Article

Experiences of Psychology Applicants from the Global South: Faculty and Student Perspectives on How to Overcome Barriers to Inclusive Education

Pankhuri Aggarwal
University of Cincinnati, USA

Nikita Ghodke
New York University, USA

Vaishali V. Raval
Miami University, USA

ABSTRACT

Although vital to efforts to promote global psychological science, applicants from the Global South continue to experience numerous challenges in securing postbaccalaureate research positions and admission to graduate programs in the Global North. In the present study, international students and applicants (N = 81, M_{age} = 25.5 years, 82.7% women) from Asia, Africa, and Latin America completed an online survey about their professional experiences prior to pursuing graduate school in the Global North, challenges faced while applying, and strategies for successfully navigating the application process. We also surveyed faculty members (N = 56, M_{age} = 46.0 years, 67.9% women) in graduate programs in the Global North about their experiences recruiting international applicants in their programs/labs and asked them to provide recommendations to students for successful application outcomes. Inductive content analysis yielded a total of 59 themes across 4 categories. The implications for education and training in psychology are discussed.

Keywords: Global South, graduate school, international students, postbaccalaureate, psychology applicants

In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in the number of international students pursuing higher education in countries located in the Western Hemisphere. These countries together are referred to as the Global North (GN) and include the United States (U.S.), Canada, most European countries, New Zealand, and Australia1 (Macready & Tucker, 2011). Nearly 6.3 million international students enrolled in higher education programs in GN countries in 2020 (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, 2022). Among these countries, the U.S. hosted most of the international student community, with 948,519 students enrolled in the 2021-2022 application cycle alone (Institute of International Education; IIE Open Doors 2022a). These numbers have only increased over the past few decades. According to the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (2023a), there was an increase of 42% in international students enrolled in full-time master programs and 5.6% in full-time doctoral programs from 2021-2022 compared with previous years.

Psychology, in particular, has become a popular field of study in higher education due to its wide range of applicability and the diverse career opportunities that it offers (Inman et al., 2008). This field has also attracted several international applicants from across the globe. According to the IIE Open Doors Report (2022b, 2023a), the number of international students enrolled in psychology programs in the U.S. was 18,747, which was an 11.4% increase from the previous year. Similarly, the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (2023b) highlighted an increase in the percentage of international students earning doctoral degrees in psychology, rising from 5.3% in 2002 to 9.3% in 2022 over the span of two decades.

This growth in international students in graduate psychology programs is cooccurring with the increasing recognition that psychology as a science lacks global representation in the communities being studied, the topics being examined, and the researchers engaging in the production of published scholarships (Lin & Li, 2023; Raval et al., 2024; Thalmayer et al., 2021). Countries in GN, particularly the U.S., are the primary producers of published research in psychology, and for a long time, it was assumed that the research conducted by Americans on Americans is relevant and applicable to understanding the psychological processes of people across the globe (Arnett, 2008). Several recent commentaries and articles have challenged this assumption, calling for a more global representation in our science (See Adams et al., 2015; Adetula et al., 2022; Corral-Frías et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2023). Having more international students from the Global South (GS) (a term referring to countries in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean, the Pacific Islands, and the Middle East) in psychology graduate programs in GN can expand the scope of our science by enabling peers and mentors to recognize the limits of the knowledge being produced and by engaging in research with global communities. International

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[1] High-income Asian countries (e.g., Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore) are sometimes included in the GN, though in this article, we use the term GN to refer to the US, Canada, and countries in Europe and Oceania.

students from GS countries are vital to efforts to promote global psychological science. However, they face multiple barriers in securing admission to graduate programs in the U.S. and other GN countries, as well as postbaccalaureate positions (opportunities or programs that students can pursue after completing their undergraduate degrees), which are often steppingstones to graduate education. Although there have been anecdotal reports of the barriers and calls for inclusivity, to the best of our knowledge, there are no published studies that report data from international applicants from the GS. The present study is the first systematic effort to explore the motivations, challenges, and experiences of psychology applicants from GS countries applying to graduate programs and postbaccalaureate positions in the U.S.

International Applicants from GS: Motivations, Challenges, and Experiences

Since the 1950s, there has been an increase in international students migrating from GS countries for higher education. A detailed analysis by Macready and Tucker (2011) drawing data from UNESCO's Global Education Digest 2009-2010 revealed that students from different regions of the world preferred to study in North America, especially students from Asia and Africa. One of the main reasons that international students migrated to Western countries, specifically the U.S., as pointed out by UNESCO's report, was the perception that renowned universities across disciplines were housed there, coupled with the lack of opportunities in their home country. Additionally, students reported that in the competitive job market, U.S. education provided them with better professional opportunities (Macready & Tucker, 2011). Similarly, in a survey conducted by Han and colleagues (2015) among enrolled international students in the U.S., most respondents believed that the U.S. education system provided them with superior knowledge in their discipline, better mentorship and networking opportunities, and advanced job prospects.

When considering the aforementioned research studies, the majority of reasons provided by international students, specifically those interested in pursuing research and academia, pointed out that the quality of mentorship and advising was better. This makes sense, as people from GS nations often face concerns in their home country, such as limited education in a certain field or a lack of formal mentorship and professional development opportunities.

In addition to the motivations to study in the U.S., numerous challenges have been documented for international students in the application and study abroad process (Altbach, 2003; Khanal & Gaulee 2019; Lee, 2013), such as visa decline, limited financial support, barriers in language proficiency, difficulty preparing competitive application materials, and a lack of mentorship to conduct research (Harris, 2004; Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002). These challenges have been reported across disciplines, including but not limited to social work (Bell et al., 2021), medicine (Serraino et al., 2023), and business (Sweeney & McFarlin, 2015). Within psychology, very few studies have explored the challenges that international students face. For example, in a study of international doctoral

students in counseling psychology, Dominguez and colleagues identified five categories of challenges experienced by international students. These include interpersonal stress, financial pressures, immigration-related stress, language barriers, and advice-related concerns (Dominguez et al., 2022).

Although there is limited prior literature on challenges experienced by international students who are already enrolled in a graduate program, there are no prior investigations of the barriers that international applicants from GS experience in the graduate admissions process in the field of psychology. A systematic investigation of the challenges faced in the graduate admissions process by international applicants from the GS is critical to improving their overall application experience and subsequently laying the foundations for incorporating diverse perspectives in psychology. In addition, there is a need to critically examine data on how the visible and invisible identities (e.g., disability status, social class, sexual orientation) of international applicants from the GS impact their ability to navigate the graduate admission process and graduate school.

