraged through relationships and surrounding networks (Sweitzer, 2009), feelings of invisibility in their professional environment may significantly hinder professional identity development for international counseling psychology students in the early career phase.

The mentoring meetings helped the mentees cultivate professional identity by providing a safe space to openly discuss unique challenges as international students and early career professionals. Sharing their stories of overcoming similar challenges helped the mentees feel seen and validated, and develop camaraderie with individuals with similar identities and backgrounds. Such support and validation aided the mentees in finding the courage to give voice to their experiences as international students and early career professionals in their professional environments.

International Competence and Global Job Search. Even though only one mentee returned to South Korea for a faculty position, all mentees identified themselves as bicultural counseling psychologists striving to develop cross-national cultural competencies. Similar to the results of Domínguez et al.'s (2022) study, the mentees also reported the psychological burden associated with the constant assessment of the transferability of their U.S. training to their home country, and keeping abreast with changes in the professional environment in their home country throughout their training. As reported in the literature (Duenyas et al., 2020; Jung et al., 2013), the one mentee who returned to an academic position in her home country experienced new challenges during her transition. The mentoring team helped the mentee by sharing their knowledge of the academic environment in South Korea and providing a space for the mentee to process her experiences of leaving the professional setting in the United States, which she had acclimated to, and the counter-culture shock during her readjustment to a less familiar professional environment back home.

Relational Dimension

Trust and Rapport Building. The mentors and the mentees were passionate about building relationships in this mentoring team. They all viewed emotional support as a core part of mentoring which augmented the benefits of instrumental support. Common experiences shared by all members ranged from growing up as cisgender women in South Korea, leaving their home country as adults to pursue doctoral education in their second language in a foreign country, and adjusting to a new cultural identity as Korean women in the U.S. context allowed the organic development of mutual understanding of each other's experiences. Members' shared abilities to create egalitarian spaces and communication skills gained from their counseling psychology doctoral education in the United States and fostered trust and rapport building among the members.

Impact of Culture on Mentoring Relationships. Several notable cultural factors uniquely impacted the mentoring relationships. The mentors and mentees

reflected on how they—either consciously or unconsciously—may have, to a certain extent, reverted to the deeply ingrained cultural norms of a hierarchical, collectivistic culture in their home country despite their adoption of values and norms of more egalitarian relationships common in the individualistic culture in the United States. The mentors and mentees acknowledged that they may have leaned into their cultural values, such as maintaining harmony, avoiding conflict, and respecting authorities (Koo et al., 2011), making them cautious or hesitant about expressing their unique individual needs, values, or experiences when they detect signs of potential conflicts.

Another cultural factor that introduced complexities to relationship building was language and nonverbal communication. Since all members received most of their education in their native language, the mentoring meetings were conducted in Korean. Sharing the same language and culture allowed the members to convey complex nuances of their emotions and experiences and have rich communication. In line with the expectations of a high-context communication culture (Hofstede et al., 2010) in South Korea, the mentoring team members were intuitively attuned to each other's nonverbal cues.

Institutional, Professional, and Societal Dimension

Compassionate Witnessing of Microaggression and Cultural Invisibility. Another salient theme in mentoring meetings was the mentees' experiences with microaggressions, which became even more frequent and intense amid a divisive sociopolitical environment during the Trump administration and the COVID-19 pandemic (Ahn et al., 2022). Consistent with the existing literature (e.g., Domínguez et al., 2022; Knox et al., 2013), the mentees reported incidents of microaggression centered on comments and feedback from their advisors, teachers, supervisors, or clients about their accent or language skills, their communication styles, or professional demeanor. All mentees shared how these microaggression experiences made them feel marginalized and alienated, and created cognitive dissonance because these experiences conflicted with an emphasis on respect for diversity and the development of multicultural competence valued in the field.

