

Athens Journal of Psychology

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- **Dr. Jim Clark**, Head, [Psychology Unit](#), Athens Institute & Professor, University of Winnipeg, Canada.

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The current issue is the second of the second volume of the *Athens Journal of Psychology* (AJPSY), by the published by the [Psychology Unit](#) of the **Athens Institute**. All papers are subject to Athens Institute's [Publication Ethical Policy and Statement](#).

Gregory T. Papanikos
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21st Annual International Conference on Psychology 24-27 May 2027, Athens, Greece

The [Psychology Unit](#) of Athens Institute organizes its 21st Annual International Conference on Psychology, 24-27 May 2027, Athens, Greece sponsored by the [Athens Journal of Social Sciences](#). The aim of the conference is to bring together scholars and students of psychology and other related disciplines. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available ([https:// www.atiner.gr/2027/FORM-PSY.doc](https://www.atiner.gr/2027/FORM-PSY.doc)).

Academic Members Responsible for the Conference

- **Dr. Thanos Patelis**, Head, Psychology Unit of Athens Institute & Research Scholar, Fordham University, USA.

Important Dates

- Abstract Submission: **7 October 2026**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **26 April 2027**

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The Social Program Emphasizes the Educational Aspect of the Academic Meetings of Athens Institute.

- Greek Night Entertainment (This is the official dinner of the conference)
- Athens Sightseeing: Old and New-An Educational Urban Walk
- Social Dinner
- Mycenae Visit
- Exploration of the Aegean Islands
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Conference fees vary from 400€ to 2000€
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3-6 May 2027, Athens, Greece

The [Sociology Unit](#) of Athens Institute is organizing its 21st Annual International Conference on Sociology, 3-6 May 2027, Athens, Greece sponsored by the [Athens Journal of Social Sciences](#). The aim of the conference is to bring together academics and researchers from all areas of Sociology, Social Work and other related fields. Theoretical and empirical research papers will be considered. You may participate as stream leader, presenter of one paper, chair a session or observer. Please submit a proposal using the form available (<https://www.atiner.gr/2027/FORM-SOC.doc>).

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- Abstract Submission: **6 October 2026**
- Acceptance of Abstract: 4 Weeks after Submission
- Submission of Paper: **5 April 2027**

Academic Member Responsible for the Conference

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Unpacking Campus Victimization: A Quantitative Study of Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

By Judy Lee Porter & LaVerne McQuiller Williams[‡]*

This study explores the intersection of gender identity and sexual orientation in shaping the experiences of threatening behaviors and sexual abuse on university campuses. It highlights how cisgender women and LGBTQ+ individuals report significantly higher rates of verbal threats, sexual harassment, stalking, and sexual violence compared to their male or heterosexual peers. The findings emphasize the compounded vulnerabilities faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, especially LGBTQ+ women, who experience heightened risks of severe violence due to both gender-based and sexual orientation-based marginalization. These results support the importance of an intersectional approach in understanding victimization and advocate for tailored sexual violence prevention strategies in university settings. The study calls for comprehensive policies that address the unique needs of marginalized groups, with a focus on creating inclusive and supportive environments for all students.

Keywords: *college students, gender identity, sexual orientation, sexual violence, cisgender women, LGBTQ+ individuals, verbal threats, sexual harassment, sexual abuse, stalking, victimization, intersectional approach*

Introduction

The prevalence of threatening behaviors, including verbal threats, stalking, and sexual violence, has become a critical area of study in understanding the safety and well-being of college and university students. Within this body of research, scholars identify U.S. college students as being at risk for a variety of forms of victimization such as rape/sexual assault, physical assault, verbal threats, and stalking (Cantor et al., 2020; Daigle et al., 2024; Fedina, Backes, Sulley et al., 2020; Fedina, Holmes, & Backes, 2018; Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000, 2002; Krebs et al., 2016; Mengo & Black, 2016; Potter et al., 2020; Wood, et al., 2018). Gender identity and sexual orientation have been identified as key factors influencing the likelihood of experiencing such behaviors.

Gender Identity, Threatening Behaviors, and Sexual Abuse

The relationship between gender identity and the experience of threatening behaviors has been extensively studied, with consistent findings indicating that women, especially those in marginalized communities, are more likely to experience a range of harassment and violence. Research has shown that women, particularly cisgender women, are at a heightened risk for various threatening behaviors, including verbal threats, stalking, and sexual violence (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Turchik &

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Edwards, 2012). Women's increased vulnerability to harassment is often attributed to societal norms that reinforce gendered power dynamics, leading to more frequent objectification and subjection to violent forms of control and dominance (Berkowitz, 2007).

Research indicates that women are more likely than men to report being followed, spied on, or sexually harassed (Fisher et al., 2000; Coker et al., 2011; Wood et al., 2018). Additionally, female college students experience higher rates of verbal threats compared to their male counterparts. For instance, McGonigal and Scalora (2024) found that women are more frequently targeted by verbal harassment on college campuses. Similarly, Wood et al. (2018) reported that female students are at a significantly higher risk of experiencing verbal threats and harassment than male students.

In terms of stalking, a recent study by Fedina et al. (2020) found that 17.4% of college students reported experiencing stalking since entering college, with cisgender females and transgender/nonconforming students facing higher odds of victimization compared to their peers. Male students also experience stalking, though at lower rates than female students. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) (2020) estimates that 5.2% of men in the U.S. have experienced stalking in their lifetime. Among college students, studies have shown that male students report stalking rates between 5% and 19%, depending on the definitions and methodologies used.

Sexual assault on college campuses remains a critical issue, affecting men and women in distinct ways. Female college students report higher rates of sexual touching and attempted sexual penetration (Turchik & Edwards, 2012). In addition, research consistently shows that women are more likely to experience sexual assault than men during their college years. Recent studies indicate that approximately 20% of women and 7% of men experience sexual assault during their college years, with women often facing more severe forms of assault and enduring long-term psychological impacts such as PTSD, depression, and anxiety (Cantor et al., 2020; Krebs et al., 2021; Steele et al., 2023). Men, on the other hand, are less likely to report their experiences due to societal stigma and gender norms, which can lead to unique challenges such as questioning their masculinity and dealing with homophobia if the perpetrator is male (Smith et al., 2018).

Sexual Orientation, Threatening Behaviors, and Sexual Abuse

Sexual orientation is another critical factor influencing the experience of threatening behaviors. LGBTQ+ individuals face unique challenges, with a growing body of literature documenting their heightened risk for harassment, discrimination, and violence. LGBTQ+ individuals often face threats to their safety not only due to their sexual orientation but also as a result of heteronormative environments that marginalize and stigmatize non-heterosexual identities (Balsam et al., 2005).

Studies have shown that individuals who identify as LGBTQ+ are at a significantly greater risk for various forms of harassment, including being followed, sexually harassed, and victimized by intimate partner violence (Elipe, Espelage, & Del Rey, 2022; Herek, 2009; Rosario et al., 2009). Along these lines, the prevalence of stalking among LGBTQ+ students is notably higher compared to their heterosexual peers. According to the Stalking Prevention, Awareness, and Resource Center

(SPARC), 1 in 4 lesbian, gay, bisexual, asexual, or queer students reported experiencing stalking since entering college, compared to 1 in 6 heterosexual students. Similarly, a study by Fedina et al. (2020) found that 17.4% of college students reported stalking victimization since entering college, with cisgender females, transgender/gender-nonconforming, and sexual minority students facing higher odds of victimization compared to their counterparts.

Sexual assault among LGBTQ+ college students is a critical issue that has garnered increasing attention in recent years. Research indicates that LGBTQ+ students face significantly higher rates of sexual assault compared to their heterosexual peers (Cantor et al., 2020; Fedina, Holmes, & Backes, 2018; Klein et al., 2023; Richardson et al., 2015; Steele, 2023; Woodford, Han, Craig, Lim, & Matney, 2018). A study by Eisenberg et al. (2017) found that bisexual and queer/pansexual/ other females experienced sexual assault at rates 2.5 to over 5 times higher than heterosexual females. Similarly, Ford and Soto-Marquez (2016) reported that bisexual female students had the highest rates of sexual assault among all groups examined, with approximately 38% experiencing sexual assault during their college years. More recently research by Fedina et al. (2020) found that LGBTQ+ students are significantly more likely to report incidents of sexual assault.

The reporting of sexual assault among LGBTQ+ students is notably low, which complicates efforts to address and mitigate this issue. Despite the higher prevalence of sexual assault, LGBTQ+ students are often reluctant to report these incidents to authorities. Eisenberg et al. (2017) noted that the majority of sexual assaults among LGBTQ+ students go unreported, similar to trends observed in the general student population. This underreporting can be attributed to various factors, including fear of discrimination, lack of trust in institutional support systems, and concerns about confidentiality. The reluctance to report not only hampers the provision of necessary support and resources to survivors but also limits the ability to gather accurate data on the prevalence of sexual assault within this population.

Intersectionality of Gender and Sexual Orientation

An intersectional approach is essential to understanding the unique experiences of threatening behaviors among individuals with varying gender identities and sexual orientations. Intersectionality, as a theoretical framework, acknowledges that the experiences of oppression and privilege are not experienced in isolation but are shaped by the simultaneous interaction of multiple social identities (Crenshaw, 1991). For instance, cisgender women and LGBTQ+ individuals face distinct but overlapping risks related to gender-based violence and sexual orientation-based discrimination.

Research on intersectionality has also highlighted the compounded nature of discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ women, as they navigate both gendered and sexual orientation-based forms of violence (Chung & Koo, 2006). In fact, LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly women, may experience greater victimization due to both their gender and sexual orientation, amplifying their risk for sexual violence and harassment (Balsam et al., 2005).

Current Study

Building on the comprehensive understanding of gender identity, sexual orientation, and their intersection with threatening behaviors, the current study aims to further investigate the nuanced ways in which these factors influence the experiences of harassment, stalking, and sexual violence among college students. By focusing on the intersectionality of gender and sexual orientation, this research intends to highlight the compounded vulnerabilities of individuals, who face distinct but overlapping risks. Specifically, the study will explore how these intersecting identities amplify the likelihood of experiencing violence and victimization within university settings.

The data for this investigation were collected from students at a midsized, private university in the Northeast as part of a larger study examining a broad range of victimization experiences. For each measurement wave, researchers randomly selected forty classes from a master list of all courses offered during the academic term. Instructors of the selected courses were invited to participate, and all agreed to allow their classes to be included. Pen-and-paper survey questionnaires were then administered to students enrolled in these classes.

In accordance with Institutional Review Board protocols, researchers were present during and after survey administration to provide support and to offer referrals to counseling or other appropriate resources as needed.

Gender identification and sexual orientation were examined in relation to a range of threatening and victimization behaviors assessed using items adapted from established instruments, including the Conflict Tactics Scales (CTS/CTS2; Straus, 1979; Straus et al., 1996), the Sexual Experiences Survey (SES; Koss & Oros, 1982; Koss et al., 2007), and prior research on stalking and unwanted pursuit (Chronbach's α .805)

Threatening and stalking-related behaviors, drawn primarily from the Conflict Tactics Scales and prior stalking research, included verbal threats of sex against one's will; being followed or spied upon; receiving unsolicited letters or written messages (including email and instant messaging); someone standing outside one's workplace or school; someone appearing at locations where the respondent believed the person had no legitimate reason to be; receiving unwanted items; attempts at unwanted communication through other means; and vandalism of property or destruction of valued belongings.

Sexual violence behaviors, adapted primarily from the Sexual Experiences Survey, included sexual touching against one's will, attempted sexual penetration against one's will, and sexual penetration against one's will.

Methods

Data Collection

This study surveyed 3019 college students who attended a Northwestern University in the U.S. in an exploratory study concerning threatening behaviors

toward them. After receiving approval from the Institutional Review Board surveys were distributed at random to students in classes from all disciplines.

Measures

Gender identification and sexual orientation were explored in relation to threatening behaviors that included the following eleven variables: “verbal threats of sex against your will”, “person followed or spied on you”, “person sent unsolicited letters or written messages including email and IM”, “person stood outside your work or school”, “person showed up at places you thought that they had no business being”, “left unwanted items for you to find”, “person tried to communicate in other ways against your will”, “vandalized property or destroyed something you loved”, “sexual touching against your will”, “attempted sexual penetration against your will”, and “sexual penetration against your will” (Cronbach’s Alpha .805).

Gender identity was measured with self-described male, female, or other. Sexual orientation was measured by Gay/Lesbian, Bi-Sexual, or other. The threatening behaviors variables measured as never, once or twice, 3 to 10 times, more than 10 times. These variables were dichotomized into never or some due to small numbers in most of the categories. Binary logistic regression analyses were used to examine the effect of gender identity and sexual orientation on experiences of threatening behaviors. SPSS 29 was used for these analyses. These variables had very few responses in the “more than once” categories so to simplify data interpretation, create distinct risk groups (e.g., high/low), and meet the requirements of binomial regression the variables were dichotomized. To double check if important data was being lost via the dichotomization logistic regression was run with no outstanding differences.

Characteristics of the Sample

Table 1 illustrates the characteristics of the survey respondents by self-designated gender identification and sexual orientation. Of the 3019 respondents 1707 identified as male and 1312 female. Respondents were majority heterosexual (n=2586) with a total of 163 identified as LGBTQ+ (64 male, 99 female). Of the LGBTQ+ group 23 men identified as Gay and 34 as bisexual and 7 other; 48 women identified as Lesbian and 49 bisexual, 2 other.