There are several reasons why systematic research on the identities and experiences of students is needed, particularly for those students who have marginalized identities. First, scholars argue that one's marginalized social status influences one's professional experiences (See Garcia, 1992). For example, studies indicate that international students with disability experience increased discrimination, fear of rejection, and lack of belonging in graduate school (IIE Open Doors, 2023b). Despite these reports of increased marginalization among students with several minority identities, there is a dearth of literature on this topic. This is problematic, as these challenges continue to lead to a lack of representation and decreased accessibility in academia for students predominantly from GS nations (Harris, 2004). Not having access to this valuable information prevents higher education institutes and other stakeholders from taking necessary actions to address these challenges. Given the increasingly diverse cohorts of students in higher education, including those within the discipline of psychology (Nettles & Balter; 2011; Thiem & Dasgupta, 2022), systematically investigating the challenges and experiences of international applicants from GS countries is of vital importance.

The Present Study

There have been anecdotal reports of the barriers that GS applicants face in applying to graduate programs in the GN, although no systematic efforts have explored the experiences of these applicants. To address this gap, this exploratory study aimed to understand student and faculty perspectives regarding the challenges faced by international applicants from GS while applying to graduate psychology programs in the U.S. Our research questions were as follows: 1) What professional experiences and accomplishments do students from GS have before applying to graduate school? 2) From faculty and applicant perspectives, what are the barriers to international applicants from GS when applying to postbaccalaureate positions and graduate programs in psychology in the U.S. 3)

From the faculty perspective, what are the benefits of having international students? and 4) What strategies, resources, and recommendations can international applicants follow to successfully obtain postbaccalaureate positions and admissions in graduate programs in the U.S.?

METHOD

Participants

Students

A total of 164 participants completed the survey. Of these, 2 participants were younger than 18 years of age, and 79 participants discontinued the survey after providing initial consent and were removed from the analysis. Our final student sample included 81 participants (M_{age} = 25.5 years, 82.7% women). Most students reported that they grew up in Asia (72.8%), followed by Africa (18.5%) and Latin America (8.6%). Most students completed their bachelor's degree in Asia (68.7%), followed by Africa (17.9%) and Latin America (13.4%). Our participants were a mix of international applicants who plan to apply to graduate programs (38.8%), international applicants who have applied to a past admission cycle (25%), and international students who are currently enrolled in a graduate program (32.5%). Among those who were currently enrolled in a graduate program, most (80%) were enrolled in doctoral programs, followed by master's programs (20%). Refer to Table 1 for student demographics.

When the students were asked about their salient identities, the following characteristics were referenced: citizenship/race (53.1%), socioeconomic class (46.9%), gender (45.7%), sexual orientation (32.1%), religion/spirituality (35.8%), disability (24.7%), age (19.8%), caste (13.6%), community membership (9.9%), first-generation college student (8.6%), urban/rural (4.9%), parents' marital status (4.9%), parents' education (4.9%), language spoken (3.7%), educational and/or professional role (3.7%), family structure (3.7%), marital status (1.2%), and caregiver status (1.2%). The participants spoke about the transient and intersectional nature of these identities (i.e., how their identities intersected to create unique experiences of privilege and marginalization) and how these identities impacted their day-to-day functioning.

Faculty

A total of 71 participants started the survey. Of these, 14 participants discontinued the survey after providing initial consent, and 1 participant, who identified as a student, was removed. Our final sample included 56 faculty (M_{age} = 46.0 years, 67.9% women). The participants included a mix of advisors (67.9%), directors of clinical training (10.7%), and area/program heads (21.4%). A total of 89.3% of our sample was tenure-track faculty, and 94.6% of the faculty members taught in their respective programs at the time of survey completion. These programs included a mix of doctoral (73.1%) and master's degrees (26.9%). Most

of the faculty completed their bachelor's (69.6%) and doctoral degrees (76.8%) in the U.S., with a small number of faculty obtaining their education in Central and North America, Africa, Asia, or Europe. Owing to researcher error, no information on the location of the faculty member's current institutional affiliation was collected. Table 1 shows the faculty demographics.

Table 1: Participant Demographics ($N = 81$ students, 56 faculty)

Demographic Markers	Student		Faculty	
	Percentage	*n*	Percentage	*n*
Gender Identity				
Cis-gender Man	12.3	10	32.1	18
Cis-gender Woman	82.7	67	67.9	38
Gender Fluid	1.2	1	0.0	0
Gender Non-Binary	3.7	3	0.0	0
Transgender	0.0	0	0.0	0
Discipline				
Clinical Psychology	51.9	42	19.6	11
Cognitive Science	6.2	5	3.6	2
Counseling Psychology	4.9	4	12.5	7
Developmental Psychology	14.8	12	41.2	23
Social Psychology	12.5	10	7.1	4
Other	12.3	8	14.3	9
Applied Psychology	12.5	1	0.0	0
Applied Positive Psychology	12.5	1	0.0	0
Applied Social Psychology	0.0	0	11.1	1
Cyberpsychology	0.0	0	11.1	1
Early Childhood and Elementary Education	0.0	0	11.1	1
Ecology	12.5	1	0.0	0
Health Psychology	0.0	0	11.1	1
Industrial/Organizational Psychology	25.0	2	11.1	1
Neuropsychology	0.0	0	11.1	1
Philosophy	12.5	1	0.0	0
Psychometric	0.0	0	11.1	1
School Psychology	12.5	1	11.1	1
Sport and Exercise Psychology	0.0	0	11.1	1
Unspecified	12.5	1	0.0	0
Country/Region of Origin				
Asia	72.8	59		
Bahrain	1.7	1		
Bangladesh	1.7	1		
China	10.2	6		
India	55.9	33		
Indonesia	1.7	1		

Iran	1.7	1
Japan	1.7	1
Malaysia	1.7	1
Myanmar	1.7	1
Oman	1.7	1
Pakistan	1.7	1
Singapore	3.4	2
Saudi Arabia	1.7	1
South Korea	3.4	2
Taiwan	3.4	2
Turkey	3.4	2
United Arab Emirates	3.4	2
Africa	18.5	15
Ghana	13.3	2
Kenya	6.7	1
Nigeria	40.0	6
South Africa	6.7	1
Tunisia	6.7	1
Uganda	13.3	2
Unspecified	6.7	1
Zambia	6.7	1
Latin America	8.6	7
Brazil	57.1	4
Jamaica	28.8	2
Unspecified	14.3	1

Procedure

This study was exempt from review by the Miami University IRB. A list of all graduate programs in psychology in the U.S. was generated. Program heads and Directors of Clinical Training were contacted via email and asked to complete an anonymous online survey. We also asked them to forward the recruitment flyer to current faculty and international students in their program. Participants were also recruited through other methods, such as online listservs (e.g., CUDCP, Project USPAS, National Register's HSP Community), social media (e.g., X, LinkedIn) and word-of-mouth. The first page of the online survey displayed an informed consent screen that included the study purpose (applicants: to examine the experiences of international applicants from GS countries in seeking post baccalaureate research assistant positions and applying for graduate programs in psychology in the U.S.; faculty: to examine the expectations and experiences of faculty with international applicants seeking post baccalaureate research assistant positions and/or applying for graduate programs in psychology in the U.S.), that completing the survey was voluntary, and that participants were allowed to skip any questions they did not wish to answer. Those who provided consent were directed to the survey. The survey was administered in English.