The mentors and mentees unequivocally pointed out the paradox in others' responses regarding their cultural differences. Although microaggressions heightened the members' awareness that their differences as internationals were highly visible and scrutinized, the lack of support and social justice action within the field of counseling psychology combating xenophobia and systematic oppression against internationals led them to feel invisible. Moreover, the mentees shared their frustrations with a lack of venues to process their struggles within their respective institutions. Furthermore, many mentees studied or worked in rural areas with limited access to cultural

resources and supportive networks. The mentees shared how it was solely their responsibility to manage the emotional and physical cost of microaggression and somehow find a way to move on.

All mentees shared that the mentoring meetings became a vital space to unpack various experiences with microaggression and cultural invisibility. Both the mentors and mentees reckoned with feelings of isolation associated with the complex layers of their marginalized identities in multiple contexts. These included: (1) being highly educated women with international educational and work experiences in a patriarchal, male-dominated South Korean society; (2) professional women with multiple minority statuses as Asian international women navigating the dominant U.S. society; and (3) foreign-born female immigrants with progressive values shaped by their doctoral training in counseling psychology, which positioned them as outsiders within the Korean American communities in the United States. The mentoring team members created a holding space for one another as compassionate witnesses (Weingarten, 2003) and co-constructed a sense of belonging and community.

Empowerment and Support for Self-Advocacy. Consistent with Sue et al.'s (2007) assertion, all mentees shared how repeated exposure to microaggression led them to experience self-doubt and internalization of negative messages. They also discussed how the humility valued in Korean culture (Chin & Kameoka, 2019), combined with the adultism of the profession that favors the voice of more experienced professionals (Singh, 2020), perpetuated their pattern of silencing their voice. As the mentees gradually started to use the mentoring space to voice their challenges, the mentoring team assisted them in changing their self-doubts and negative self-talk by gently challenging their deficiency-based self-perception and shifting their focus to their strengths. The mentors and peer mentees constantly reminded them of the risk-taking spirit, resourcefulness, and resilience they had demonstrated while executing their plan to leave their home country and seek graduate education in a new culture far away from their primary source of support.

The mentors also validated each mentee's experience as outsiders as a source of their feelings of isolation and loneliness while affirming the critical thinking skills and bicultural competence they had gained from their bicultural navigation experiences. The mentors encouraged the mentees to give voice to their unique experiences as Korean international female students outside of the mentoring space so that they could bring their authentic selves to their professional roles instead of compartmentalizing parts of their experiences to conform to the cultural and organizational norms to fit in. The mentees were also encouraged to accentuate what they weathered as outsiders at the margins of intersecting identities and use those experiences as an impetus for professional growth.

Another recurrent theme of the mentoring meetings revolved around self-advocacy. Similar to the participants in Lee et al.'s (2022) study, the mentees shared the difficulties in giving voice to their training needs and the unique challenges they face as international students. Mentoring for self-advocacy often started with sharing the lived experiences of the mentees, in which Korean values of conformity to the norms or showing respect to others through silence were misinterpreted as signs of passivity, a lack of character, or reticent compliance. The next step involved brainstorming various behavioral repertoires and determining when and how to seek support from supervisors and administrators and advocate for their needs in a way that blends in with the professionalism expected in the U.S. context while staying true to their personality and Korean cultural values.

Reciprocal Relationship Between the Mentors and the Mentees

Another prominent characteristic of this mentoring group was the reciprocal relationship between the mentors and the mentees. It was significant to this group because the mentoring team members were used to a top-down mentoring approach prevalent in Asian culture (Chin & Kameoka, 2019). The mentors and the mentees agreed that they experienced a shift from a task-oriented approach focused on instrumental support, particularly with internship application, to a relationship-oriented approach to the extent that this group became "a social capital" for them over time. A sense of community emerged progressively as a synergy of relationships between the mentors and the mentees, between the two mentors, and among the mentees. Another factor that sustained the mentoring relationship was a lack of an evaluative component, which allowed the mentees to present topics of interest without worrying about negative evaluations by people in power positions.