Table 1. *Characteristics of Respondents by Gender Identification and Sexual Orientation N = 3019*

	CIS	Heterosexual	LGBTQ+	Gay	Lesbian	Bi sexual	Other
men	1707		64	23		34	7
women	1312		99		99	49	2
total	3019	2586	163	23	99	83	9

Results

Table 2 provides a cross tabulation of the threatening behaviors by gender identity and sexual orientation. Cross tabulation found that gender achieved statistical significance with a chi square of $<.001$ for gender and a range of $<.001$ and $.041$ for sexual orientation for the following: Women ($n=51$, 3.8%) and LGBTQ+ respondents ($n=18$, 11%) reported more verbal threats. Women ($n=293$, 22%) and LGBTQ+ ($n=56$, 34%) being followed or spied on. Women ($n=479$, 36.5%) and LGBTQ+ ($n=41$, 25%) reporting unsolicited letters or written messages. Women ($n=377$, 30%) and LGBTQ+ ($p=.012$, $n=39$, 24%) reporting someone standing outside their work or school. Women ($n=330$, 25%) and LGBTQ+ ($n=46$, 28%) reported more unwanted items left for them to find. Women ($n=369$, 28%) and LGBTQ+ ($n=48$, 29.5%) more likely to report unwanted communication. Women ($n=337$, 25.7%) and LGBTQ+ ($n=44$, 28.5%) more likely to report someone vandalized their property or destroyed something they loved. Women ($n=121$, 10%) and LGBTQ+ ($n=33$, 20%) were more likely to report someone sexually touching them against their will. A greater percentage of women ($n=51$, 3.8%) said they had been a victim of attempted sexual penetration against their will. There was no statistically significant association between LGBTQ+ and heterosexual respondents for attempted sexual penetration against their will. A greater percentage of women ($n=36$, 2.75%) and LGBTQ+ ($n=11$, 6/75%) reported sexual penetration against their will. Showing up at places someone should not be was statistically significantly associated with Women ($n=379$, 29%) and heterosexual respondents ($p=.041$, $n=727$, 42.5%).

Table 2. Crosstabulation Threatening Behaviors and Gender Identification and Sexual Orientation N-3019

	CIS Male	CIS Female		LGBTQ+	Hetero- sexual	
Variable	n percentage	n percentage	Chi Square	n percentage	n percentage	Chi Square
Verbal Threats of Sex Against Your Will	16 .09%	51 3.8%	$<.001^{***}$	18 11%	49 1.7%	$<.001^{***}$
Followed or Spied on You	238 14%	293 22%	$<.001^{***}$	56 34%	492 17%	$<.001^{***}$
Sent unsolicited letters or written messages including email and IM	480 28%	479 36.5%	$<.001^{***}$	41 25%	829 29%	$<.001^{***}$
Stood outside your work or school	335 19%	377 30%	$<.012^{**}$	39 24%	653 23%	$<.012^{**}$
Showed up at places you thought that they had no business being	390 23%	379 29%	$<.041^*$	42 26%	727 42.5%	$<.041^*$

Left unwanted items for you to find	345 20%	330 25%	<.001***	46 28%	629 22%	<.001***
Tried to communicate in other ways	403 23.5%	369 28%	<.001***	48 29.5%	724 25%	<.001***
Vandalized Property or destroyed something	336 19.7%	227 25.7%	<.001***	44 28.5%	628 22%	<.001***
Sexual touching against your will	57 3%	121 10%	<.001***	33 20%	155 5%	<.001***
Attempted sexual penetration against your will	7 .04%	51 3.8%	<.001***	5 3%	53 3%	.804
Sexual penetration against your will	6 .035%	36 2.75%	<.001***	11 6.75%	31 1.1%	<.001***
Attempted sexual penetration against your will	7 .04%	51 3.8%	<.001***	5 3%	53 3%	.804
Sexual penetration against your will	6 .035%	36 2.75%	<.001***	11 6.75%	31 1.1%	<.001***

*p=.041, **p=.012, ***p<.001

*p=.041, **p=.012, ***P<.001

Binomial Regression Analysis

Table 3. *Binomial Regression: Threatening Behaviors and Gender Identification N - 3019*

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I.for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Verbal Threats of Sex Against Your Will	.774	.338	5.229	1	.022*	2.168	1.117	4.210
Followed or Spied on You	.373	.106	12.332	1	<.001****	1.452	1.179	1.789
sent unsolicited letters or written messages	.383	.086	20.073	1	<.001****	1.467	1.241	1.735
stood outside your work or school	.581	.130	20.036	1	<.001****	1.787	1.386	2.305
tried to communicate in other ways	-.453	.136	11.171	1	<.001****	.636	.487	.829
Vandalized Property or destroyed something you loved	.290	.126	5.259	1	.022*	1.336	1.043	1.711
Sexual touching against your will	.590	.189	9.764	1	.002***	1.804	1.246	2.611

Attempted sexual penetration against your will	1.351	.446	9.175	1	.002***	3.860	1.611	9.249
Sexual penetration against your will	1.190	.486	5.994	1	.014**	3.288	1.268	8.526
Constant	-.620	.053	137.337	1	<.001	.538		

*p=.022, **p=.014, ***p=.002, ****p=<.001

To summarize Table 3, all of the threatening behaviors save one indicated that women were much more likely to report all the events more than men. While all of the threatening behaviors are very concerning the two most serious “attempted sexual penetration” and “sexual penetration against their will” were reported at higher percentages at nearly three times as often, and over twice as often.

The sole variable that was significantly statistically associated with “having a person trying to communicate in ways other than letters or written messages including email and IM” - indicated that men were less likely to report this event by over 36 percent.

A binomial regression analysis of threatening behaviors and gender identification found that nine of the variables were statistically significantly associated with gender identity with eight of the variables associated with cisgender and one variable associated with cisgender men – “having a person trying to communicate in ways other than letters or written messages including email and IM” ($p<.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) = .636$), for every one unit increase in “someone trying to communicate in other ways”, saw a decrease of 36.4% (.487, .829) in men reporting this behavior.

Cisgender women were more likely to report verbal threats of sex against their will ($p=.022$, $\text{Exp}(B) 2.168$), for every one unit increase in reports of “receiving verbal threats of sex against your will” there was an odds of 116% (1.117, 4.210) chance of reporting this behavior; having “someone following or spying on them” ($p<.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) 1.542$) indicates that for every one unit increase in reporting this behavior, the odds of reporting this is increased by 45% (1.179, 1.789), the odds of “someone sending unsolicited letters or written messages” ($p<.001$; $\text{Exp}(B) 1.467$) increased by 46% (1.241, 1.735), the odds of reporting a “person standing outside work or school” ($p<.001$, $\text{Exp}(B) 1.787$) increased by 78% for each unit increase (1.386, 2.305), the odds of a “person vandalizing property or destroying something you loved” ($p=.022$, $\text{Exp}(b) 1.336$) increased by 33% (1.043, 1.711) for every one unit increase in that behavior, The odds of having reported “sexual touching against your will” ($p=.002$, $\text{Exp}(B) 1.804$) increased by 80% (1.246, 2.611) for each unit increase, the odds of having “reported attempted sexual penetration against your will” ($p=.002$, $\text{Exp}(B) 3.860$) increased by 286% (1.611, 9.249), and the odds of reporting “sexual penetration against your will” ($p=.014$, $\text{Exp}(B) 3.288$) increased by 229% (1.268, 8.526) for each unit increase.

Table 4. Binomial Regression: Threatening Behaviors and Sexual Orientation N - 3019

	B	S.E.	Wald	df	Sig.	Exp(B)	95% C.I. for EXP(B)	
							Lower	Upper
Followed or Spied on You	.949	.187	25.746	1	<.001****	2.584	1.791	3.728
tried to communicate in other ways	-.650	.241	7.250	1	.007*	.522	.325	.838
Vandalized Property or destroyed something you loved	.657	.226	8.425	1	.004**	1.928	1.238	3.004
Sexual touching against your will	1.604	.238	45.350	1	<.001****	4.974	3.118	7.934
Attempted sexual penetration against your will	-2.035	.655	9.635	1	.002***	.131	.036	.472
Sexual penetration against your will	2.073	.488	18.076	1	<.001****	7.947	3.056	20.663
Constant	-3.360	.120	788.495	1	<.001****	.035		

*p=.007, **p=.004, ***p=.002, ****p<.001

To summarize Table 4, LGBTQ+ respondents were more likely to report being followed or spied on (over 1 and half times), vandalized property or something they loved destroyed (92%), being sexually touched against their will (nearly 4 times as much), and reporting “sexual penetration against their will (nearly 7 times as much).

A binomial regression analysis of threatening behaviors and sexual orientation found that four variables were statistically significantly associated with GLBTQ+ orientation, while two variables were statistically significantly associated with heterosexual orientation.

Having someone who “tried to communicate in other ways” (p=.007, Exp(B) .522) and “attempted sexual penetration against your will” (p=.002, Exp(B) .131) was statistically significantly associated with heterosexual orientation. It was found that holding all other predictor variables constant, the odds of someone who “tried to communicate in other ways” decreased by 52% (.325, .838) for a one unit increase in reports of someone who “tried to communicate in other ways”. While the odds of “attempted sexual penetration against your will” decreased by 13% (.036, .472) for a one unit increase in reported an “attempted sexual penetration against your will”. Respondents who identified as heterosexual were less likely to report someone who “tried to communicate in other ways” and “attempted sexual penetration against your will”.

Respondents who identified as LGBTQ+ were more likely to report being “followed or spied on” with the odds increasing by 158% for every one unit increase in reports of being “followed or spied on” (p<.001, Exp(B) 2.584 (1.791, 3.738)). The odds of LGBTQ+ respondents reporting having their property vandalized or something they loved destroyed increased by 92% (p=.004, Exp(B) 1.928, 1.238,

3.004). The odds increased by 397% of having been sexually touched against their will ($p < .001$, Exp(B) 4.974, 3.118, 7.934). The odds of LGBTQ+ respondents reporting “sexual penetration against your will” increased by 695% ($p < .001$, Exp(B) 7.947, 3.056, 20,663).

Discussion

The findings of this study underscore the significant role that gender identity and sexual orientation play in individuals' experiences of threatening behaviors and sexual abuse on university campuses. In particular, cisgender women and LGBTQ+ individuals reported higher rates of verbal threats, sexual harassment, stalking, and sexual violence compared to their male or heterosexual counterparts. This study contributes to the growing body of research highlighting how both gender and sexual orientation intersect to influence the prevalence and severity of harassment and violence, further reinforcing the need for a nuanced understanding of campus safety and victimization.

Cisgender women in this study were notably more likely than their male peers to report experiencing verbal threats, sexual touching, and sexual penetration. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that women, particularly those in higher-risk environments like college campuses, are more vulnerable to various forms of gender-based violence (Fisher, Cullen, & Turner, 2000; Turchik & Edwards, 2012).

Moreover, the finding that women in this study were more likely to report experiences of being followed or spied on aligns with previous research on the prevalence of stalking and unwanted surveillance targeted at women (Fedina et al., 2020; Fisher et al., 2000; Coker et al., 2011). The relatively high rates of verbal threats, unsolicited messages, and harassment reported by cisgender women are also consistent with the works of Turchik and Edwards (2012) and Wood et al. (2018), who found that women are particularly vulnerable to sexual harassment and intimate partner violence. These findings suggest that the intersection of gender and power dynamics continues to create an environment where women are disproportionately exposed to harmful behaviors.

LGBTQ+ individuals in this study also reported experiencing higher rates of threatening behaviors compared to heterosexual respondents, further supporting the growing body of literature documenting the unique vulnerabilities faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to experience sexual harassment, stalking, and violence due to their sexual orientation, often exacerbated by a culture of heteronormativity that marginalizes non-heterosexual identities (Balsam et al., 2005). This study's findings are consistent with previous research showing that LGBTQ+ individuals, especially LGBTQ+ women, are at a greater risk of experiencing sexual violence and victimization due to both societal prejudice and personal vulnerability (Herek, 2009; Rosario, Schrimshaw, & Hunter, 2009). The significantly higher likelihood of LGBTQ+ individuals reporting sexual violence—such as unwanted sexual touching and sexual penetration—underscores

the heightened risks they face in university environments, where stigmatization and exclusion are still pervasive.

The intersectionality of gender and sexual orientation was a key theme in this study. The compounded vulnerabilities faced by LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly those who are also women, were clearly evident in the findings. LGBTQ+ respondents, especially LGBTQ+ women, were more likely to report severe forms of violence, including sexual penetration, than their cisgender heterosexual counterparts. This supports the framework of intersectionality proposed by Crenshaw (1991), which argues that the interconnected nature of identities—such as gender and sexual orientation—shapes the experiences of marginalization and victimization in unique ways. The intersection of these identities appears to amplify the vulnerability of individuals to violence and harassment. Balsam et al. (2005) similarly highlight that LGBTQ+ people of color face heightened victimization not only because of their sexual orientation but also due to the social prejudices linked to their racial and ethnic identities.

Additionally, the higher rates of sexual violence reported by LGBTQ+ respondents in this study reinforce findings from Cantor et al. (2020), Fedina et al. (2020), and Herek (2009), who noted that LGBTQ+ individuals, especially those in marginalized communities, face distinct risks for victimization. The compounded nature of their vulnerability, arising from both their gender and sexual orientation, often results in greater exposure to intimate partner violence, harassment, and sexual assault. These findings underscore the importance of adopting an intersectional approach when considering the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals, particularly in environments such as universities, where students are exposed to a range of social and institutional pressures that can increase their susceptibility to violence.

Moreover, the findings of this study suggest that university settings may perpetuate a climate in which both women and LGBTQ+ individuals are at risk. The higher rates of verbal threats, stalking, and sexual violence reported by both groups emphasize the need for university administrators and policymakers to prioritize sexual violence prevention programs tailored to the needs of marginalized groups. This is especially important considering that both cisgender women and LGBTQ+ individuals face disproportionate rates of victimization, as evidenced by the study's statistical analyses. Turchik and Edwards (2012) argue that comprehensive and intersectional prevention strategies are essential for addressing sexual violence on college campuses, and this study's findings support that argument.

In addition to gender and sexual orientation, future research should consider other intersecting identities, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and disability, which may further influence the experiences of victimization among marginalized groups. For example, research by Chung and Koo (2006) indicates that LGBTQ+ women of color face unique challenges in navigating both gender and racial/ethnic-based violence. Understanding how multiple identities shape the experiences of stalking, harassment, and violence can provide a more nuanced understanding of campus safety and inform the development of more effective prevention and intervention strategies.