Design

Given the dearth of literature on this topic, we designed a survey with several open-ended questions. Adopting an exploratory qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2009) allows the capture of participants' unique lived experiences in a culturally sensitive manner, promoting a pluralistic approach to knowledge and practice (Ward et al., 2018). Such an approach is suitable for inquiries that are characterized by limited or insufficient knowledge (Orina et al., 2015). The goal of exploratory studies is to prioritize the development of ideas and subsequently validate those results (Orina et al., 2015).

Measures

Demographic Questionnaire

The participants were asked to indicate their age, gender, discipline, and the country in which they completed their highest degree.

Educational and Professional Experience Questionnaire

Students answered forced-choice questions about their educational background and professional experience (e.g., type of degree, GPA, number of peer-reviewed publications, and conference presentations). The faculty indicated the number of international students who enrolled in their programs, including the number of postbaccalaureate positions offered each year. The participants also responded to open-ended questions. Students were asked about their salient social identities, prior work experience and accomplishments, and application process. The faculty described the role played by international students in their labs and programs and provided recommendations for international applicants to further strengthen their applications. Sample questions for students included "*To the extent you feel comfortable, please describe your social identities on the basis of ability, age, caste, gender, sexual orientation, social class, race, ethnicity, religion, and other dimensions that may be relevant to understanding your experiences as an international applicant*," and "*Overall, what were the chief barriers you experienced in securing postbaccalaureate research positions and/or admission to a graduate program in psychology in the U.S.?*" Sample questions for faculty included "*What skills/experiences have you observed that contribute to the success of international research assistants?*" and "*What recommendations do you have for international applicants to further strengthen their application for a postbaccalaureate position?*".

Data Analytic Strategy

Descriptive statistics regarding the numeric responses were computed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 28. The responses to the open-ended questions were analyzed using inductive content analysis. Content analysis, as a method of investigation, is used to systematically organize subjective

interpretations of qualitative content (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In inductive content analysis, the themes and categories are derived directly from the data through open coding, grouping and categorization, and abstraction (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Open coding refers to notes and comments documented in the text during the initial reading of the data. These open codes are subsequently grouped using headings and subheadings. This stage involves comparing different higher-order categories and deciding whether a given code falls under a specific category. After this step, the researcher formulates a general description of the research topic. In the present study, the first author (PA) conducted the coding, with the third author (VR) serving as an auditor. The first author analyzed all the qualitative data and identified prevalent themes. These themes were subsequently reviewed by the third author for accuracy. We followed the guidelines on best practices to ensure the validity and transparency of the open-ended data provided by Conry-Murray and colleagues (2024).

Reflexivity Statement

The first author (PA) identifies herself as a cis-gender woman from India who completed her doctorate in clinical psychology in the U.S. As an international applicant herself, PA recognizes several systemic barriers in higher education for international applicants while also acknowledging that these barriers look different across students on the basis of their identities and experiences. The second author (NG) identifies as a nonbinary individual with a disability from India who is currently pursuing a master's degree in the U.S. NG brings unique perspectives to this study that are informed by their experiences in navigating the graduate application process as a student with several marginalized identities. The third author (VR) is a cisgender woman faculty member in psychology who migrated to Canada and subsequently the U.S. from India for postsecondary education in the 1990s. VR has also mentored several international graduate students in clinical psychology and brings a wealth of knowledge regarding diversity in higher education to this project.

RESULTS

Preliminary Data: Graduate and Postbaccalaureate Admissions

Faculty Perspective

Faculty reported that a wide range of international candidates applied for postbaccalaureate positions at their labs within the past 1 year (0-20) and 5 years (0-15). Most positions were in person (87.0%), with a few being virtual. A small number of faculty reported not offering any postbaccalaureate positions due to university regulations or prior unpleasant experiences (18.6%).

With respect to graduate admissions, faculty reported admitting a wide range of students to their master's (6-160) and doctoral programs (1-60). A total of 60.8% of the faculty indicated that the admitted students included international

applicants. Among those faculty who admitted a student to their lab, a majority (65.5%) did not admit an international student that year.

Student Perspective

Most students in our sample (79.3%) applied for postbaccalaureate positions after completing their bachelor's degree. Among those who applied, most students (73.3%) were able to successfully secure these positions. These positions were in both GN (54.4%) and GS (45.7%) and were a mix of remote (44.0%), in-person (40.0%), and hybrid (16.0%). Two-thirds of these research positions were unpaid (67.5%). With respect to the graduate program admission process, 56.0% of the students applied and were accepted in the same cycle, 32.0% applied and were unsuccessful the first time but were admitted in the next cycle, and 12.0% applied to 3 or more admission cycles.

Close to two-thirds of our sample (65.5%) sought mentorship in the form of application review and feedback, guidance on mentor selection, and workshops on the GRE before submitting their applications. This assistance and guidance were sought from online portals (35.9%), senior students (28.2%), friends and family (12.8%), mentors (9.0%), and external paid agencies (7.7%). The average amount of U.S. dollars spent on the application process was reported to be $2,204 (range = $200-$8,000).

Research Question 1: Students' Professional Experiences Prior to Application

Numeric responses

Slightly more than half of our sample (55.1%) reported having awards, honors, and scholarships at the time of application. The students reported an average GPA of 3.64 out of 4 ($n = 47$), 4.36 out of 5 ($n = 6$), and 8.36 out of 10 ($n = 10$). Within the domain of research, participants reported a range of research experiences, including assisting with conceptualization and research design (56.3%), participant recruitment (58.8%), data collection (63.8%), literature review (58.8%), survey formatting (46.3%), data entry (48.8%), numerical data analysis (47.5%), qualitative data analysis (16.3%), and other experiences (12.5%). Slightly more than half of our sample (54.8%) had experience of presenting posters and/or papers as a first author at a scientific conference at the time of application. These conferences were a mix of national (25%), international (23.8%), university and/or college-based (23.8%), regional or state-level (13.8%), and U.S.-based (13.8%) conferences. Approximately two-thirds of our sample (59.4%) reported not having a publication at the time of application. Among those who had published (40.6%), on average, participants reported having 2 publications (Range = 1-8; $SD = 1.36$). These journals were a mix of international journals (38.5%), U.S.-based journals (30.8%), home country journals (15.4%), and other journals (15.4%) (e.g., Canada-based, a mix of national and international).