The mentors attended to the reciprocity of their relationships with the mentees by sharing their knowledge and previous experiences to validate the mentees' experiences and facilitate their intentional decision-making and self-empowerment. The mentees shared that the mentors' self-disclosure made the role modeling component of the mentoring come alive for them, providing a sense of relief, validating their experiences, and allowing them to observe different professional roles within the field. Both mentors felt that giving access to their inside story through role modeling (Chan et al., 2015) fostered their own growth alongside the mentees as the mentoring relationship shifted from instrumental support to relational support. For one of the mentors, being able to serve as a role model gave meaning to the challenges she had faced as an international student. The other mentor noted that observing the mentees' increased self-awareness of their intersecting identities enriched her own self-awareness as a Korean immigrant woman. Both mentors felt that they had gained colleagues and peers, which was identified as one of the benefits of

mentoring for mentors in the multicultural and feminist model of mentoring (Benishek et al., 2004).

The mentees used the space to exchange relevant career information and practical tips to help each other with professional development, serving the roles of what Kram and Isabella (1985) defined as information peers and collegial peers. The mentees' relationships with each other evolved to what Kram and Isabelle referred to as special peers as they transitioned through different stages of their graduate training and early career stage together, and their validation and support for each other went beyond professional issues to personal issues. Some mentees became mentors for other international counseling psychology students, thus expanding a virtuous cycle of mentorship.

The mentoring relationships were not without challenges. Some mentees shared that it was sometimes difficult to navigate cultural frame switching (Schwartz et al., 2014) and discern whether to approach their interactions with the mentors from a Korean lens versus an American lens. For example, although all meetings were conducted in Korean, emails were sometimes sent in English. This created some confusion and discomfort for the mentees because using English that does not have honorific forms breaks the Korean cultural norm of showing respect and deference to people with more seniority. In addition, despite the mentors' efforts to lift the mentees' voices and reduce the power hierarchy by engaging in self-disclosure, the mentoring team members might have avoided potentially conflict-inducing topics or an explicit disagreement with each other to maintain harmony and hierarchy.

Implications for Practice, Advocacy, Education and Training, and Research

Numerous scholars and practitioners unequivocally highlighted the importance of support from advisors, teachers, clinical supervisors, mentors, and peers for the growth and success of international counseling psychology students (Consoli et al., 2022; Domínguez et al., 2022; Hui-Spears & Park-Saltzman, 2022; Inman, 2018, 2020; Knox et al., 2013; Lee et al., 2022; Park-Saltzman et al., 2012). The mentoring group described in this paper expands the existing literature by providing a living example of how a support network of mentors and mentees could offer a sustained, safe support space through group mentoring for international counseling psychology students during their graduate training and transition into their early career. Unlike traditional dyadic mentoring for counseling students (Boswell et al., 2015), this mentoring group combined hierarchical mentoring with peer support, creating a dynamic and supportive community. Similar to other mentoring programs (e.g., Heppner, 2017), it integrated cultural competencies into its mentoring model with an added focus on community building. Finally, unlike programs

concentrating solely on academic career paths (Hill et al., 1999), this mentoring group addressed the broader transition from graduate studies to early career stages.

The themes from this mentoring group may have limited applicability for mentoring other international counseling psychology students. Most notably, the shared background and language among the mentoring team members may have played an important role in rapport building and mutual understanding of the cultural nuances that would have been difficult otherwise. A lack of an evaluative component in the mentor–mentee relationships also limits the replicability of the level of openness demonstrated by the mentees in this group to the advising, teaching, or supervision contexts. In addition, this mentoring group only addressed developmental stages starting from the internship application phase, with little attention to earlier developmental stages in the mentees' academic careers. It should be noted that this limitation was acknowledged by the mentors, and after 2020, mentoring group sessions offered through the KPN were expanded to include mentees of all developmental stages.

With these limitations in mind, we circle back to our main questions regarding what members of our field can do to create a fertile training environment and an affirming mentoring community for international counseling psychology students. Our suggestions in the following section are based only on the themes from the mentoring group that can be applied to all international counseling psychology students, excluding the themes associated with the specific cultural background of the mentoring team. Infusing Rappaport's (1995, 2000) assertion on the transformative power of finding alternative narratives often hidden in the shadow of dominant narratives, our goal is to brainstorm strategies that faculty, supervisors, and peers can adopt to validate and affirm alternative narratives of international counseling psychology students as sources for their professional growth.