Finally, the study's findings have important implications for university policies and practices related to sexual violence prevention. It is clear that cisgender women

and LGBTQ+ individuals are at heightened risk for a variety of threatening behaviors, including verbal threats, sexual harassment, and sexual violence. Universities must create inclusive environments that address the specific needs of these groups and foster a culture of respect and safety for all students, regardless of their gender or sexual orientation. This includes implementing tailored sexual violence prevention programs, supporting bystander intervention training, and providing safe spaces for students to report incidents of harassment and violence.

Conclusion

This study underscores the complex and multifaceted nature of victimization based on gender identity and sexual orientation. Both cisgender women and LGBTQ+ individuals are more likely to experience verbal threats, stalking, sexual harassment, and sexual violence compared to their male or heterosexual counterparts. The findings highlight the importance of adopting an intersectional approach to understanding campus victimization, as the experiences of harassment and violence are shaped by the interaction of gender and sexual orientation. Addressing these vulnerabilities through targeted, intersectional prevention programs is essential for creating safer, more inclusive university environments.

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Using Simulated Patients' Ratings to Predict Psychology Graduate Students' Interviewing Skills

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Psychologists depend upon comprehensive interviews to help identify mental health conditions in order to provide evidence-based, effective interventions. Although it would be ideal for trainees to acquire interviewing skills before seeing their first client, there are limitations in the effectiveness of interviewing peers and obtaining useful feedback from peers and supervisors (Kaslow et al., 2009; Meier & Davis, 2011). Simulated patients (SPs) are often better suited to provide standardized experiences and impartial feedback (Kaslow et al., 2009). Students gain invaluable implicit feedback during role-plays with SPs, as they learn to adjust their skill development appropriately (Lovink et al., 2021). This study focuses on assessing the benefits of SPs in clinical psychology interview training. The Simulated Patient Assessment of Clinician Effectiveness Scale (SPACES) was created to enable SPs to offer feedback on the performance of psychology trainees' clinical interviewing. SPACES was adapted from the Arizona Clinical Interview Rating (ACIR) Scale (Stillman et al., 1977), a widely employed tool for assessing the interviewing skills of medical students. The items within SPACES cover the evaluation of clinician confidence, comfort level, perceived understanding, genuineness, and overall conversational flow. The Skills in Psychological Interviewing: Clinical Evaluation Scales (SPICES) was developed in response to the call for standardized methods of evaluating psychology students' skill development across the American Psychological Association's (APA's) competency areas. The SPACES form was analyzed and compared with the SPICES measure to determine the extent to which SP's SPACES ratings of students' (N=98) scores align with measures at the beginning and end of a semester of training in clinical interviewing with SPs. Results indicate that SP ratings do assess the likeability of interviewers but are not effective at assessing development of technical interviewing skills.

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Introduction

Clinical psychology has made significant progress during the 20th century. Advancements in psychological services have notably increased the life expectancy of individuals with mental disorders (Chan et al., 2023). However, approximately 22.8% of adults living in the United States, equivalent to 57.8 million Americans, are estimated to have one or more mental illnesses according to the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH, 2024). As the United States (US) population continues to diversify, the prevalence of mental illness is likely to rise according to the US Congressional Budget Office (CBO, 2021). In response to the demand, the number of individuals graduating with doctorates in psychology is rapidly rising, as prevalence rates increased by 25% from 2008 to 2017 alone according to the American Psychological Association (APA, 2019). Moreover, health service psychology, or patient-facing psychology, has been growing at a faster rate than research-focused psychology, with over half of doctorates awarded in 2017 being in health service psychology and representing a 28% increase over 10 years (APA, 2019).

With the increasing need for clinical psychologists and the steady rise in future providers, maintaining standardized education and training is crucial. One metric of ensuring quality training for future psychologists is instilling accreditation standards, which demonstrate a program's dedication to comprehensive clinical training. The American Psychological Association's Standards of Accreditation (SoA) aim to establish and to enforce updated and well-rounded competency expectations that facilitate the education and evaluation of students. Current competencies outlined by the SoA include: 1) research, 2) ethical and legal standards, 3) individual and cultural diversity, 4) professional values, attitudes, and behaviors, 5) communication and interpersonal skills, 6) assessment, 7) intervention, 8) supervision, and 9) consultation and interprofessional/ interdisciplinary skills (APA, 2018). However, the practical application of these competencies can be complex. Programs must account for the varied experiences of students who enter with differing levels of prior training and education (Fouad et al., 2009; Rodolfa et al., 2013). Programs are challenged to ensure that standards are maintained while also adapting to the unique experiences of each student.

Training the growing number of graduates into qualified professionals requires the cultivation of several core skills, with clinical interviewing being at the forefront. Interviews, combined with clinical practices by psychologist Jean Piaget, began in the 19th century to explore thoughts objectively with standard and nonstandard questioning (Sommers-Flanagan et al., 2015). Today, interviewing skills are vital to interpersonal relationships, interventions, assessments, evidence-based decision-making, supervision, and consultation. Gathering information through the client experience is one of the pivotal points in assessment and treatment to arrive at a scientifically valid diagnosis (Sommers-Flanagan et al., 2015). As the initial point of contact, interviews set the tone for the therapeutic relationship and provide the first opportunity for establishing rapport. Client/patient perceptions of the relationship are key predictors of future outcomes and potential indicators of increased risk of dropping out of therapy (Flückiger et al., 2018; Jankowsky et al., 2023). To help students develop the skills necessary to build

positive relationships and strong therapeutic alliances from the initial interview, training programs frequently use role-play exercises.

This paper begins by introducing the importance of continued training in the growing psychology field, the role of competency models in training, and the outcome on patient care. A literature review then examines how interviewing skills are often taught and assessed in health service psychology doctoral programs and the role of simulated patients within the process. Methodology, including participants, relevant measures used, and procedures are then described before the results are outlined. A discussion then explains the implications and utility of the findings, and the paper ends with conclusions and a review of limitations.

Literature Review

What Interviewing Skills to Teach

Clinical interviews rely on strong verbal and nonverbal communication skills. Competent interviewers acknowledge their own areas requiring growth, remain conscious of personal biases, and are proactive in seeking to understand their clients in order to bridge any gaps in knowledge or skills (Solomon et al., 2017). While attending to these issues, the interviewer must also remain mindful of the purpose of the interview and remain sensitive to their own and the client's disclosure choices (Davies, 2019). Integrating these skills requires practice and intentional effort; thus, the skills needed to conduct effective interviews can be taught and are not necessarily inherent. An analysis of psychology trainee interviewing skills before and after explicit training reveals that training allows interviewers to develop increased empathic communication, to utilize their knowledge and training to demonstrate credibility, and effectively to address important aspects of the interview, such as consent and safety assessment (Osborn et al., 2023).

When interviewing, it is imperative that providers allow their patients to use their own words to describe their experiences and to avoid implying that there are 'right' or 'wrong' answers. One method of fostering open communication is in the use of open-ended questions, which prompts patients to elaborate (Bredart et al., 2014). Using a patient's own language during reflections and when synthesizing information can then support the patient in feeling validated and understood, in turn increasing patient ratings of satisfaction and enhancing their likelihood of continued care (Heavan et al., 2003; O'Keefe et al., 2001). Combining open-ended and close-ended questions to conduct an interview will also facilitate a client-centered approach. Following the lead of a patient encourages the use of active listening and empathic responding and is associated with increased positive clinical outcomes regardless of setting or diagnosis (Heavan et al., 2003). Throughout the interview process, providers often fixate on presenting problems or clinical concerns. In order to establish a positive environment, to build rapport, and to gather information regarding protective factors and patient strengths, it is valuable to spend interview time eliciting positive experiences and inquiring about patient wellness (O'Brian & Schlechter, 2016).

It is also important for clinical interview training to incorporate specific emphasis on and practice of safety and risk assessments. Unfortunately, many mental health providers are not provided with sufficient training to assess for suicidality (Schmitz et al., 2012), to feel confident enough to ask about or to evaluate for possible abuse (Young et al., 2001), or to be effective in responding to threats of violence and suicidal risk (Mackelprang et al., 2014; Osborn & Cash, 2020). However, even through brief targeting training opportunities, providers are able to increase their competency and their confidence in these skills (Osborn & Cash, 2020), illustrating the value of their inclusion within training programs.

How to Teach Interviewing Skills

Psychology and medical programs have been progressively employing role-play experiences to train and to evaluate students. Unlike other methods of instruction, role-playing facilitates opportunities to step into the role of provider in low-risk environments while enabling direct observation (Shae & Barney, 2015). Not only do students gain the opportunity to practice interviewing skills, but they may also role-play as the patient and develop increased empathy while gaining insight into patient experiences (Meier & Davis, 2011). Role-playing with a supervisor often improves student confidence and allows opportunities for direct modeling and practice of targeted clinical interviewing skills (Shae & Barney, 2015). While role-play with a supervisor may occur in direct supervision experiences, more often instruction surrounding interviewing skills occurs in group settings, and role-play activities occur as practice assignments between peers. While these experiences have the potential for benefits, they are often not taken seriously by students, include inaccurate portrayals of diagnoses or clinical experiences, and are not very effective (Kaslow et al., 2009; Meier & Davis, 2011).

Simulated patients (SPs) are actors specifically trained to portray particular diagnoses or symptoms within clinical settings to facilitate clinical training (Barrows, 1993). SPs are used across various disciplines (e.g., medicine, nursing, nutrition, pharmacy, occupational therapy, mental health) to train students, to facilitate competency acquisition, and to assess competencies (Barrows, 1993; Beshgetoor & Wade, 2007; Cangelosi, 2008; Giles et al., 2014; Kaslow et al., 2009; Masters et al., 2015; Mesquita et al., 2010; Yap et al., 2012). The training that SPs receive creates role-play interactions that are more representative of actual client interactions within safe environments to practice skills without the potential risk of ethical dilemmas, harming clients, and increased levels of uncertainty (Kaslow et al., 2009; Masters et al., 2015).

Assessing Interviewing Skills

Despite the continued presence of interviewing skills within competency models for mental health professionals, structured evaluation and assessment of interviewing skills varies widely and is under-researched. Measures focusing on specific interview components, such as the Jefferson Scale of Physician Empathy (JSPE), are often used to assess abilities before and after training (Fernandez-Olano

et al., 2008). However, a limitation of single factor measures is that they evaluate only one aspect of an interview and not overall interviewing competency. Instead, it is beneficial to utilize measures that incorporate the range of skills and interpersonal exchanges that make up an effective clinical interview.

Use of Client and SP Feedback

To increase objectivity in skill assessment and supervision, client feedback has become a more common tool (Worthen & Lambert, 2007). Using rating scales (e.g., client satisfaction ratings) students and their supervisors have access to immediate feedback regarding the services provided and their perceived efficacy. When client feedback is consistently incorporated into supervision, students demonstrate greater improvement in their clinical skills than students who do not have client feedback incorporated into their supervision (Reese et al., 2009). Additionally, student self-evaluations appear to increase in accuracy, demonstrated by a stronger association between client outcomes and provider self-efficacy ratings for those for whom client feedback was a regular part of their training (Reese et al., 2009). Unfortunately, research shows that client satisfaction ratings are often influenced by social desirability pressures and can vary significantly based on how and when they are collected (Burroughs et al., 2005).

To address some of the subjectivity and bias associated with direct client satisfaction ratings and feedback, SP feedback has been utilized to assess competencies and to monitor improvement overtime (Kaslow et al., 2009; Masters et al., 2015, Yap et al., 2012). As interactions with SPs have been found comparable to true client interactions, their feedback is viewed as an effective representation of how clients in the interactions may feel. Additionally, the SP presentations can be standardized, providing more consistent pre- and post-test experiences and allowing for more direct comparisons of skill changes over time (Block et al., 2018; Kaslow et al., 2009). The increased impartiality of feedback provided by SPs, as compared to that provided by true clients, paired with the decreased exposure to unnecessary risk associated with building competency via working with clients has led to the use of SPs for evaluative purposes by 94% of medical schools in the United States (Block et al., 2018; Kaslow et al., 2009).

The study aimed to evaluate students' ability to establish a rapport with interviewee SPs while learning and applying interviewing skills. The progress of the clinical trainee's rapport with the simulated patient was evaluated at the beginning and end of the semester. The second objective is to assess the technical interviewing skills of students, including risk assessment. The study will determine the capacity of SPs to evaluate technical skills developed over the second semester in an APA-accredited program. This study's findings will enhance the understanding of how students develop and refine their interviewing skills and the effectiveness of standardized patients in providing feedback on such skills.

Methodology

Participants

Data were collected from 100 first-year doctoral clinical psychology students at a large university in the southeastern United States in the winter of 2019 prior to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The students were enrolled in a four-month interviewing course combined with lab sessions incorporating weekly three-hour meetings with a session facilitator and other students enrolled in the Clinical Psychology Ph.D. or Psy.D. program. The students were assigned to 10 groups of 10 students each. The students had minimal prior experience interviewing clients for clinical purposes. The course and lab sessions aimed to develop several skills, including professional standards and ethical decision-making, professional presentation, effective communication with diverse interviewees, appropriate relational and interpersonal skills, informative and well-integrated oral and nonverbal communication using professional language and concepts, and practical interpersonal skills combined with the ability to manage difficult communication situations. The course was developed in accordance with the SoA of the American Psychological Association (APA).

Data from two participants were removed due to missing scores on the Skills in Psychological Interviewing: Clinical Evaluation Scales (SPICES), an instrument developed specifically for evaluating clinical interviewing skills (Osborn, et al., 2023). Of the remaining 98 participants included, 77 identified their gender as female, 16 as male, and 5 did not specify. Ages of participants ranged as follows: 20-24 (n = 72), 25-29 (n = 19), 30-34 (n = 4), 40-44 (n = 2), or not specified (n = 1). Participants reported identifying as White (n = 62), Hispanic/Latinx (n = 21), African American (n = 6), Asian (n = 3), other (n = 3), and not specified (n = 3). Among these participants, 83 identified English as their first language, 11 reported Spanish as their first language, one noted Creole as the first language, and two specified 'other'. One participant chose not to report their first language. Nine participants indicated being trainees in the Ph.D. Clinical Psychology program, 88 were trainees in the Psy.D. Clinical Psychology program, and one participant chose not to disclose which program. Ninety-three participants reported being in their first year of their graduate program and four reported being in their second year. One participant chose not to answer.