Open-ended Responses

Students' open-ended responses regarding accomplishments and honors at the time of application were coded using the following themes: 1) institutional honors (e.g., merit-based scholarship, medals, honors list, leadership experience) (21.0%), 2) research awards and scholarly accomplishments (e.g., publication, grant, research scholarship, completing honors thesis) (17.3%), 3) clinical experience (e.g., completing clinical internships and placements) (6.2%), and 4) other accomplishments (e.g., extracurricular accomplishments, teaching experience) (3.7%). Responses to questions assessing research experiences at the time of application were coded using the following themes: 1) research projects and/or coursework (67.2%), 2) research internship/assistantship (15.5%), 3) conference presentation and/or manuscript preparation (8.6%), and 4) no/limited experience (8.6%).

Research Question 2: Barriers to Admitting International Applicants

Faculty Perspective

Common reasons cited by faculty for not admitting international students included 1) lack of work experience/less competitive applications (14.3%), 2) a mismatch of research interests (5.4%), 3) no/lack of international applications to the lab/university (5.4%), 4) inability to satisfy language/visa requirements (3.6%), 5) lack of sponsored spots in the program (1.8%), 6) losing student to another lab/university (1.8%), 7) and other factors (3.6%). Sample responses include "*Application was unclear regarding their program-related experiences and their career goals*," "*International applicants have usually presented at fewer conferences*," "*Most positions cannot sponsor visas. I encourage students to collaborate on analyzing data, but they need to be very independent and do this work voluntarily,*" and "*I don't believe international students should apply to U.S. schools at all*."

Student Perspective

Students faced a range of challenges while applying for postbaccalaureate positions and graduate school. These challenges were coded as follows: 1) financial difficulties (e.g., high fees, lack of funding) (23.5%), 2) lack of information about the application process and GN educational system (e.g., differences in GPA, curricula, social norms) (16.0%), 3) limited professional opportunities in the country of origin/lack of remote positions in GN (16.0%), 4) visa/immigration-related issues (13.6%), 5) lack of mentorship and guidance (12.3%), 6) difficulties finding mentors who care about issues prevalent in GS (6.2%), 7) logistical challenges (e.g., sending transcripts, receiving recommendation letters) (4.9%), 8) no challenges (4.9%), 9) language barriers (3.7%), 10) inability to receive feedback on application materials (2.5%), 11) and

other challenges (e.g., discrimination, biases, bureaucracy, assumptions inherent in the higher education system in the GN) (4.9%).

Notably, almost all the participants reported facing more than one challenge. Some students also spoke about ways in which these challenges interacted with each other, ultimately denying entry into the world of higher education. For example, one student said,

> This is ultimately a challenge if you do not have [a] work permit during application, as my postbaccalaureate applications are usually screened out because of this. To me, sponsorship for [a] visa is not needed, but to get a work permit, I must at least have an offer. To have my applications screened out due to this question was so disheartening.

Other sample responses include "*Lack of research experience in my home country was not at par with the domestic applicants who have lab facilities, small size classes, and mentorship systems in place*," "*We have to completely rely on the websites, often not knowing the reality of how the lab functions and how the PI is*," "*Many master's programs in the U.S. don't accept a 3-year Bachelors so that even though prospective PIs wrote back to me [and] encouraged me to apply to their lab, they were unaware of the fact that their university would not deem me eligible for their program*," and "*Unfamiliarity with the application norms (how to seek reference letter, when to start preparing applications, whom/how to seek help from)*."

On the other hand, a small number of students reported facing no/limited challenges. For some students, this was because they were "*in the process of applying*," and for others, the admission/selection process was reported to be relatively smooth. One participant stated, "*I haven't experienced any such things as of now*." One student elaborated:

> I was fortunate that I knew so many people who supported me throughout the application process. I had also meticulously curated [a] specific set of training experiences that would make me attractive as an applicant. The main barrier for me to obtain these experiences was to convince people that I was worth their shots. So, I worked really hard, literally days and nights and weekends, to prove that I took this path seriously.

Research Question 3: Faculty Perspectives on the Benefits of Admitting International Applicants

The faculty highlighted some key benefits of admitting international students to their labs and/or programs. According to the faculty, international students 1) presented unique global perspectives and helped broaden their understanding of discipline (62.9%), 2) achieved positive student outcomes, including lower dropout rates and strong work ethic (14.3%), 3) increased international collaboration (8.6%), 4) offered to work with diverse clientele (5.7%), 5) increased diversity of the student body (5.7%), and 6) other benefits (2.9%). Sample excerpts include "*They contribute to diversity of backgrounds,*

experiences, etc., which fosters growth [and] prevents stagnation," "*My lab works on global settings, so the perspectives they bring from living in those countries are invaluable*," "*Forming culturally diverse research teams [allows] for data collection from minority communities*," "*International students often have different lay theories/assumptions than domestic students about how people "work" and having other perspectives help identify untested assumptions or key boundary conditions*," and "*International students are less likely to withdraw [from] doctoral programs and [are] less likely to take off-campus jobs during their studies*." One faculty member shared,

> Our program has benefited from having international students because these students deepen and expand the kind of conversations we have in classes, seminars, and lab meetings. They bring unique perspectives on human functioning based on cultural and national differences, including differences in legal systems, forms of privilege/oppression, and salient identities.

Research Question 4: Recommendations for Successful Outcomes for Graduate Schools and Post-Baccalaureate Applications

Faculty Perspective

Overall, the faculty looked for a range of skills from postbaccalaureate positions, such as 1) familiarity with quantitative research methods (18.6%), 2) knowledge of specific theories and disciplines (14.0%), 3) personality characteristics such as perseverance, curiosity, dedication, desire to learn, and motivation (11.6%), 4) prior leadership and work experience (9.3%), 5) experience with academic writing (7.0%), 6) language abilities (7.0%), 7) interpersonal skills such as communication (4.7%), 8) executive functioning and organization skills (4.7%), 9) ability to work in person (2.3%), and 10) other (2.3%). For example, a faculty member explained three key things that they looked for in applicants: "*1) some background experience (classroom or elsewhere) in social or health sciences; 2) conscientiousness, organization skills, strong executive functioning, positive attitudes, reliability, and communication; and 3) good team members with some leadership experienc*e." Other examples include "*Students tend to be successful when they are fully engaged in learning new skills and willing to ask* questions"; "*I look for interest in the topic and prior research experience";* and *"independence, problem-solving, [and] emotionally stable*."