Implications for Practice

One of the salient themes of the mentoring group related to practice was the mentees' lived experiences and identity as bicultural and bilingual therapists. Our findings suggest that having a safe space to process the challenges of being bicultural and bilingual therapists enabled the mentees to identify the core of their authentic selves while navigating multiple sociocultural spaces and exploring strategies for cross-cultural interactions in therapy congruent with their communication styles and cultural values. Faculty, supervisors, and peers of international counseling psychology students can facilitate this process by showing genuine curiosity and interest in their journey and inviting them to discussions on points of convergence and divergence between professional values and the clinical skills they are expected to demonstrate and

their cultural values and behaviors (Consoli et al., 2022; Domínguez et al., 2022).

Consistent with the findings of the existing studies (e.g., Garrison et al., 2022; Lee et al., 2022), the mentees of the mentoring group reported anxiety regarding evaluation or judgment from their supervisors or clients on their English proficiency. As the mentees gained more confidence as bicultural and bilingual therapists, their focus during clinical interactions broadened to how they connect with clients rather than a sole focus on the spoken language. We echo Garrison et al.'s (2022) recommendations for supervisors and trainers to critically examine the potential influence of native-speakerism (i.e., a belief system that values a language spoken by native speakers as a superior form of language; Holliday, 2008) on their expectations for English proficiency and initiate open conversations with their international supervisees about the impact of their linguistic diversity on their clinical work.

Implications for Advocacy

We strongly agree with other counseling psychologists (e.g., Moore-Lobban et al., 2021), who emphasized the importance of enlarging the circle for cultural outsiders as a central mission of advocacy work. Some of the most prominent themes of this mentoring group centered on the mentees' experiences as cultural outsiders manifested as self-doubts, anxiety, and shame about their cultural differences, as well as distress regarding coping with other people's invalidation, misunderstanding, or microaggression. Consistent with the results of Lee et al.'s (2022) study, the mentees highlighted the importance of the psychological safety they felt in group meetings as a facilitative factor that enabled them to open up about their inner struggles without worrying about being misunderstood or judged.

Then, how can the field of counseling psychology create an environment that encourages psychological safety for international students outside small pockets of support like this mentoring group? This process can start with a critical assessment of the underlying assumptions of their conceptualization of competence used as the educational and professional standards in the field, and collective efforts to normalize and validate diverse ways to achieve competence. Such an accepting atmosphere will create fertile ground for international counseling psychology students to engage in interpersonal risk-taking—what Edmondson (2018) identified as a crucial component of psychological safety—such as voicing their opinions and values, challenging the status quo, or sharing non-mainstream ideas without worrying about negative judgment, ostracization, or shaming.

Oftentimes, enlarging the circle requires using one's knowledge, experiences, and power to bridge the gap caused by systematic barriers. To that end, many counseling psychologists have made excellent recommendations for

practical ways to engage in systemic-level advocacy for international counseling psychology students, such as serving as a liaison between counseling psychology programs and other outside entities such as practicum sites and International Student Offices on campus or supporting policy work led by the program, university, or professional organizations to remove barriers and restrictions related to funding and employment opportunities (see [Consoli et al., 2022](#); [Domínguez et al., 2022](#); [Lee et al., 2022](#) for more details). As [Wedding et al. \(2009\)](#) recommended, faculty and supervisors are encouraged to collaborate with other professionals, such as international student advisors and international scholars, to assist their international mentees in working through visa restrictions and other contextual factors that may affect their career planning, including the transferability of their U.S.-based training in their home country.