Procedures

The present study employed simulated patients to assess the progress and competency of participants in basic interviewing skills. Simulated patients were provided with detailed descriptions of the case they were to portray, including the client's name, age, clinical setting, presenting problems, and personal background information. The simulated patients attended two-hour, face-to-face training sessions regarding the characteristics of each disorder to be portrayed. The training sessions were conducted by a psychology faculty member who was an expert in each of the five disorders to be portrayed by the simulated patients.

The course began with a pre-test, videotaped interview to establish a baseline score (i.e., the average of the two evaluators' ratings) of the participants' clinical interviewing skills before they received formal training. Each student was allotted 15-minutes to complete an interview with a simulated patient who portrayed an individual with a mental health disorder. The pre-test was conducted in person and video recorded for evaluation by two randomly assigned interns and/or post-doctoral residents utilizing SPICES. The students also received feedback from the simulated patient using the Simulated Patient Assessment of Clinician Effectiveness Scale (SPACES), a 12-item measure developed for this project for the purpose of providing feedback from simulated patients to students.

Participants engaged in a structured weekly didactic and practice session as part of the interviewing course requirements. The instruction sessions commenced with a brief comprehensive lecture covering a range of interview-relevant topics and skills, including assessing for suicide, threat, and abuse. Following the lecture, the students participated in two skills-based interventions each week. Each student completed bi-weekly 15-minute role-plays and received live feedback from peers and the course facilitator while the students reflected on their performance. The structure of these sessions was designed to facilitate students' utilization of role-playing to reduce the stress of and to increase skills necessary for initial clinical interviews with a clients at their first practicum sites. Simulated patients and facilitators rotated every week, and participants had the opportunity to role-play with a new simulated patient each encounter. A two-week scenario featuring a single diagnostic case allowed students to practice and to observe other trainees for each of the five mental health disorder portrayed. Furthermore, the students responded to modules focusing on basic interviewing skills, such as reflection, summarization, and empathy, guided by the observance of ethical considerations and diversity, among other components.

At the end of the semester, the participants completed a post-test interview to evaluate progress and competency in their interviewing skills. The post-test interview was conducted in person, and participants were randomly assigned to a 15-minute interview time slot. During the interview assessment, students were instructed to avoid using notes, as the aim was to prepare them for sitting with and focusing fully on a client. Following the post-test, two interns or post-doctoral residents were randomly assigned to assess the student's skills along with an experienced faculty member using the Skills in Psychological Interviewing: Clinical Evaluation Scale (SPICES). To be eligible to begin their first practicum experience, students needed to pass the class by scoring 80% or higher based on the average scores of all three raters. The standardized patients provided feedback to the students who interviewed them using the Simulated Patient Assessment of Clinician Effectiveness Scale (SPACES).

Test Instruments

The Simulated Patient Assessment of Clinician Effectiveness Scale (SPACES)

The Simulated Patient Assessment of Clinician Effectiveness Scale (SPACES) was created to enable SPs to offer feedback on the performance of psychology trainees' clinical interviewing. SPACES was adapted from the Arizona Clinical Interview Rating (ACIR) Scale (Stillman et al., 1977), a widely employed tool for assessing the interviewing skills of medical students. The items within SPACES cover the evaluation of clinician confidence, comfort level, perceived understanding, genuineness, and overall conversational flow. Its purpose is to enhance clinical training by comprehensively assessing critical aspects of clinician-patient interactions.

The Skills in Psychological Interviewing: Clinical Evaluation Scales (SPICES)

The Skills in Psychological Interviewing: Clinical Evaluation Scales (SPICES, Ketterer, 2014) was developed in response to the call for standardized methods of evaluating psychology students' skill development across many of the American Psychological Association's (APA's) nine profession-wide competency areas.

Results

The SPACES scores were analyzed and compared with the SPICES results to determine the extent to which SP's SPACES ratings of students' scores align with the SPACES competency measures at the beginning and end of a semester of training in clinical interviewing with SPs. The current study evaluates the utilization of SPACES in assessing the clinical effectiveness of students from SPs' perspectives.

Descriptive Statistics

Results included the scores of 98 participants from a graduate program in clinical psychology on the SPICES and SPACES measures at pre-and-post-test. Of note, two participants were removed from statistical analyses due to missing one or more scores on the SPICES measure. On the average, participants received higher scores at post-test (SPICES; $M = 94.35$, $sd = 3.33$), as compared to pre-test (SPICES; $M = 84.51$, $sd = 7.39$). Similarly, simulated patients appeared to rate participants more positively at post-test (SPACES; $M = 43.38$, $s = 4.37$) than at pre-test (SPACES; $M = 41.13$, $s = 6.30$).

Table 1 depicts the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviations of the scores obtained by participants on the SPACES and SPICES at two timepoints.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Scores Obtained by Students on the SPACES and SPICES at Pre-and-Post Test

Variable	Descriptive Statistic				
	N	Min	Max	Mean	Standard Deviation
Pre-Test SPACES	98	26.00	48.00	41.13	6.30
Post-Test SPACES	98	19.00	48.00	43.38	4.37
Pre-Test SPICES	98	33.00	97.50	84.51	7.39
Post-Test SPICES	98	15.67	101.67	94.35	3.33

Internal-Consistency Reliability

To confirm the psychometric properties of the assessments, the internal-consistency reliability of the SPACES and SPICES were assessed using Cronbach's alpha at pre-test and post-test. The reliability statistics for the pre-test SPACES test showed a strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.848$). Alpha coefficients ranged from 0.813 to 0.854 after item removal, suggesting each item contributes approximately equally to the scale's internal consistency. The post-test SPACES also demonstrated strong internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.753$), and alpha coefficients if items were deleted ranged from 0.695 to 0.763. Similarly, the pre-test SPICES showed robust internal consistency ($\alpha = 0.851$). An item-deleted analysis revealed minimal changes in the overall alpha when individual items were removed from pre-test ($\alpha = 0.836$ to 0.855). However, the post-test SPICES exhibited internal consistency below the expected level ($\alpha = 0.596$), and the Cronbach's Alpha ranged from 0.536 to 0.629 after removal.

Paired-Sample t-Test

Paired-sample t-tests were conducted to examine whether completing the practicum course would lead to perceived improvement as well as assessed gains regarding clinical interviewing skills. Students obtained significantly better scores on the SPICES at post-test ($M = 94.35$, $s = 3.33$) as compared to pre-test ($M = 84.51$, $s = 7.39$), demonstrating higher ratings of skill development by instructors at post-test, ($t(97) = -13.07$, $p < 0.001$, $d = 1.32$). Similarly, significantly better ratings by SPs of perceived interviewing effectiveness were obtained on SPACES by students at post-test ($M = 43.38$, $s = 4.37$) as compared to pre-test ($M = 41.13$, $s = 6.30$), suggesting an increase in perceived clinical skills by simulated patients ($t(97) = -2.97$, $p = 0.002$, $d = 0.300$). Overall, results show that students completing the practicum course developed better clinical interviewing skills, as indicated by both simulated patient and instructor ratings.

Table 2. SPICES and SPACES Scores at Pre-and-Post Test. Note that higher Scores on SPICES and SPACES Indicate Greater Clinical Skills

	Pre-Test Scores		Post-Test Scores		t-test	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	t-score	p-value
SPICES	84.51	7.39	94.34	3.34	-13.065	<0.001
SPACES	41.13	6.30	43.38	4.37	-2.968	0.002

Bivariate Correlations

Results of non-directional, bivariate correlations showed significant positive associations between post-tests scores on the SPICES and the pre-test scores on the SPICES ($r = 0.208$, $r^2 = 0.043$, $p = 0.04$), as well as on the post-test scores on the SPACES ($r = 0.251$, $r^2 = 0.063$, $p = 0.01$). Notably, results indicate that students receiving more positive evaluations from instructors at pre-and-post-test timepoints were more likely to receive positive feedback from simulated patients at post-test. Further, a significant positive association was found between pre-test SPICES scores and pre-test SPACES scores ($r = 0.279$, $r^2 = 0.078$, $p = 0.006$). These findings suggest that students obtaining positive evaluations from simulated patients were more likely to receive positive scores from instructors at the pre-test condition. The positive correlation between scores obtained on the SPICES at post-test and the scores obtained on the SPACES at pre-test approached significance ($r = 0.195$, $r^2 = 0.038$, $p = 0.055$), suggesting that SPs may recognize early those students who relate well as interviewers. Future studies may examine more fully the association between skill development results at post-test and the feedback of simulated patients at the pre-test condition.

Table 3. Bivariate Correlations between Pre-and-post Test SPICES and SPACES Scores

Measure	1	2	3	4
1. Pre-Test SPICES		0.208*	0.276**	0.038
2. Post-Test SPICES	0.208*		0.195	0.251*
3. Pre-Test SPACES	0.276**	0.195		0.049
4. Post-Test SPACES	0.038	0.251*	0.049	

* $p < 0.05$ level (2-tailed).

** $p < 0.01$ level (2-tailed).

Multiple Linear Regression

A multiple linear regression analysis was used to determine the unique contributions of the following variables in predicting skill development evaluations at post-test: (1) skill assessment at pre-test, (2) simulated patient evaluation at pre-test, and (3) simulated patient evaluation at post-test.

Table 4. Summary of Multiple Linear Regression Analyses for Predicting SPICES at Post-Test

Variables	Regression Statistics		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Pre-Test SPICES	0.072	0.045	0.160
Pre-Test SPACES	0.074	0.053	0.139
Post-Test SPACES	0.182*	0.074*	0.239*

* $p < 0.05$

The overall model was statistically significant, showing that the predictors accounted for 9.2% of the variance in post-test scores on the SPICES ($F(3, 94) = 4.280, p = 0.007$). Results showed that post-test scores on the SPACES predicted post-test scores on the SPICES above and beyond other predictors ($B = 0.182, SE B = 0.074, p = 0.016, sr^2 = 0.057$).

Discussion

Clinical interviewing is a crucial aspect of graduate training, as it establishes effective communication and rapport building, which, in turn, can lead to improved mental health outcomes. Moreover, clinical psychologists utilize clinical interviews to identify mental health conditions (Sommers-Flanagan et al., 2015). Once clients decide to pursue treatment, accurate diagnoses can guide evidence-based interventions for a variety of conditions. Simulated patients can be used to train and assess upcoming cohorts, meeting the needs of a growing number of trainees. The current study aimed to determine if students can establish rapport with SPs, improve their interviewing skills, and maintain and develop the connection skills over time.

Intervention Efficacy

This research study evaluated the level of technical and interpersonal interviewing skills students possess, using the SPICES 26-item measure and SPACES 12-item measure. In the current study, the SPICES exhibited high internal consistency at the pre-test, but there was some variability at the post-test. The decrease in alpha for post-test evaluation is likely due to the inclusion of ratings from three evaluators, one of whom was an experienced faculty member, increasing the variability compared to the pre-test ratings. The measure has previously been validated and found to have strong internal consistency and inter-rater reliability (Ketterer, 2014). Moreover, the results revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between pre-test and post-test SPICES scores, indicating that interviewing skill assessments before formal instruction and practice are significant but weak predictors of how students will respond to formal interviewing training.

The SPICES post-test scores were significantly higher than the SPICES pre-test scores and reflected a large effect, strongly suggesting that the training and practice improved students' technical interviewing skills and that the course achieved its objective of improving the students' technical interviewing skills

overall. The findings are consistent with previous unpublished data indicating an increase of at least one standard deviation in the SPICES scores from pre-test to post-test annually. In addition, the SPACES scores revealed a statistically significant change from pre-test to post-test, although this was a small effect. This small change from pre-test to post-test, especially given the large degree of skill improvement, suggests that two processes are involved. The SPs' ratings on SPACES may reflect something about the interviewers which might be called likeability or charisma, whereas the SPICES scores most likely reflect technical skill development. Skills may well be easier to teach and much more amenable to specific instruction than likeability. However, using simulated patients (SPs) in training can significantly enhance the overall likability of interviewers by fostering a positive attitude during the learning process (Gorski et al., 2022).

The importance of a single intake interview conducted by doctoral students has been called into question due to mixed findings (Hutchinson et al., 2008). However, multiple practice with and feedback from SPs allows students to gain insight into patient experiences and to improve their interviewing skills (Meier & Davis, 2011). Working with SPs can help clinicians develop skills in responding to anxiety-provoking and challenging interview situations. Moreover, SPs may provide secondary psychological benefits through rapport building with students, based, in part, on communicating their perception of the interviewers.

Interviewer's interpersonal likeability probably influences the interviewee's perceptions of them. However, in this study, there was limited room for improvement, since the clinical trainee's initial scores were already high at pre-test ($M=41.13$, $sd= 6.30$) with a maximum possible score of 48. Clinical psychology trainees, who are selected through a careful graduate admission process, likely possess basic interpersonal skills at admission. Nevertheless, SPs may aid in further developing these interpersonal and communication skills (Zraick et al., 2003). SP feedback could benefit trainees by allowing them to practice their skills on real individuals, receive feedback on their performance, and reflect on their practice (Gorski et al., 2022). The clinical psychology trainees in the present study receive bi-weekly feedback from simulated patients for each role-play, and this could very well have aided in their improved SPICES scores from the beginning to the end of the semester.

Utilization of Client Feedback

More than a third of patients who attend their first therapy session do not return for their next visit (Simon et al., 2012). Although it would be ideal for trainees to acquire interviewing skills before seeing their first client, factors that may impede the development of interviewing effectiveness include a lack of motivation to change, unclear bias mitigation strategies, and the absence of communication training (Hagiwara et al., 2020). Therefore, novice clinicians may get dismissed by or even do damage to their clients because they are not aware of their skill deficiencies. Interestingly, clients who do not return report both favorable and unfavorable outcomes of therapy, such as high satisfaction and

maximum improvement, as well as low satisfaction, weak alliance, and no improvement (Simon et al., 2012). The rationale for their non-return is difficult to discern without receiving more explicit feedback. Further research is also warranted, as some clients may continue therapy despite initial judgments (Odell et al., 1998).