Faculty recommended that students 1) conduct extensive research on laboratories and emphasize research/program fit in the application (27.5%); 2) enhance command of the English language, including comfort with academic reading and writing (25.0%); 3) increase exposure to research and graduate admission processes common in the GN (17.5%); 4) obtain professional experiences, including research, clinical, leadership, and voluntary work, before applying (15.0%); 5) advocate for self and highlight cultural experiences (7.5%); and 6) other (7.5%). Sample excerpts include "*I used to recommend that students*

be on X and follow scientific conversations happening. More recently, I encourage students to participate in university programs [that] prepare students for Ph.D. applications," "*Find good research mentors while completing a bachelor's degree and publish*," "*Be proud of, and willing to highlight the value of, being multilingual*," "*Cater the emails/application to the lab. Do not use AI or template emails when reaching out or applying*," and "*Convey the quality of undergraduate training/experiences - many U.S. faculty do not know which universities are highly respected in other places*." A faculty member elaborated on some of these recommendations:

> Enhanced command of [the] English language so that previous experiences and career goals are communicated clearly in the application and interview. Examine the program website and contact members of the program to understand what training they provide, what the graduate student experience will be, and what careers the program aims their students toward. Additionally, understanding what the specific professors are currently investigating and applying to those with [whom] one has shared research interests.

Similarly, another faculty member spoke about their recommendations for what not to do. They said,

> They should be sure to understand the program content. They should not apply to programs that do not fit their interests. Students should avoid trying to get admitted through "backdoor" procedures, such as sending their curriculum vitae to the faculty in the hopes of gaining admission. Students should avoid repeatedly contacting faculty to convince them that they should be admitted. This is an annoying practice.

Student Perspective

Student responses on recommendations for faculty and programs were coded as follows: 1) promote research/academic initiatives to international students by offering remote positions and sponsoring visas (18.5%); 2) recognize the diversity of transferable experiences and be open to international applicants even if they lack research experience (17.3%); 3) offer detailed information about the application process and expectations from students using websites, webinars, and workshops (14.8%); 4) connect international applicants with other international students and potential mentors (7.4%); 5) increase transparency (e.g., ability to sponsor visas, anonymous evaluation of applicants' candidacy) and flexibility of application deadlines (7.4%); 6) offer grants/stipends and scholarly opportunities to applicants from GS (6.2%); 7) offer equitable opportunities to international applicants (4.9%); and 8) educate themselves about challenges faced by international students (4.9%), 9) mentor students from GS (3.7%), 10) increase tolerance for a lack of proficiency in English (2.5%), 11) and none (1.2%).

Sample excerpts include "*Please understand that we aren't fortunate enough to get research exposure or have optimum skills. Academic curricula in many*

Asian countries do not focus on practical research knowledge. We want to learn and grow, kindly accept our willingness to develop," "*This is bold but do not ask about whether applicants require visa sponsorship - just give them a fair chance of being reviewed,*" "*l suggest that students should pay after getting the admission rather than at the time of submission,*" and "*University and professors should have clear guidelines. For example, do they want to be contacted or not? What kind of students are they looking for? Tell us what you want to see in our applications.*" One applicant suggested adding a question to elicit cultural differences across education systems. They said,

> If they just had this question for us to explain the main differences and maybe while considering the application they would understand that some applications are weak owing to these barriers, and not because I am weak per se. For example, having the chance to explain that in Brazil it is not common that recommendation letters would be nice because when they read mine, they would know that if it is not that good, it is because my professors are not used to writing it and not because I am a weak student.

Another student shared,

> The majority of clinical [psychology] Ph.D. programs in North America do not have a large enough presence of international students, specifically Asian, African, or Latinx students. It feels isolated being in one of these programs. Clinical practicum supervisors are not always well versed in supervising international students either. I've been told by a handful of licensed psychologists that my accent may get in the way of establishing rapport with clients. These comments undermine the confidence of English language learners in clinical work and make them feel that they are less competent than Caucasian, cisgender, young female students, who make up most clinical programs.

DISCUSSION

There is no published literature that explores the obstacles that international students from the GS face when seeking admission to graduate schools in the U.S. This study is the first systematic effort to investigate both student and faculty perspectives on the experiences of psychology applicants from the GS as they navigate postbaccalaureate positions and graduate admissions. Overall, this study highlights the diverse professional experiences and strong work ethic that GS students bring that are valuable to graduate programs in psychology. These applicants also experience challenges that are not shared by their GN counterparts. These challenges echo the need for higher education institutions to improve their existing application processes to be more inclusive and equitable. Our study also highlights the salience of visible and invisible identities for the international student population throughout the application process and afterwards.

Credentials and Diverse Lived and Professional Experiences of GS Students

Our participants described competitive academic honors and scholarships, professional experiences (e.g., clinical internships, teaching experience), and research experiences they had gained through their bachelor's degree in their country of origin. These experiences and honors indicate strong motivation and excellent work ethic, both of which are plausible markers of success in graduate school and beyond. It is therefore not surprising that most of our sample indicated that they were successful in obtaining graduate admission and/or post baccalaureate positions at institutes in the U.S., UK, Canada, Netherlands, and/or Australia.

Although GS students may not have the types of research experience valued by psychological scientists in GN (e.g., experiences with data collection using experimental tasks, specific methodologies, or statistical analyses) or products of dissemination (posters or publications in international peer-reviewed outlets), more than half of our sample reported having some research experience through independent projects, coursework, and research internships. More than half of the students also reported presenting their research at peer-reviewed conferences. Some of our participants benefited immensely from remote research opportunities enabled by the COVID-19 pandemic. These included serving as a research assistant in a research laboratory in GN, collaborating on research projects, contributing as coauthors, and presenting research alongside international collaborators at virtual/hybrid conferences. Our findings build on several calls for action by scholars in psychology who emphasize the importance of being innovative by offering remote positions to students to enhance inclusivity and representation (Nguyen et al., 2022; O'Connor et al., 2020).