Implications for Education and Training

Cultural isolation and feelings of alienation reported by the mentees in the mentoring group were closely related to the U.S.-centrism deeply ingrained in counseling psychology training ([Consoli et al., 2022](#)), in which their differences as internationals were viewed as deficits and their adherence to their cultural norms was often misconstrued. The resulting tension between hypervisibility associated with scrutiny for evaluation and invisibility stemming from cultural invalidation led to the silencing of their authentic voice and the compartmentalization of their cultural identities. These findings mirror a dilemma reported in [Yang et al.'s \(2023\)](#) study about challenges in maintaining authenticity amid mixed messaging between the emphasis on genuineness and implicit pressure to adhere to the rules for scholarly success in counseling psychology graduate training.

To foster a sense of belonging and inclusion among international counseling psychology students, faculty and supervisors are encouraged to critically assess the influence of U.S.-centrism and deficiency-based narratives about international students in higher education ([Yoon & Portman, 2004](#)) and in counseling psychology training ([Garrison et al., 2022](#)). Counseling psychologists with international backgrounds are not free from biases against international mentees, stemming from internalized U.S.-centrism and these deficiency-based narratives ([Consoli et al., 2022](#)). Thus, it is vital for all faculty and supervisors to actively reflect on their potential biases against international mentees. Including non-U.S.-based theories and global issues in the curriculum and training materials and inviting international students to choose research topics or presentation topics in class related to their cultures could also be beneficial ([Consoli et al., 2022](#)). Furthermore, training programs can provide training to faculty and supervisors regarding the unique

challenges international students face to support faculty and supervisors in becoming supportive mentors and allies for international mentees.

Expanding upon the existing literature on the influence of peers on international counseling psychology students' professional growth (Consoli et al., 2022; Inman, 2018, 2020) and counseling psychology doctoral students' expression of authenticity (Yang et al., 2023), the empowering impact of reciprocal relationships among peer mentees as compassionate witnesses to each other in our mentoring group highlights a need to foster peer interactions in counseling psychology training. Training programs may consider organizing training activities or informal gatherings that facilitate interactions between domestic and international students (Domínguez et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2023). Faculty and supervisors can run a peer mentoring group among international and domestic students or encourage international students to join a support group with other international peers outside the program to help them enlarge their support network.

Limitations of the Paper and Future Research

One of the main limitations of this paper is the self-reflective nature of the analysis, in which the mentoring group participants themselves analyzed the group content and process. Another limitation is related to the community narrative analysis method, which has limits in capturing the nuanced variations of the narratives through individual stories. Also, despite the mentoring teams' efforts to minimize the dominance of the mentors' voices in the analysis process, the mentees may have been reluctant to voice their opinions out of respect for the more experienced mentors and a desire to maintain group harmony, values deeply ingrained in their culture of origin.

Nevertheless, this paper's illustrative description of the mentoring group provides rich examples of variables that can be examined in future qualitative and quantitative studies. Although the mentoring group reported in this paper had mentors and mentees who were all cisgender females, it seems important to investigate the impact of gender on the mentoring experience of international students in counseling psychology. Furthermore, future research can explore the reciprocal relationships between mentors and mentees, identifying factors that influence mentor–mentee dynamics in group mentoring and peer mentoring among international students in counseling psychology.

Conclusion

The mentoring group described in this paper provides a case example of a culturally sensitive, relationship-focused, and strength-based group mentoring program for international counseling psychology students. The themes discussed in the mentoring group capture the cultural values and dynamics

specific to the culture shared by the mentoring team members, as well as the experiences commonly shared by international counseling psychology students. Our hope is that the illustration of this case example will enhance faculty, supervisors, and peers' understanding of international counseling psychology students, motivating them to create a safe space for international students and reach out to them to initiate authentic conversations about their experiences. We also hope that our paper will give international counseling psychology students the courage to voice their needs. We believe that reciprocal conversations grounded in authenticity, compassionate witnessing, and the mentors' genuine interest in and commitment to the international mentees' professional advancement, combined with the international mentee's corresponding efforts for self-advocacy, play a key role in creating an affirming training environment for international counseling psychology students.

Author Contributions

The third, fourth, fifth, and sixth authors of this manuscript contributed equally to the manuscript. Their names are listed in alphabetical order.

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