The present study aimed to investigate the extent to which the ratings of SPs could predict their ability to rate the skill development of the students. The results showed that while the SPs' ratings correlated with scores on the interviewing skills scales, they only accounted for a small proportion of the variance. There was no significant correlation between the pre-test and post-test SPACES scores, indicating the SPs' scores were not related between the two time points. However, the 12-item SPACES displayed high internal consistency at both pre-test and post-test, indicating the measure is reliable at detecting interpersonal likeability.

The authors also sought to explore whether the SPs' pre-test score was associated with the post-test skills score. However, the correlational analysis did not reveal any significant correlation between these two scores. SP's pre-test evaluation of the clinical trainee does not seem to be a reliable predictor of their final scores, suggesting that likeability varies over time.

The consistency of scores between SPs and skill evaluations during the pre-test phase was also investigated. The analysis demonstrated a statistically significant, positive correlation between the pre-test SPICES and pre-test SPACES scores, indicating that as the SPICES scores increased, so did the SPACES scores to some extent. Notably, this correlational analysis produced one of the highest coefficients in the study, suggesting the relationship between simulated patients' ratings and skill evaluations is strongest before the clinical trainees acquire technical skills. This observation suggests that entry-level students exhibit general affability before developing technical skills.

The regression analysis revealed that the post-test SPACES was a significant predictor of post-SPICES, further supporting an effect of the timing of assessment. Clinical psychology trainees who tend to be more likable may perform better on SPICES, possibly due to their increased competence or test-related anxiety. Likeability can influence how individuals are perceived and evaluated, ultimately affecting their ability to perform well. Further research is necessary to investigate whether the SPs can predict more than just affability.

Conclusion

Employing reliable assessments to evaluate trainees on the APA SoA competencies accurately is important while giving feedback and evaluating their eligibility for commencing clinical work. The pre-practicum course is designed to help meet every practicum site's unique needs, a requirement not applicable to all courses. Therefore, it is important to utilize assessment tools to ensure that trainees meet the standards set by the APA. The interventions and methods used in this course provide tailored feedback, both live and through the SPICES and SPACES, which supports students while they are developing their clinical interviewing skills, as evident from the feedback provided by both simulated patients and skill

raters. The assessments utilized in the current study effectively capture the underlying structure from the perspective of both simulated patients and interns or post-doctoral students.

A correlation was revealed between the scores given by SPs and skill raters, both before and after the SPs acquired technical skills. SPs exhibit the ability to assess likability which is related to but different from technical expertise. Implications of this study suggest that perceptions of the simulated patient and rater of technical interviewing skills should be considered independently and together to improve the accuracy of assessing the developing psychologist.

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A Review of Literature on the Nature of the Greek Community in Melbourne, Australia

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History in Australia tells us that Greek migration to Australia dates to the late 19th century and early 20th, and by 1940 when the vast majority of migrants actually settled in what they refer to as their ‘new home’ their ‘second homeland’ (δεύτερη πατρίδα), searching for a new beginning in the ‘lucky country’ or ‘the country of opportunity’ as they viewed Australia. This process was made possible by the Assisted Passage Agreement signed by the Greek and Australian governments in 1952 that opened the way for the Greek people to come to Australia in large numbers and then for the City of Melbourne become home to the world’s largest population of Greek people outside of Greece, a distinction it has maintained up to the present time. It was not smooth sailing however for these migrants – some challenges they faced were language, the loss of family and friends, and adjusting to a new way of life and culture – the Australian way. As a country Australia was and still is committed to providing culturally appropriate health care and services, and this principle is incorporated into the service contract of Medicare, the national healthcare system (Department of Human Services, 2012). Will start also with noting that there was no need for ethics for this type of anticipated data collection because everything that will be collected and the data that will go into the next paper will be in the public domain and is intended by its writers for general consumption as it will be in the online world. Data Collection is to be of online nature via <https://www.reddit.com> during a 6-month period August 2025 – January 2026 (posts made in the last 12 months).

Introduction

This paper presents a review of literature concerning the nature of the Greek community in Melbourne, Australia, with particular attention to issues of migration, cultural identity, wellbeing, and intergenerational experiences within the Greek diaspora. The quotations included throughout this paper are derived from previous qualitative studies conducted in Melbourne between 2011 and 2016 and are not drawn from the current data collection undertaken during 2025–2026. Their inclusion serves to strengthen the literature review by providing illustrative real-life examples and participant perspectives relevant to the themes discussed.

The first study, conducted in 2011, was a qualitative investigation titled *Cultural Understanding of Health and Adjustment to Cardiovascular Disease among the Greek Elderly*. The study involved 13 participants over the age of 60 who were recruited from the Fronditha Care activity group in Melbourne, Australia (see Table One for participant demographics). The research explored the health beliefs of elderly

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Greek Australians and examined how they understood health, illness, and cardiovascular disease within the context of their cultural values and attitudes toward wellbeing and medical care.

The second study commenced in 2012 as part of a PhD research project titled *Health Beliefs and Practices in Three Generations of Greek Australian Women in Melbourne*. This qualitative study examined the health beliefs and practices of women across three generations of Greek Australian families, including the immigrant generation, first generation, and second generation Australian-born participants. A total of 48 participants took part in the study (see Table Two for participant demographics). Participants discussed and interpreted experiences related to health, illness, and wellbeing through their own cultural and generational perspectives.

The third study, undertaken in 2016, investigated *Greek Dancing as an Aspect of Cultural Identity and Wellbeing*. This qualitative study involved 19 participants from the Manasis School of Greek Dance and Culture in Melbourne, Australia (see Table Three for participant demographics). The research explored the significance of Greek dancing as a means of cultural expression, identity maintenance, community connection, and wellbeing among members of the Greek diaspora living in Australia.

Table 1. *Participant Demographics from Study One: ‘Cultural Understanding of Health and Adjustment to Cardiovascular Disease among the Greek elderly’*

Age [at the time of interview]>60	Gender 5 (male) 8 (female)	Male (Participants 2,3,5,12,13)	Female (Participants 1,4, 6,7,8,9,10,11)
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Table 2. *Participant Demographics from Study Two: ‘Health Beliefs and Practices in Three Generations of Greek Australian Women in Melbourne’*

All female Participants	Immigrant generation	1 st generation	2 nd generation
Age [at the time of interview]	>58 - <78	>37-<50	>16 -<18
Years in Australia	>39 - <56	Australian born	Australian born

Table 3. *Participant Demographics from Study Three: ‘Greek dancing as an aspect of cultural identity and wellbeing’*

Age [at the time of interview] >18	Gender Male Participants 4 Female Participants 15	Country of Birth - Greece Participants 1,2,12,13,16	Country of Birth – Australia Participants 3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,14,15,17,18,19
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Will start with some historical information as a background to the topic.

Background

Greek migration to Australia dates back to the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with larger waves of migration occurring following World War II and the Greek Civil War. By the mid-twentieth century, many Greek migrants had settled permanently in Australia, often referring to it as their “second homeland” (δεύτερη πατρίδα). For many, Australia represented a place of opportunity, stability, and the possibility of a better future for themselves and their families.

A significant increase in Greek migration occurred following the Assisted Passage Agreement signed between the Greek and Australian governments in 1952, which enabled large numbers of Greek migrants to settle in Australia. As a result, Melbourne became home to one of the largest Greek populations outside Greece, a distinction it continues to maintain today.

Despite the opportunities available in Australia, the migration experience was often challenging. Many migrants experienced language barriers, separation from family and friends, social isolation, and difficulties adjusting to a new cultural and social environment. Adapting to Australian society required considerable psychological, social, and cultural adjustment.

Australia has long promoted multiculturalism and the provision of culturally appropriate healthcare and social services. This commitment is reflected within the Australian healthcare system, including Medicare, which recognises the importance of culturally responsive service provision for diverse migrant communities (Department of Human Services, 2012).

Methodology, Data Collection and Early Findings

It is important to note that formal ethics approval was not required for this stage of the study because all data collected were publicly available online and intended by users for public consumption. The study utilised publicly accessible discussions posted on Reddit, an online social media platform, and no private or restricted-access material was included. Furthermore, no direct interaction with participants occurred, and no additional personal data beyond what was publicly available online was collected or analysed.

Data collection was conducted online via Reddit over a six-month period between August 2025 and January 2026. The study focused on posts published within the previous 12 months, with data collected twice monthly throughout the research period.

Preliminary findings from the first three months of data collection (August 2025 – October 2025) indicated that social media platforms such as Reddit function as important spaces for discussions relating to diasporic identity and migration experiences. Common topics included Greek migration, life in diaspora, religion, food, sport, cultural identity, and community belonging. In addition, many users sought practical advice regarding issues such as Greek citizenship by descent, migration between Australia and Greece, and processes associated with obtaining Greek citizenship.

A Review of Literature¹

While the Greek community has largely integrated into Australian society, Greek migrants and their Australian-born descendants have maintained a strong cultural identity characterised by enduring connections to their ancestral homeland, the Greek language, and the Greek Orthodox faith (Tamis, 2005). Religion and spirituality, in particular, have functioned as important sources of emotional support, identity continuity, and resilience for both first-generation migrants and subsequent generations of Greek Australians (Avgoulas & Fanany, 2015; 2024).

Many Greek migrants who arrived in Australia during the post-war migration period had firsthand experiences of war, occupation, and political instability. Greece experienced occupation by German and Italian forces during World War II, followed by the Greek Civil War, both of which contributed significantly to social disruption and economic hardship. For many migrants, migration to Australia was initially perceived as temporary, with the intention of eventually returning to Greece after achieving financial stability and establishing a better future for their families (Price, 2000). However, for the majority, permanent return migration did not occur, and Australia gradually became home.

This experience often produced complex and sometimes conflicting emotions among members of the migrant generation. Many participants expressed nostalgia and sadness associated with their inability to return permanently to Greece, while simultaneously acknowledging the opportunities and stability they experienced in Australia. Some participants reflected positively on their migration experience, describing Australia as a country that provided security, opportunity, and improved living conditions. Others compared their circumstances favourably to those of relatives who remained in Greece, particularly during periods of economic instability.

For both the migrant generation and their descendants, Australia became a “second homeland” (δεύτερη πατρίδα), and many individuals gradually became acculturated into the English-speaking Australian context. Most migrants arrived with limited financial resources, minimal formal education, and predominantly rural backgrounds. Despite these challenges, they brought with them strong cultural traditions, values, beliefs, and social practices that they sought to preserve and transmit to future generations as essential aspects of their “Greekness” (Tamis, 2005).

The early years of settlement in Australia were often characterised by social, linguistic, and emotional challenges. However, traditional cultural values, family structures, and religious faith functioned as important sources of resilience and psychological support during this period of adjustment. Compared with some other migrant communities in multicultural Australia, the Greek community has demonstrated a particularly strong attachment to homeland, culture, and collective identity, which has contributed to a strong sense of belonging and continuity within diaspora (Kaloudis, 2006).

¹As noted previously and further highlighted by this footnote, this paper is a review of literature of the topic quotes that have been included in this paper are from previous research from 2011-2016 and not from this current study as this data was collected in 2025 and 2026. The reason for its inclusion was to highlight further the literature review of this paper with real life examples and via the use of relevant quotes.

Culture plays a significant role in shaping how individuals and communities understand health, illness, wellbeing, and social experience. The experiences of migrant communities and the relationship between cultural identity and wellbeing have been widely discussed within migration and cultural psychology literature (Lopez-Class et al., 2011; Unger & Schwartz, 2012). Migration is often a life-changing experience not only for migrants themselves but also for future generations. The process of migration and acculturation may contribute to stress, anxiety, and psychological vulnerability, particularly during periods of social adjustment and cultural transition (Pumariega et al., 2005). At the same time, the experience of migration varies significantly across individuals depending on social, cultural, historical, and personal factors. Previous research has also demonstrated important relationships between migration, acculturation, and health outcomes among migrant populations (Miranda et al., 2011; Organista et al., 2003; Salant & Lauderdale, 2003).

Some of the data discussed in this review relates specifically to the health and wellbeing of older Greek Australian women living in Melbourne. These findings derive from several in-depth qualitative studies conducted within the Greek Australian community between 2011 and 2016. Ethical approval was obtained where required, and all identifying information was removed to protect participant confidentiality. Fictional names were also used throughout the research process.

The studies aimed to document and better understand the experiences of migration, settlement, acculturation, and ageing among members of the original migrant generation who had lived in Australia for several decades. An autoethnographic and narrative approach was adopted to allow participants to describe their experiences and perceptions in their own words, either in Greek or English. To further explore intergenerational acculturation and identity, interviews were also conducted with children and grandchildren of the migrant generation. In total, 16 family groups participated in the study, comprising 48 participants across three generations.

The findings discussed below primarily reflect the perspectives of the immigrant generation. Interviews explored participants' experiences of migration, identity, health, family life, religion, and cultural continuity. The resulting narratives were analysed using ethnographic and narrative approaches. As the first author is a member of the Greek Australian community, the research was conducted from both insider and outsider perspectives, facilitating culturally informed engagement with participants and allowing interviews to be conducted in Greek where necessary.

The discussion is organised into four thematic areas: Health and Wellbeing in Greece before Migration; Greece after Migration; Health and Wellbeing in Greece Compared to Australia; and Recreating Greekness in Australia. Participant quotations are included to provide insight into lived experiences and personal interpretations of migration, identity, and wellbeing.

Despite residing in Australia for many years, many participants remained more comfortable communicating in Greek than in English. This reflects a broader pattern observed within the Greek Australian migrant generation, which largely maintained a Greek-speaking identity (Tamis, 2005). In contrast, the first and second Australian-born generations are primarily native speakers of English, and there is evidence suggesting a gradual decline in Greek language proficiency among younger generations.