As mentioned by our faculty participants, the life experiences of applicants from diverse global communities in GS are invaluable assets that can help promote global psychological science (Balva et al., 2023). Everyday life embedded in familial, social, cultural, political, economic, educational, healthcare, and other relevant contexts in communities in the GS is vastly different from that in the GN (Arnett, 2008). Students growing up in communities in the GS are familiar with norms, beliefs, and lifestyle preferences within their communities, as well as issues that are important for psychological scientists to study in those communities. This experiential knowledge is key to transforming psychology into a truly global discipline that is devoted to generating an inclusive and comprehensive knowledge base, with real-life implications for supporting the well-being of people globally (Bullock, 2015; Gerstein & Ægisdóttir, 2007).

Barriers to Graduate Admission in the U.S. for GS Applicants

The challenges voiced by our student participants include financial difficulties (e.g., costs associated with applications, language proficiency tests, credential evaluations—assessing the equivalence of foreign academic qualifications, foreign currency exchange), visa and immigration-related issues, language barriers, limited research opportunities and mentoring in the country of

origin, lack of information about the application process and GN educational system, logistical challenges (e.g., sending transcripts, obtaining recommendation letters), difficulties finding mentors who care about issues prevalent in GS, assumptions inherent in the higher education system in GN, and marginalization and discrimination. The barriers reported by faculty were similar, including less competitive applications due to limited research experience, mismatch in research interests, and visa or sponsorship requirements. These challenges uniquely impact students from the GS, as their domestic peers have easier access to research assistantships, paid summer internships, and postbaccalaureate positions (e.g., lab managers and project coordinators) and greater familiarity with how the education system in the GN works (Gebhard, 2012; Perdomo, 2018). Some scholars have documented barriers to international student involvement, including but not limited to language and communication issues, implications for geography, imbalances in power, cultural differences, and a lack of access to funding (See Baklashova & Kazakov, 2016; Gandhi, 2009; Tovares & Kamwangamalu, 2017).

Challenges pertaining to limited opportunities for research engagement and limited mentoring should be understood within the broader context of higher education in GS. Given the combination of high population density and resource constraints in the GS, institutions of higher education often serve a large student body with limited resources. Faculty time is often devoted to teaching multiple large enrollment courses, student evaluations, and administrative work, leaving relatively little time available for research (Raval et al., 2024). Furthermore, compared with natural sciences, engineering, and medicine, social sciences, including psychology, have traditionally received fewer institutional and government resources for building research infrastructure. In fact, scholars from GS report challenges such as limited access to research labs, data analytic software, technology to support psychophysiological data collection, research grants, and paid research leaves (Raval et al., 2024). Given this, fewer research opportunities are available for students to engage in, as well as less access to faculty time for mentoring. Fewer opportunities are also available for professional experiences needed for applied psychology programs (e.g., Clinical Psychology, Counseling, Neuropsychology). This lack of opportunities, combined with limited information about the application and education system in the GN, presents an additional challenge (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019).

Challenges related to assumptions inherent in the higher education system in GN, as well as marginalization and discrimination, can be understood in the broader context of the Euro-American worldview in which higher education is embedded (Stein, 2018). For example, the students in our study reported that admissions committees in the U.S. are not aware of how higher education is structured in other parts of the world or that faculty members shared that applicants are unfamiliar with social norms in GN regarding how to approach potential mentors or that there is a mismatch with faculty research interests. Furthermore, psychology as a discipline originated in Europe and North America and, as a result, is grounded in White, Euro-American worldviews concerning the scope of the science, conceptions of rigor, and preferred methodologies (Adams et al., 2022). Although some applicants from GS have managed to navigate this

process with the help of relevant resources and guidance, the barriers they face do not end at the time of application.

Graduate students in our study also described some challenges they continue to battle even after enrollment, such as differences in the academic systems, navigating a new cultural and linguistic region, the costs associated with studying abroad, and restrictions on engagement due to visas. These issues have also been documented by other scholars (Aggarwal et al., 2022; Gebhard, 2012; Park et al., 2016) and have only grown worse with the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent sociopolitical climate of the U.S. (Aggarwal et al., 2024; Mbous et al., 2022), particularly for students with other minority identities (Szkody et al., 2023). In addition to the preexisting financial difficulties and loneliness that students experience, they also reported experiencing travel bans, visa-related issues, covert/overt acts of racism and discrimination, and limited support from their programs and mentors (Aggarwal et al., 2024).

Although applying to graduate programs remains burdensome and excludes many students due to the nature of the application process, these concerns faced by international students have increasingly led to dialogues on accessing opportunities and resources. These discussions have resulted in many hybrid and remote opportunities for the inclusion of students and researchers from the GS region. International students find these opportunities helpful in setting the foundation for future educational and vocational endeavors (Webb, 2023).

Visible and Invisible Identities

Our students shared that their visible and invisible identities intersected and shaped their experiences and worldviews. In addition to identity markers that are common determinants of privilege and marginalization in GN (e.g., race, SES, gender, religion, disability; Hays, 2016), students also referred to other identity markers, such as skin color, caste membership, languages spoken, marital status, family structure, and membership in regional and subregional communities. Students spoke about the contexts in which identities existed, noting that identities associated with privilege in their home countries were often linked with marginalization in the U.S. Our finding builds on existing literature on intersectionality (Cho et al., 2013), heterogeneity of privilege and marginalization (Atewologun et al., 2016), and additional markers of power and privilege outside North America and Western Europe (e.g., Aggarwal et al., 2021; Saini, 2019). Scholars have argued that the unique ways in which international students' identities and experiences unfold in host countries is an understudied area of investigation (Tran, 2017). Our results echo the need to empirically study this topic and develop measures to incorporate identity-based discussions in professional contexts (e.g., classrooms and seminars).

RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations for Programs/Advisors

Offer Research Opportunities to GS Applicants

Both students and faculty highlighted the importance of diverse perspectives in psychology while also identifying key barriers that make this process difficult to achieve. Many students emphasized that the lack of exposure to research opportunities was one of the primary reasons for their non-selection. We suggest that faculty involve students from GS in their research teams and expose them to research and professional development opportunities. When appropriate, faculty can encourage GS students to take the lead in conceptualizing and/or executing projects. Faculty could also consider pairing domestic students with international applicants to foster conversations about the differences and similarities across education systems. In addition to promoting representation and inclusivity in psychology (Nguyen et al., 2022; O'Connor et al., 2020), such approaches also facilitate epistemic and scientific imagination (Adams et al., 2015). Overall, systematic efforts are needed to develop programs that provide GS applicants with the necessary training and exposure for successful outcomes during and beyond graduate school (Tran, 2017).