Language plays an important role in identity formation, acculturation, and cultural continuity (Feuerverger, 1989; Fishman, 1977; Giles & Johnson, 1981; Li, 1995). Beyond communication, language functions as an expression of ethnicity, belonging, and cultural identity. For migrant populations, language proficiency may also influence wellbeing and access to healthcare, particularly when communication barriers affect the ability to seek support and engage effectively with health services (Unger & Schwartz, 2012).

Although participants generally preferred speaking Greek, many demonstrated frequent code-switching between Greek and English, often incorporating English loan words into everyday conversation. These included terms associated with Australian social life, healthcare, technology, and contemporary culture. Some participants expressed surprise and disappointment when made aware of the extent to which English words had become embedded in their speech, occasionally noting that they had forgotten corresponding Greek terms. This reflects both the significance of language maintenance within the migrant generation and the ongoing influence of the English-speaking Australian environment.

Overall, many older participants reported limited English proficiency and relied heavily on children and grandchildren when communicating within the broader Australian context, particularly in healthcare settings. Limited formal education and language barriers often contributed to reliance on traditional knowledge systems and family support in matters relating to health and wellbeing.

Health and Wellbeing in Greece before Migration

Participants in previous studies frequently perceived Greece prior to migration as a healthier and more fulfilling environment than Australia, with homeland itself often viewed as an important component of emotional wellbeing and identity. Similar perceptions were also evident among younger generations who had never lived in Greece but had developed idealised understandings of their ancestral homeland through stories and experiences shared by parents and grandparents. Greece was often imagined as a place characterised by simplicity, strong social relationships, healthier lifestyles, and greater overall wellbeing.

Interestingly, these positive perceptions of Greece coexisted alongside recognition that many members of the migrant generation had left Greece due to economic hardship, social instability, and limited opportunities. For many participants, migration represented both loss and opportunity. It is also important to acknowledge that many migrants left Greece at a relatively young age, and their recollections of homeland were often shaped by childhood memories rather than adult experiences associated with work, family responsibilities, or financial pressures. One participant reflected on this by stating, “We were strong kids then; the lifestyle was different then.”

Medicine and healthcare have a long history within Greek society dating back to Hippocrates, and the medical profession has traditionally been highly respected. However, participants frequently described healthcare in rural Greece during their youth as limited and inaccessible. Some participants recalled that medical knowledge and resources were restricted, particularly in isolated villages. One participant

explained, “There were doctors, but they did not know the medication.” Others recalled only seeking medical assistance in cases of serious illness, while some reported rarely or never visiting a doctor during childhood. One participant described the challenges associated with accessing healthcare in rural Greece:

“In Greece in those years, there was only one doctor for many villages and someone had to go personally to call the doctor, as there were no phones. The doctor would come on a donkey; it was very difficult.”

Participants also described significant differences between traditional approaches to illness management in Greece and the more formalised healthcare system they later encountered in Australia. During their childhood in Greece, home remedies, herbal treatments, and traditional healing practices were commonly used, particularly in rural communities where access to medical services was limited. Several participants recalled specific practices associated with illness management. One participant stated, “My mother would rub me with petrol and give me warm drinks.” Another recalled being taken to the seaside during an episode of whooping cough after a doctor recommended “fresh air.” A participant who experienced tonsillitis described how heated compresses made from hay-like materials were applied to reduce infection because medical care was difficult to access. Others recalled practices such as bed rest, rubbing therapies, and cupping being commonly used within the household context.

Overall, participants frequently associated Greece with healthier living conditions and attributed this perception to lifestyle, diet, and environmental factors. Many believed that food in Greece during their childhood was fresher, less processed, and consumed in moderation. One participant explained:

“When I was a child in Greece, we ate meat only once a week, and it was fresh. We didn’t have refrigerators. That’s why there weren’t so many illnesses.”

Others associated health with the natural environment and lower levels of pollution and industrialisation. One participant commented, “We were lucky that there were no infections then as the atmosphere was clean.”

The contrast participants drew between Greece and Australia in relation to health and wellbeing may also reflect broader psychological and generational factors. As older adults, participants possessed greater awareness of illness, ageing, and chronic disease than they had during childhood in Greece. Since many significant health experiences occurred after settlement in Australia, participants may have associated Australia more strongly with illness simply because it was the setting in which ageing and health decline occurred. In addition, participants were influenced by contemporary public discussions surrounding health, stress, pollution, and lifestyle factors within Australia, including information circulated through both mainstream and Greek-language media. These perceptions were further shaped by the views and experiences of younger generations living within the broader Australian social context.

Greece after Migration

When reflecting on contemporary Greece, many participants expressed the view that both the country and its people had changed significantly since the time they migrated. Most participants had returned to Greece on several occasions and were therefore able to compare their memories of homeland with present-day realities. For many, these visits evoked mixed emotions characterised by nostalgia, sadness, cultural disconnection, and a sense of loss.

One participant described her experience by stating:

Greece has changed. When I was there, I would close my eyes and remember the past, the Greece I remembered. Everything has changed, and this saddens me. The people who live there are now different; I did not find my friends, everything has changed.

Others expressed concern regarding changes in social values and lifestyle practices in Greece. One participant commented, "Greece has changed, the way of life is very different, young people have no respect." Another contrasted life in Greece with Australia, explaining:

Here we work, and I have taught my children this as well. There, the young people just want to have a good time. Here we have a better life.

Participants frequently noted differences between Greek and Australian social values, particularly in relation to work ethic, family life, religion, and everyday routines. At the same time, many became increasingly aware that they themselves had also changed through decades of residence in Australia. Having migrated at a relatively young age, many participants had not personally experienced the major political, economic, and cultural transformations that occurred in Greece and Europe during the latter half of the twentieth century, including changes associated with European Union membership and globalisation.

Although participants often perceived themselves as culturally unchanged, their narratives suggested that prolonged residence in Australia had significantly influenced their attitudes, behaviours, and identities. Many described experiences of being perceived as "Australian" by individuals in Greece, which contributed to feelings of displacement and not fully belonging in either country. Some participants reported experiencing suspicion or resentment from people in Greece upon returning. One participant recalled:

[It was] terrible, my own father and brother did not speak to me. The people there changed. They would say, 'The Australians have come to take our farmland.'

Another participant reflected more broadly on this cultural divide, stating, "They disliked us and we them." Others expressed concerns associated with economic migration and employment, noting that increasing migration from Greece to Australia might affect opportunities for younger Australian-born generations.

Participants also discussed broader social and cultural changes they observed in Greece. These included perceived changes in family life, religious participation, food practices, and language use. Several participants commented that people in Greece no longer maintained the same traditional practices they remembered from childhood. One participant remarked, “They don’t cook, they go out,” while another observed, “They don’t even go to church. The grandmothers don’t even go. I go to church every Sunday.”

Changes in language use were also frequently discussed. Participants expressed surprise at the increasing incorporation of English words and expressions into contemporary Greek language use in Greece. One participant noted:

I hear on television shows from Greece that some Greek words are used wrong,

adding that the English word “okay” was now commonly used in everyday conversation.

Despite recognising these social and cultural changes, participants continued to express strong emotional attachment to Greece and the villages or regions in which they were born. Feelings of nostalgia and longing for homeland remained prominent throughout their narratives. One participant explained:

I do feel a pull to go back. I was born there, my village, but when I went everything was different, nothing was the same as the way I left it.

Another participant described wanting to bring soil from Greece back to Australia during one of her return visits but ultimately deciding against it because she believed the soil belonged to Greece itself.

The emotional complexity associated with maintaining connections to both Greece and Australia was often described in terms of living between “two homelands.” One participant explained that when visiting Greece she missed her family in Australia, yet once she returned to Australia she missed Greece. She reflected:

That’s what it’s like to have two homelands.

Another participant described this emotional tension by stating:

It’s our πατρίδα (‘patrida’ homeland), my family is there. Here I feel and have always felt like someone who is free but a prisoner.

These narratives highlight an important psychological dimension of migration and diaspora: the difficulty of reconciling memories of homeland with the realities of long-term settlement in another country. Participants frequently experienced tension between the idealised Greece preserved in memory and the contemporary Greece they encountered during return visits. At the same time, many were unaware of the extent to which their own identities, values, and worldviews had shifted through the process of acculturation within Australian society.

These changes were evident not only in visible aspects of culture, such as language use and social practices, but also in attitudes toward work, religion, family

life, and everyday behaviour. Over time, Greek culture within Australia developed along a distinct trajectory shaped by migration, memory, and adaptation to the Australian context.

As a result, Greek identity within the Australian diaspora came to reflect the values, memories, and cultural understandings of the migrant generation rather than contemporary Greek society itself. In contrast, Greece continued to evolve socially, politically, and culturally within the broader European context. Consequently, Greek Australians often maintained a comparatively stable or nostalgic understanding of Greek identity while simultaneously becoming increasingly integrated into the English-speaking Australian mainstream.

This process reflects the complex and often unconscious nature of acculturation within migrant communities, whereby cultural continuity and adaptation occur simultaneously across generations.

Health and Wellbeing in Greece compared to Australia

Participants generally perceived healthcare services in Australia as superior to those available in Greece during their youth, particularly in relation to access to medical treatment, healthcare infrastructure, and financial security associated with illness. However, despite recognising the advantages of the Australian healthcare system, many participants believed that emotional wellbeing and quality of life were better in Greece.

One participant reflected on the contrast between the two countries by stating:

The comfort is that, as difficult as things may be, you can overcome them financially here [in Australia]. When my children were ill, I would take them to the doctor and buy the medication. There [in Greece], no. Our parents found it very difficult. My siblings were ill there, and they died. Why did they die? There was no medication, the doctors were not careful. Those years were difficult.

Another participant commented simply, “It’s better here, the healthcare,” while another observed, “Here people mainly go to doctors,” highlighting the greater reliance on formal medical care within the Australian context.

At the same time, several participants believed that although healthcare systems and medical knowledge were more advanced in Australia, people in Greece were healthier overall. This perception was closely associated with participants’ views of lifestyle, diet, social relationships, and stress. Many participants described life in Greece as slower, simpler, and emotionally more fulfilling than life in Australia.

One participant explained:

The way of life is very different in Australia compared to Greece. It’s beautiful in Greece. You feel wonderful in Greece. Our life changed in Australia. You go to work, you come home, and then you go to work again.

Another participant expressed similar sentiments regarding stress and work pressures:

Here we work very hard. I don't understand how over there they don't have the anxiety we do. Things are harder now because they don't have work, but you go there and the shops and cafés are full.

Participants frequently associated Greece with lower levels of stress and stronger enjoyment of daily life despite economic hardship. One participant reflected:

They don't have money, but they have a good time.

She then recalled childhood memories of life in Greece:

I remember, as a child, I would go to the garden. I would take an onion with some bread and eat. But I would not stress. I would go to the fields for work and come home singing in the evening.

Others acknowledged that contemporary Greece had changed significantly, particularly following economic difficulties and financial crisis. One participant noted, "Things were better before the crisis. The way of life was better."

Despite their positive perceptions of lifestyle in Greece, participants also expressed favourable views regarding life in Australia and recognised the ways in which they had adapted to Australian society. Several participants acknowledged adopting healthier routines, dietary habits, and lifestyle practices associated with life in Australia. One participant stated:

I try to keep my rules. I have breakfast, a sandwich for lunch or tuna with salad. We have learnt a different way here.

Others reflected positively on family relationships and social support within the Australian context. One participant commented:

They live better in Greece, but the families are not close. We are more connected to our families here.

Another participant recognised the benefits of adaptation and acculturation, explaining:

We have adopted an Australian lifestyle that I think works well.

These narratives illustrate the complex and often contradictory ways in which migrants evaluate health, wellbeing, and quality of life across cultural contexts. Participants consistently contrasted Greece and Australia in terms of healthcare systems, emotional wellbeing, stress, family relationships, and lifestyle. At the same time, their reflections demonstrate the extent to which they had become integrated into Australian society, often without fully recognising these changes themselves.

Overall, participants acknowledged that migration to Australia provided significant opportunities, improved healthcare access, economic stability, and better futures for their children and grandchildren. Nevertheless, feelings of loss, nostalgia,

and emotional attachment to Greece remained central aspects of their experiences. These findings reflect a broader dilemma commonly associated with migration experiences: although migration may lead to social and economic advancement, these gains are often accompanied by emotional, cultural, and psychological losses that may never be fully reconciled.

Recreating Greekness in Australia

Several important factors shape the experiences of Greek Australians, particularly religion, family, language, and community belonging. Religion, especially the Greek Orthodox faith, functions not only as a spiritual framework but also as an important cultural and social institution through which individuals interpret life experiences and maintain continuity with their cultural heritage. Family likewise occupies a central role within Greek culture, influencing identity formation, intergenerational relationships, and social support structures.

The similarities in values and beliefs between the migrant generation and their children and grandchildren demonstrate the strong commitment of older Greek Australians to preserving and transmitting cultural traditions to younger generations. This commitment has contributed to the continued support of Greek language schools, cultural organisations, churches, and community activities that reinforce Greek identity among younger Australian-born generations (Avgoulas & Fanany, 2013; Tami, 2005). As a result, many second- and third-generation Greek Australians continue to identify strongly with their Greek cultural heritage despite being fully integrated into Australian society.

Among older members of the community, devotion to the traditions and rituals of the Greek Orthodox Church remains particularly strong. Religious rituals associated with birth, marriage, illness, and death continue to shape individual and collective experiences and provide emotional comfort and meaning during times of uncertainty and hardship. One participant reflected on the role of religion during illness by stating:

Religious rituals are good, especially during illness, as they help us emotionally. They do not take away illness, but they give us courage and strength.

Interestingly, religious belief and practice also remain significant among many younger Greek Australians despite broader secularisation trends within Australian society (Avgoulas & Fanany, 2015). For younger generations, religion often functions not only as a spiritual system but also as an important connection to family history, cultural identity, and shared community experience.

One younger participant whose grandmother had taken part in the study described an intense personal experience that she interpreted through a religious and spiritual framework. The participant described episodes of fear, paralysis, and distress occurring during the night, which she associated with spiritual forces and interpreted within the context of religious belief. Rather than seeking psychological or medical explanations, she and her family turned to the church and sought guidance from a priest. Following prayer and religious intervention, the participant reported that the experiences ceased.