Value Experiential Knowledge of GS Applicants

We recommend that graduate programs in psychology and faculty mentors explicitly consider experiential knowledge, which is based on diverse lived experiences, as a criterion in admissions decisions. This should be considered alongside academic credentials, research productivity, and other professional experiences of students from GS. Explicitly including experiential knowledge in graduate admission decisions would benefit not only GS applicants but also the discipline of psychological science, helping it become truly global (American Psychological Association, 2013). In addition to making space for this experiential knowledge, programs and faculty must normalize the behavioral accounts prevalent in the GS as opposed to pathologizing them (Adams et al., 2015). This approach is fundamental to decolonizing mainstream theory and research (de Sousa Santos, 2014).

Create and Advertise Mentoring Programs for GS Applicants

Over the past few decades, several independent groups and organizations have created opportunities for international applicants and students to receive feedback on their application materials (see Table 2). Mentorship programs, such as the Next-Gen Psych Scholars Program (NPSP) for those interested specifically in doctoral programs in psychology and the Científico Latino's Graduate Student Mentorship Initiative (GSMI) for STEM-related fields, are internationally renowned and student-friendly initiatives. These programs actively address challenges faced by international students and have been beneficial in creating accessible resources for potential applicants (Cadena et al., 2023; DeJoseph & Carosella, 2023).

These resources, however, are used only by a handful of students (e.g., those who regularly use social media platforms that include regular announcements of such resources and opportunities). This leaves many others facing barriers to accessing them due to a lack of awareness about networking sites such as X, Mastodon, and BlueSky, which provide valuable information and make it more difficult for them to enter the academic community. Therefore, similar resources should be consolidated and freely available for students across nationalities and geographic locations. Independent academic institutions could also consider publishing these resources open access on their websites to increase access. This is particularly important for those applicants whose home country institutions do not organize informative sessions about studying abroad and the graduate application process.

In addition to receiving specific feedback on applications, students from GS would also benefit from guidance on the graduate admission process, especially as this guidance may be absent in their home countries. Institutes could consider including participation in mentoring programs of international students in their decisions for RPT (reappointment, promotion, and tenure) to encourage faculty to volunteer a portion of their time guiding these students. Given the wide range of experiences within the international student body, faculty can help students with comparatively less experience capitalize on their prior experiences and build a strong foundation through the use of some of their transferable skills. If advisors are able, they could consider providing feedback to international applicants on their graduate applications. While we recognize that this would mean additional work for faculty, it would allow international applicants to receive specific feedback on what they could improve in subsequent application cycles.

Table 2: Resources for International Applicants and Students

Name of Resource/Organization	Link to the Resource
Helpful Tips for Applicants	
Resources for International Students Entering Clinical Psychology Programs	https://docs.google.com/document/d/1EMH18efUUswyLAf9mBSd0oePI_e4J4CAbfrynDhS40A/edit
Harvard Psychology's Ph.D. Resources and Online Tips Page	https://psychology.fas.harvard.edu/pro-tip
Getting into Graduate School	https://www.abct.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/ABCT-Getting-Into-Graduate-School-Virtual-Toolkit.pdf
Mentoring Programs for Getting into Graduate School	
Application Statement Feedback Program	https://www.asfp.io/
Grad school prep program	https://www.clinicalpsychphd.com/home
NextGen Psych Scholars Program	https://nextgenpsychscholars.com/

Project Short	https://www.project-short.com/
Graduate Student Mentorship Initiative	https://www.cientificolatino.com/gsmi
Prospective Ph.D. & RA Event in Psychology	https://psychology.fas.harvard.edu/pprep

Mentoring Programs for Graduate Training and Internship Applications

American Psychological Association (APA)	https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zKp6Ha05C9o
GradPSYCH Blog	https://www.gradpsychblog.org/international-students-internship-thoughts-from-training-directors/#.YvJ0ES1h30o
Association of Psychology Postdoctoral and Internship Centers	https://www.appic.org/Portals/0/2018%20Conference/2018_APPIC_Presentation_Hwang_Hurley.pdf
APA's Resource Guide for Psychology Graduate Students with Disabilities	https://www.apa.org/pi/disability/resources/publications/resource-guide
APA's Resource Guide for Psychology Graduate Students of Color	https://www.apa.org/apags/resources/ethnic-minority-guide.pdf
Proud and Prepared: APA's Guide for LGBT Students Navigating Graduate Training	https://www.apa.org/apags/resources/lgbt-guide.pdf

Scholarships, Grants and Fellowships

List of scholarships	https://www.linkedin.com/posts/lucymuthoni_2024-scholarships-we-still-have-a-few-days-activity-7146262290227429376-ZAKn/?utm_source=share&utm_medium=member_desktop
List of fellowships	https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1e9hAxj5mqUZGHp9yUzwKEG1DWdDJNNFXNCZEYx3dghM/edit?gid=0#gid=0

Other Resources

APA	https://www.apa.org/gradpsych/2009/11/welcome
Eligible Cip Codes for the Stem OPT Extension	https://studyinthestates.dhs.gov/stem-opt-hub/additional-resources/eligible-cip-codes-for-the-stem-opt-extension
Project USPAS	https://sites.google.com/view/uspas/home
PsychResearchList	https://www.psychresearchlist.com/
Psychin' Out	https://psychinout.org/

Reducing Financial Burden

To reduce application fees, especially for students who reapply, faculty members open to admitting international students should explicitly list this information on their websites. An overt display of information about open spots in labs would prevent international applicants from spending time and money in applying to faculty who are either not open or unable to provide admission/professional experience to non-native students. This would also ensure that international applicants do not internalize their inability to gain admission as a personal deficiency but rather understand that their lack of selection is due to their inability to sponsor a foreign student visa.

Similarly, academic societies can consider offering their membership to international students at a subsidized rate. Membership in academic societies is often a burden due to high fees, which are typically in U.S. dollars. Although this could be difficult for some academic societies, this exception in the case of GS applicants, who come from weaker currency backgrounds and/or underrepresented groups, can be beneficial in navigating the process.

Given that several students reported difficulties in obtaining funding, we recommend that graduate institutions and public/private organizations extend funding opportunities (e.g., grants, fellowships) to international students, particularly those with multiple disadvantaged identities. Programs and institutions should either make credential evaluations completely optional and/or cover the fees on behalf of the students if these reports are mandatory for graduate admission. Similarly, scholarships and other financial aid can be offered to students to offset some of the application fees. We recognize that academic institutions are often strained for resources; however, given the extent to which this barrier exists for international applicants, educational institutions should brainstorm innovative and sustainable ways to address it. Partnerships with other organizations should be considered and pursued when appropriate.