While this experience may be interpreted differently within psychological, spiritual, or cultural frameworks, it is significant in demonstrating the extent to which religious belief systems continue to shape meaning-making processes within the Greek Australian community. Both the participant and her family understood the experience through a culturally and religiously informed lens and responded accordingly by seeking support from the church rather than from formal mental health services.

This example also illustrates the persistence of cultural beliefs, traditions, and interpretive frameworks transmitted across generations within migrant communities. It suggests that religion and spirituality continue to function as important mechanisms of coping, resilience, and identity formation among Greek Australians.

Participants in the study described a wide range of emotions associated with migration and settlement in Australia, including sadness, fear, loneliness, anxiety, and homesickness. Difficulties associated with language barriers, cultural adjustment, separation from family, and adapting to unfamiliar social environments were frequently recalled.

One participant reflected emotionally on leaving Greece:

They took me to Athens, Piraeus, and when the time came to leave... Oh God, if I knew how to swim and I was not afraid of death, I would have jumped. That's how much leaving impacted me.

Another participant described the challenges associated with migration and language barriers:

We came here without knowing the language, without knowing anyone. It was challenging for us. The first years there was a lot of sadness. We were afraid, and we would hide.

At the same time, many participants also reflected positively on the resilience and adaptability developed through migration experiences. One participant concluded, "Australia made us people," reflecting the belief that migration and settlement fostered independence, resilience, and personal growth.

Participants were also highly aware of the relationship between migration and health, including both physical and psychological wellbeing. Several participants associated migration experiences with stress-related illness, anxiety, and emotional strain. One participant stated:

Migration impacted my health. I had a nervous breakdown.

Others connected their health difficulties more broadly to the emotional and psychological burdens associated with migration and settlement. Religious faith frequently emerged as an important coping mechanism during these periods of hardship. One participant explained:

Everything was very difficult. I was alone. I didn't know anyone, and I would pray and ask for the Virgin Mary's help.

For many participants, migration to Australia was initially viewed as temporary. Most migrants arrived with the intention of eventually returning to Greece after establishing financial stability. This expectation strongly influenced their commitment to preserving Greek language, traditions, religion, and cultural identity within the Australian context. One participant explained:

We all had the dream of staying in Australia for a few years only and returning to Greece.

However, permanent return migration rarely occurred. Participants recognised that, over time, they had adapted to Australian society in ways that complicated the possibility of fully reintegrating into life in Greece. One participant reflected:

Everything changed from the minute we got here. Life changed. We did what the Australians do. We kept the Greek language, but our manners changed.

The difficulties associated with return migration and cultural readjustment have been well documented within migration literature (Christou, 2001; Christou, 2006; King & Christou, 2015). These experiences demonstrate the long-term psychological and emotional effects of acculturation and identity transformation within migrant populations.

Despite the many challenges associated with migration and settlement, the Greek Australian community has demonstrated considerable resilience and social integration across generations. Migration significantly shaped participants' understandings of health, wellbeing, identity, and belonging. While participants frequently acknowledged the social and economic opportunities available in Australia, many continued to experience emotional attachment to Greece and nostalgia for the homeland they remembered from childhood.

Participants often contrasted the emotional and psychological dimensions of wellbeing in Greece with the pressures and demands associated with Australian life. This distinction highlights the importance of considering both physical and psychological dimensions of health within migration experiences, particularly among ageing migrant populations.

Communication and language barriers also emerged as important aspects of migrant wellbeing and social adaptation. One participant recalled an experience from the 1950s when she attempted to purchase eggs from a store despite not speaking English. Unable to communicate verbally, she imitated the sound of a chicken and used hand gestures to indicate eggs. This example illustrates the challenges faced by early migrants as well as their resilience and adaptability in navigating unfamiliar environments.

Over time, Greek migrants established strong and interconnected communities throughout Melbourne. Greek cafés (καφενείο), milk bars, churches, and local businesses became important gathering places that fostered social connection and cultural continuity (Alexakis & Janiszewski, 2016). Today, suburbs such as Oakleigh continue to function as important centres of Greek cultural life and are frequently referred to as "Little Athens" due to their concentration of Greek businesses, restaurants, cafés, and community organisations (Avgoulas & Fanany, 2020).

The development of the Greek Australian community was strongly influenced by post-war migration policies and the gradual establishment of stable social and cultural institutions. By the mid-1970s, newly arrived migrants were often able to settle within already established Greek communities that provided social support, employment opportunities, religious institutions, and opportunities for cultural maintenance (Clyne, 2011; Tamis, 2005).

These community structures have played an important role in supporting wellbeing, identity maintenance, and resilience among Greek Australians. Religion, in particular, has continued to function as a source of emotional support, meaning-making, and social cohesion across generations. Beliefs relating to fate, God's will, and religious responsibility frequently shaped attitudes toward health, illness, and everyday life (Avgoulas & Fanany, 2012; 2013; 2015; 2017).

The strong emphasis on social relationships and community belonging within the Greek Australian diaspora reflects broader discussions within social network theory and migration research regarding the importance of collective identity and social support in shaping behaviour, wellbeing, and adaptation (Jackson, 2011). Similarly, contemporary forms of communication and online social networks increasingly provide additional spaces for cultural maintenance, identity negotiation, and community connection within diasporic populations (D'Andrea et al., 2010).

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Using Formative Assessment to Improve Student Achievement in Reading: Reflections from the Field

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The ability to read by the completion of the fourth grade is essential for a student's future academic and social success. With only thirty-four percent (34%) of fourth grade students reading on grade level, the importance of improving the instruction of reading cannot be overstated. The purpose of this study was to examine teacher's perceptions of the efficacy of formative assessment as a means of improving student's reading performance. The study utilized a qualitative methodology to interview, record, code, and analyze responses to eight open-ended questions relating to the efficacy of formative assessment. Participants included fourteen (14) language arts, English as a second language (ESL) teachers from an urban predominately Hispanic Title I public elementary school, grades kindergarten through sixth, in a large metropolitan city in North Texas. Findings identified nine major themes ranging from the identification of student's levels of performance to using formative assessment to empower higher levels of student achievement. The findings are considered appropriate to guide future practice and research.

Keywords: *formative assessment, reading instruction, efficacy, improvement themes*

Introduction

Many students leave elementary school without knowing how to read. This occurs even though reading is essential in ensuring the student's future academic and social success (Griffin & Murtagh, 2015). Schechter et al. (2015) revealed that approximately only 34% of fourth grade students read on grade level. Students who are unable to read proficiently by fourth grade are less likely to graduate from high school. When students do not possess the basic skills needed to read, their comprehension and communication skills are diminished (Leu & Maykel, 2016).

Many countries have implemented high stakes testing in the form of summative assessments which have little impact on student learning. Summative assessment, known as *assessment of learning*, differs from formative assessment which is referred to as *assessment for learning* (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). Assessment of learning or summative assessment occurs when a test is administered and scored to judge a student's achievement at mastering the learning target. Assessment for learning or formative assessment occurs when student responses modify instruction, encompasses the students' understanding, and are used to establish future learning goals (Black & William, 1998a).

Research has revealed formative assessments, when used correctly, can positively impact student learning (Black & William, 1998a). Teachers employing formative assessment practices throughout a unit of study enable intervention strategies needed

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for objective mastery to be implemented. Stiggins and Chappius (2005) assert that “assessments have to help teachers accurately diagnose student needs, track and enhance student growth toward standards, motivate students to strive for academic excellence, and verify student mastery of required standards” (p.14). Black and Wiliam (1998b) contended that teachers do not utilize formative assessments consistently because the instructional power and benefit to improve student outcome have not been fully conceptualized. The incomplete utilization of formative assessment propagates ineffective usage of the evaluation tool.

The present study examined kindergarten through sixth grade elementary English language arts teachers’ perceptions of formative assessments as a tool to assess reading, the role formative assessment plays in lesson planning and instruction, and teacher’s perceptions as to whether formative assessments lead to improved student learning. The study was conducted in a Title I, predominantly Hispanic elementary (kindergarten through sixth grade) school in a large metropolitan city in North Texas.

Theoretical Background

The current study is framed by the constructivist theory of social development and on both Piaget and Vygotsky’s work on social learning theory, zone of proximal development, and the more knowledgeable other. Additionally, assessment types and usage, descriptive feedback, and collaboration support the framework. The following narrative address each of these topics.

Constructivist Theory of Social Development

The constructivist learning theory is founded historically on the work of several pioneers in the field of educational psychology including but not limited to Piaget and Vygotsky (Bada, 2015). The constructivist theory is formed on the premise that learning is an active process which occurs as students construct new learning by building upon previously learned information while providing meaning through their learning experiences (Bada, 2015).

Vygotsky added to the understanding of social development theory by highlighting three key themes: 1) the learner’s collaboration with others, 2) individual possession of a deeper knowledge of the concept, and 3) the difference between what a learner can do independently versus with assistance (Vygotsky, 1978). Taking into consideration the importance of interaction and collaboration between the teacher and students and between students and peers, the social learning theory as outlined by Vygotsky (Popham, 2013) forms the foundation for this study. Vygotsky (1978) stressed that social learning theory provides the basis for collaborations between teacher, student, and peers. Vygotsky viewed such collaboration as the catalyst for student learning and understanding concepts coming from interaction with one another rather than just by teacher-centered lessons. Likewise, Zhou and Brown (2015) emphasized Vygotsky’s postulation that social interaction precedes learning as they maintained that students learn with the help of others.

Vygotsky stressed that another important component of cognitive development is the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which is defined as what a student can do with assistance of someone and not independently (Zhou & Brown, 2015). Teachers can use the formative assessment process to determine a students' ZPD, establish attainable goals, and move students from working independently to working interdependently which increases learning capacity (Heritage & Chang, 2012; Moss & Brookhart, 2019). Moore, (2011) Vygotsky emphasized that the most explicit instruction should be given in the ZPD (Moore, 2011). The more interaction and guidance children receive when they are learning a new skill or concept, the greater the attainment of the concept being taught (Vygotsky, 1978).

Assessment

Assessment is a necessary part of the education process (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). As a link between teaching and learning, assessment is the way to determine if the applied instructional approaches resulted in students meeting the targeted learning objectives (Wiliam, 2013). The central purpose of all assessment is to provide data to help educators make decisions regarding students' progress (Moss & Brookhart, 2019). Beginning in the 1950s, a summative style of standardized testing became a regular part of district and statewide assessment practices in education throughout the United States (Stiggins & Chappius, 2005).

Formative Assessment

Formative assessment, for this study, was defined as a process teachers' use throughout the instructional period to guide their teaching and to gauge student progress toward learning targets (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Popham, 2013). Research has emphasized formative assessment as a continuing process that is comprised of the teacher using varying methods of data collection throughout instruction (Black & William, 1998a; Curry, Mwavita, Holter, & Harris, 2016). The social development theory supports the concept that meaningful formative assessment occurs when the teacher fully implements formative assessment strategies. (Black & Wiliam, 2009; Clark, 2012).

Benjamin Bloom contributed greatly to the theory of formative assessment when the mastery of learning concepts was linked to the terms, formative and summative evaluation. Bloom et al. (1971) suggested that to improve achievement and close achievement gaps, differentiated instruction is needed. Differentiation can be accomplished by conducting ongoing formative assessments to determine student's level of understanding, using that knowledge to guide instruction and target learning gaps thus enabling students to more effectively learn. Bloom et al. (1971) further asserted that explicit feedback, with teachers correcting misconceptions and misunderstandings, is important and occurs as a result of ongoing formative assessment utilization.

The landmark research study, *Inside the Black Box*, conducted by Black and Wiliam (1998a) found that the efficient use of formative assessment can have a significant impact on teacher practice, on student learning, and on closing the

achievement gap between student populations. Further, the results showed formative assessments have the greatest impact on the achievement of students identified as struggling or low achieving (Black & Wiliam, 1998a).

Stiggins and Dufour (2009) postulated that formative assessments are utilized by teachers and schools in order to “identify student understanding, clarifying what comes next in the learning, trigger and become part of an effective system of intervention for struggling students” (p. 640). Additionally, formative assessments have the power to “inform and improve the instructional practice of individual teachers or teams, help students track their own progress toward attainment of standards, [and] motivate students by building confidence in themselves as learners” (p. 640). Stiggins and Dufour (2009) also asserted that formative assessments can be catalysts for continuous improvement for students and schools. Perera-Diltz and Moe (2014) stated the reason for applying formative assessment is to actively engage students in the learning process and to foster growth by using various assessment strategies. The implementation of the assessment is only the beginning of formative assessment process (Dixson & Worrell, 2016). The analysis and use of collected assessment data make the process formative.

Formative Assessment and Instruction

Formative assessment is an ongoing planning process that teachers implement during instruction to gather information to improve student performance (Hattie (2012) as cited in Duckor et al., 2018; Popham, 2013). Wiliam (2013) identified three major processes central to the implementation of formative assessment: 1) identification of learners' current skill, 2) identification of target, and 3) steps the learner needs to reach the targeted skill. The results of formative assessment are utilized when teachers change their instructional strategies, the instructional program, or both to meet student needs (Brink, 2017). It is vital that as teachers plan instruction, multiple formative assessment strategies are utilized to determine the amount of student mastery of concepts and provide guidance for instructional adjustment (Blythe, 2015). Formative assessment used correctly guides instruction but is not used for student grade evaluation (Cizek et al., 2019). Popham (2014) indicated that when teachers use formative assessment to adjust instruction, substantive gains in student achievement can occur. Additionally, teachers can use the information obtained through formative assessment to set new and more challenging learning targets to increase achievement levels, and to extend learning for students that have mastered the learning objectives (Wilson & Mackie, 2018). Brookhart (2011) found that feedback has a greater impact on achievement when it is focused on the student's performance or process on a task.

Student Engagement

Black and Wiliam (1998b) found that students should be active participants in the formative assessment process. As previous stated, the constructivist theory states that learning occurs as students are actively engaged in learning activities. It is essential that students are aware of learning expectations and the target established to achieve

mastery. When student participate in the formative assessment process, they are more likely to take ownership of their own learning by embracing the strengths and weaknesses discovered through an analysis of data and targeting areas for improvement. Students can use formative assessment results to reflect on their current levels of performance, to set the new learning goals and to monitor their progress.

Feedback

Feedback is an essential component of the formative assessment process (Heritage & Heritage, 2013). “Feedback provides a vehicle for integrating all components of formative instructional practices...” (Chan et al., 2014). When teachers provide feedback, research indicates that student learning significantly increases and learning gaps at all grade levels significantly decrease (Sekulich, 2020). When formative feedback is shared, the learner’s thinking is impacted thus improving learning (Shute, 2008). “Not all feedback is equally effective. Feedback is effective only when it produces the desired outcome, that is, when students are able to move their own learning forward” (Chan et al., 2014, p. 97). Feedback that is “timely, specific, addressable, ongoing and content-rich” is essential (Duckor, 2014, p. 28). Fisher and Frey (2015) stated that “checking for understanding is part of a formative assessment system in which teachers identify learning goals, provide students feedback, and then plan instruction based on students’ error and misconception” (p. 2).

Feedback should be reciprocal. Both Hattie (2012) and Tovani (2012) suggested that the most powerful feedback is from student to teacher. Teachers can better assist students if learning is viewed from the student’s perspective (Tovani, 2012). The value of feedback as part of the formative assessment process is undeniable.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose the current study was to examine teachers’ perceptions of formative assessments as a tool to assess reading, the role formative assessments play in lesson planning and instruction, and whether formative assessments lead to improvement of student learning. Fourteen language arts teachers in a North Texas Title I elementary school were interviewed using structured open-ended questions (Appendix). The analysis of results led to reflections on the participants perceptions of formative assessment as related to reading instruction.

Method

A qualitative research approach was utilized to examine teachers' perception in using formative assessments in elementary reading classes. A purposeful sampling of only language arts teachers was employed. The researcher used open-ended interview questions which allowed participants to share thoughts, beliefs, practices, and experiences about formative assessment. A case study research design was utilized as it allowed the researcher to study perceptions among a group of elementary language arts reading teachers. Yin (2015 & 2017) proposed the use the case study method when the researcher had little to no effect on the people or conditions being studied. Additionally, Creswell and Plano Clark (2011) indicated that case studies allow the researcher to gain in-dept understanding of a phenomenon with a small sample of participants.

Participants

The study was conducted in a traditional, urban predominantly Hispanic Title I public elementary school, grades kindergarten through sixth grade, in a large metropolitan city in North Texas. Participants included one male and thirteen females, all who taught either English as a second language (ESL) or bilingual language arts classes. Of the participants, eight were Hispanic, three were Anglo, two were African American and one was Asian. The average age of the participants was forty-two and the average teaching experience was eleven and one-half years, with a range from one year to twenty-four years.

Data Collection

Data were collected through individual interviews using eight specific, targeted open-ended questions (Appendix). Prior to collecting data, the researcher received approval of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) which ensured that implementation of the study as designed protected the rights and welfare of human subjects and that no harm would occur as a result of participating in the study. All potential participants were assured that participation was voluntary and that all identifying information would be removed. Additionally, the information provided would only be used for this specific study and would then be destroyed. All potential study participants were provided an overview of the study designed for implementation and invited to participate should they so desire. Each teacher that accepted the invitation to participate was provided with a research study package via their personal email which included a letter of invitation, a consent to participant form, and the interview protocol that would be utilized. Following receipt of the signed consent, the researcher contacted each respondent and scheduled an interview at the participants convenience. The interviews were held via Zoom videoconferencing and lasted no more than one hour. Prior to beginning the interview, the researcher clarified any questions the participant might have.

Analysis

Multiple steps were taken in the analysis of data. The first step was to record all interviews for transcription purposes. Additionally, copious observational notes were taken during the interview that were used for comparison with the transcriptions for accuracy. Following the interview, the researcher listened to the recording and transcribed each word-for-word. The transcription was then compared to the notes taken during the interview to establish accuracy. The interviews were then thoroughly analyzed and trends in responses were identified. Identified themes were coded and organized according to patterns that emerged in the study. The researcher then organized the coded data into common themes.

Results

The results from the data collection showed that the respondents believe that, when fully utilized, formative assessment had a positive effect on student reading development. Additionally, the participants indicated that the use of formative assessment data was essential in both future lesson planning and modification of existing lesson plans. All participants credit formative assessments as leading to improved student learning and academic mastery of concepts.

Using Formative Assessments as a Tool for Assessment of Reading

Analysis of responses revealed that participating teachers believed formative assessments provided data necessary to identify students' current levels of understanding compared to the mastery learning expectations. Respondents communicated that using reading formative assessments provided the opportunity to verify students' correct application of reading strategies and skills taught during the instructional period. All respondents reported using some method of formative feedback to support student learning in reading and desired professional development to teach additional skills in using formative assessment strategies to improve student engagement, participation and learning outcomes.

Identifying Student's Level of Performance

The findings revealed that all the participants across all grade levels expressed feeling confident in using formative assessment. Participants expressed the assumption that multiple formative assessment tools should be used, throughout the lesson, to gather information about student learning and level of understanding. Respondents further emphasized that formative assessments provided insight as to the effectiveness of material presentation.

These assertions are confirmed by the literature. The value of formative assessment lies in the quality of feedback teachers give to students about their learning and to teachers about their teaching (Andrade, Lui, Palma, & Hefferen, 2015). Teachers become better teachers when they continuously use feedback through the

formative assessment process to target and eliminate gaps in the learning (Kincal & Ozan, 2018).

Identification of Students' Strengths and Weaknesses

In relation to the study, participants reported the usefulness of formative assessments in identifying students' areas of strengths and weakness. Chappuis (2012) noted that using formative assessment to obtain feedback on student learning "directs attention to the intended learning, pointing out strengths and offering specific information to guide improvement" (p.4).

Participants also observed that formative assessment assists in the identification of students' weaknesses. Teachers reported that the use of formative assessment to identify student level of attainment of specific reading concepts like main idea or cause and effect, decoding, and using vocabulary allowed them to provide more targeted intervention for small groups of students or individual students. Chappuis (2009) indicated that information gained from formative assessment data guides teachers in providing targeted interventions for those students struggling to master concepts (Chappuis, 2009). Likewise, Gustafson et al. (2019) observed that "[t]aken together, the two aspects regarding the content and form of instruction, respectively, provide a general framework for how to develop a successful and individualized educational system for reading instruction" (p. 18). Using the data collected from formative assessments including student work samples, teachers were able to set more targeted goals for all students throughout the educational tiers: Tier 1 - entire class instruction, Tier 2 - small group instruction and Tier 3 - one-on-one instruction an intervention (Gustafson et al., 2014).

Formal Summative Assessment Usefulness

Participants also found formal assessments, such as summative assessments and benchmarks were useful in providing information about student learning. Study participants reported using other types of assessments such as end of unit tests, weekly tests, standardized tests, and benchmarks to obtain information about students' mastery of concepts. While teachers administered many of these tests because they are required by the school district or the Texas Education Agency, they believed formal assessments were also purposeful. Dixson and Worrell (2016) identified the primary difference between summative and formative assessment is how teachers use the collected information. Respondents expressed the belief that summative assessments had a place in the learning process because they show how much students know. The participant teacher's perception of summative evaluation reflects the thoughts of Candal (2016) who reported that summative assessments provide a comprehensive view of student learning. Gupta (2016) also found that summative assessments or end of unit assessments allows the teacher to "gather data about student performance with regards to learning outcomes" (p. 44).

Using Formative Assessments to Guide Lesson Planning

Results of data analysis additionally revealed that the study participants were of the opinion that formative assessments should be an integral part of lesson planning and instruction. While teachers may administer other types of assessments, respondents felt that formative assessment provided real time data that could be utilized to alter current lesson plans and/or develop subsequent lessons based on student performance on the formative assessment used during instruction. Participants further expressed their belief that formative assessment strategies can be used to increase engagement and build student confidence.

Targeting Reading Skills based on Running Records

The findings revealed that respondents felt running reading records were indeed formative assessments because types of information collected were specific measures of reading abilities like oral reading skills and how learners used strategies presented in class. Lipp and Helfrich (2016) explained that teachers should document observable student behaviors using running records which then allows analysis to determine text comprehend (Lipp & Helfrich, 2016). Gillett and Ellingson (2017) purported “Running records provide concrete evidence of students’ skills, reading levels, strategies, and progress as readers” (p. 136). Teachers reported using running reading records to determine student reading level. Respondents reported that a deep analysis of running records provided data on what students have the ability to perform independently or with assistance known as the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD).

Modifying Lesson Plans and Subsequent Instruction

Research findings revealed that respondents incorporated formative assessment when designing instructional lesson plans and subsequent instruction. Formative assessments were both planned prior to instruction and often occurred spontaneously, as needed, to guide instruction. Previous researchers have found that true formative assessment occurs when teachers change their instruction to meet the learners’ needs based on the data collected from the process and not to make judgements about student learning (Black & Wiliam, 1998a; Davidson & Frohbieter, 2011). Conderman and Hedin (2012) noted that formative assessment has a greater impact on teacher lesson planning and instruction because teachers have more opportunities to make instructional adjustments throughout instruction rather than having to wait to discover students’ understanding at the end of the unit.

Participants reported designing questions to gauge student understanding thus using student responses to determine the concepts following lessons would contain. Participants reported modifying their lesson plans based on results from formative assessment. Teachers described scaffolding lessons, dedicating more time and attention to a certain concept, or moving on to more advanced concepts. Teachers were more likely to modify their lessons to meet the needs of the whole class or struggling students by re-teaching the lesson or providing individual interventions.

Using Different Types of Formative Assessment Strategies during Instruction

Teachers shared their beliefs that formative assessment is different from other assessments in that it could be completed quickly and provided data that was immediately usable. Buelin et al. (2019) stated “[f]ormative assessment takes place frequently, can be quite informal, and is used to monitor and adjust instruction while that instruction is in progress” (p. 21). Teachers reported being able to help reluctant students by implementing formative assessment in nonthreatening ways like using whiteboards, exit tickets, and thumbs up or thumbs down. Buelin et al. (2019) reported that “[f]ormative assessments take many familiar forms: web or concept maps, hand signals like thumbs up/down, exit tickets that students complete before leaving class, choral responses, one- word or one-sentence summaries of lesson content, think/pair/share activities, journal responses, and low- or no-stakes quizzes” (p. 21). Teachers believed utilizing these methods made students feel more confident and did not publicly single out those students struggling with the concepts. Participants reported that student participation and engagement increased, both of which had a positive impact on student learning.

Formative Assessment and Improvement in Student Learning

Further analysis of data revealed that all study participants believed that using formative assessment ultimately led to improved students’ reading ability and skills. Respondents also expressed the belief that formative assessment assisted teachers in the identification of needed student interventions placing focus on reading levels and skills and enabled improved text selection, targeted vocabulary, and language acquisition strategies. Additionally, teachers felt differentiation and scaffolding of lessons and activities for struggling students was enhanced through the use of data obtained from formative assessments.

Higher Level of Student Achievement

Analysis of participant responses revealed the belief that when implemented effectively as part of lesson planning and instruction, formative assessment leads to higher levels of student achievement. These findings are consistent with Wiliam (2013) who identified three major processes as central to the implementation of formative assessment: (a) identification of what the learner currently knows about the skill or concept, (b) identification of where the learner needs to be and, (c) identification of the steps the learner needs to master the skill or concept.

Several teachers believed formative assessments improved the student’s ability to learn because the teacher is not waiting until the end of the lesson to determine the level of student understanding. Participants described incorporating formative assessment during instruction to address student reading skills or concepts in the moment allowing quick identification and corrective actions to be taken so student misconceptions do not persist. Hoover & Abrams (2013) found that there is a direct correlation between an increase in student achievement and formative assessment use.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptions regarding formative assessment and student success. The participants teach elementary ESL and bilingual language arts teachers in a traditional, urban, Title I public school in North Texas.

Conclusions

This qualitative case study examined fourteen kindergarten through sixth grade elementary ESL and bilingual language arts teachers' perspectives of formative assessments as a tool to assess reading skills, the role formative assessment plays in lesson planning and instruction, and teacher's perceptions as to whether formative assessments led to improved student learning. The results of the study reveal that teachers felt that the use of formative assessment has a positive impact on student reading achievement and improve student learning outcomes. Furthermore, participants communicated their positive perspective regarding the usefulness of integrating formative assessment in lesson planning and instruction to assess student learning as well as using data from the assessments to guide lesson planning. Respondents shared their utilization of various formative assessment strategies to promote student participation, foster collaboration, and increase student confidence. The participants also expressed the need for more professional development on strategies that are exclusive to reading and that allow students to self-assess during the learning process. All participants shared the belief that formative assessment is a necessary part of the teaching and learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

In the spirit of continuing to increase awareness on the effectiveness of formative assessment, future studies, using mixed method approach could be performed. Furthermore, future researchers should identify how formative assessment is implemented and what formative assessment strategies are most often used by instructional personnel. Identified formative assessment practices could be researched and correlated with student reading scores obtained on standardized summative assessments.

This study only included teachers. Future research could include interviews to determine student perception show of the usefulness of formative assessments. Additionally, research could be conducted to determine the impact formative assessment have in increasing motivation, participation and engagement.

Future studies could also be expanded to include other content areas in addition to language arts. Additionally, a cross-curricular approach should be studied to determine if there is a correlation between how often students are exposed to the formative assessment process and student achievement.

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Appendix

1. How do you feel about using formative assessment?
2. How do you feel about using formative assessment in reading?
3. What other types of assessment have you used and why?
4. Can you explain how Running Reading Record may be considered as formative assessment?
5. How do you integrate the process of formative assessments within your lesson plans?
6. How do you integrate the process of formative assessment in your instruction methods?
7. If you believe that incorporating the process of formative assessment in your teaching has improved your student's ability to learn, please explain how.
8. What future training would you like on the topic of formative assessment?