GN Training Programs Should Foster Inclusive Education

Applying to graduate school can be stressful, especially as international students face many additional requirements (e.g., credential evaluation reports and English proficiency examinations). In addition to stress, the students in our study described the financial burden of fulfilling these requirements in a timely manner. Therefore, it becomes important to create a supportive environment during the application process. Fellow domestic students should approach conversations about differences in education systems and cultural values with curiosity and compassion and assist international applicants in navigating the new environment both during and after the application process.

In addition to creating a supportive environment, programs are advised to be inclusive of the different accommodations that international students with minority identities may require. Creating a safe space for underrepresented groups would help promote an equitable space for all. Importantly, advisors and domestic students should not assume the identities and experiences of all international

students based on their international student status. As several of our participants shared, despite facing marginalization in the U.S. because of some of their salient identities, these identity markers were simultaneously associated with power and privilege in their home countries. Only emphasizing one aspect of their identities can result in feelings of invalidation and an overall disintegration of identity. We recommend that faculty review recently published articles on this topic to advance their understanding of the unique challenges faced by international applicants in psychology (e.g., Aggarwal et al., 2022; Aggarwal et al., 2024). This would ensure that international students are supported not only during but also after admission, decreasing feelings of loneliness and isolation.

Recommendations for Students

Gain Professional/Research Experience

The findings underscore the need for GS applicants to continue to seek out both in-person and remote research opportunities to better navigate the competitive application process. Big Team Science projects, such as ManyBabies (a global consortium for developmental researchers), have involved GS students in projects by offering training, exposure, mentorship, and co-authorship. This not only strengthens these large team projects but also allows students to gain experience in the field. Students can also consider following individually led initiatives on social and professional networking platforms (e.g., X, LinkedIn) that have compiled a list of research labs in GN that are open to accepting international applicants.

Learn about the GN Education System and Culture

We recommend that students actively learn more about the GN education system and prevalent norms. This includes reading up about the different types of programs offered, learning more about the institutions and visiting them (if possible), and increasing their awareness of the different sociocultural norms. Students can consider reaching out to other international students and staff in GN for their advice and recommendations for preparing for applications, campus visits, and interviews. Students can also consider reaching out to additional sources of support, including but not limited to mentors/advisors, academic counselors, and therapists, especially when navigating difficult interpersonal situations.

Highlight Lived Experience and Advocating for Self

Students from the GS are encouraged to highlight their lived experiences and unique cultural perspectives in their application materials, including their cover letters, personal statements, and interviews. Due to various levels of exposure to issues faced by international students, it is recommended that students make others aware of their experiences and advocate for themselves when necessary. Advocating for oneself might be difficult, especially for those students who

belong to cultures in which standing up for oneself may not be the norm. In such scenarios, students might find it helpful to explain their cultural norms and traditions, especially to faculty and other colleagues who might not be aware of them.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although this study is one of the first to systematically investigate the challenges faced by graduate applicants from GS countries, several limitations should be noted. First, although we reached out to all program heads and directors of clinical training in psychology in the U.S. and advertised the study through professional society listservs multiple times, only a small number of faculty members completed our surveys. Owing to researcher error, we were unable to ask a direct question about the current institutional affiliation of the faculty, so we cannot be sure that all the faculty were affiliated with a U.S. institution. However, given our recruitment efforts, which were primarily in the U.S. and our stated focus on U.S.-based graduate programs on the consent form, we believe that a majority of the faculty were from the U.S. It is possible that only those faculty members who had recruited international students in the past or supported the internationalization of education responded to our survey. Therefore, our sample may not be representative of all U.S.-based psychology faculty. Similarly, although this survey was shared in student groups, specifically with those from the underrepresented populations in GS, we noted that only a few students with minoritized identities completed the survey. Further online advertising and participation efforts may have excluded individuals lacking access to necessary resources (e.g., internet, computer, social media accounts). We encourage scholars to review our findings considering these limitations. Furthermore, since we intended to systematically examine the barriers faced by international applicants in psychology, the results of the study may not apply to other disciplines and occupations. It would be worth further investigating a similar survey focused on underrepresented groups from the GS and the barriers they face, which are not limited to navigating experiences of discrimination in the academic community in psychology but also broader social contexts. Collecting data from different disciplines would also allow for an examination of which challenges are unique to applicants in psychology and which are not. Finally, we recommend that future scholars include quantitative measures of mental health to assess the psychological and emotional impact of the challenges associated with applying to graduate programs in GN.

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☐ *Entire work, with minimal or no editing*
☐ *Entire work, with extensive editing*

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Author bios

PANKHURI AGGARWAL, Ph.D., received her Ph.D. in clinical psychology from Miami University, Ohio, and her master's in psychology with a specialization in clinical psychology from the Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai. She is currently working as an Assistant Professor at the University of Cincinnati. Her research program addresses issues of inequity, exclusion, and lack of representation within academia and, more broadly, in the mental health field. Her first line of research examines the relevance of theoretical frameworks, clinical instruments, diagnostic systems, and treatment modalities originating in the West for their applicability in other parts of the world. As her second line of research, she studies the current challenges in educational and training programs in health service psychology, particularly from the perspective of individuals with historically marginalized identities. Email: pankhuri.aggarwal@uc.edu

NIKITA GHODKE, B.S., received their undergraduate degree in Psychology from JAIN (deemed-to-be university) in India. They are currently enrolled in a master's program in Communicative Sciences and Disorders at New York University. They aspire to be a speech and language pathologist and a developmental cognitive neuroscientist. Their clinical research interests include poverty/inequality and the possible impact it has on the brain and cognitive development (language, executive function, memory, etc.) of infants, toddlers, and preschoolers from lower-middle-income countries. Their interest lies in making research inclusive, open, and informed policymaking. Email: nikitaghodke04@gmail.com

VAISHALI V. RAVAL, Ph.D., received her Ph.D. in clinical psychology at the University of Windsor. She is a professor of psychology and an affiliate of global and intercultural studies at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, where she serves as the core faculty in the American Psychological Association-accredited clinical psychology Ph.D. program. Her research centers on three interrelated areas: (a) cultural and contextual foundations of parenting, with a focus on emotion processes and how they relate to child and adolescent mental health among culturally diverse families around the world; (b) global mental health, with a focus on contextual understanding of psychopathology and culturally informed mental health training and intervention approaches; and (c) experiences of marginalization and their impact on mental health and well-being. Email: ravalvv@miamioh.edu