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Studying the Ability for Empathic Understanding in School Teachers

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Abstract

The concept of "empathic understanding" was introduced to pedagogy by Carl Rogers, a prominent clinical and educational psychologist, for naming one of the necessary qualities determining the teachers' competence. The author's work is devoted to studying this ability in today's teachers. In our research, 60 graduate students, current schoolteachers, participated. They all attended the author's online course, *Child Development and Learning in Cultural Context*, in 2023. As one of the homework assignments, they were asked to read a passage from N. Nosov's novella about a ten-year-old boy struggling to solve a math problem and to interpret the child's difficulties from the perspective of Leo Vygotsky's theory studied in the course. The data was collected electronically and analyzed with a simplified content analysis method. According to the results, 57 students (95%) used the correct concepts from Vygotsky's theory in their answers. However, only 18 students (30%) made a thorough analysis of the child's problem, and what distinguished them from others was their ability to find adequate textual illustrations of the theoretical concepts they chose. The author concluded that theoretical knowledge, although it contributed to "empathic understanding," did not determine it. Indicators of the ability studied were a) careful reading and immersion in the text's content and b) the ability to identify with the story characters. The author's further efforts will be directed towards increasing the proportion of such practical exercises in child psychology courses. This will help students specializing in education develop the competencies needed for their everyday professional activities.

Keywords: Carl Rogers, Leo Vygotsky, Nikolai Nosov, child psychology, psychological prose, teacher's competence, empathic understanding, training for teachers

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Introduction

It is well known that the ability to empathize is possessed not only by humans—primates and higher animals also have it (De Waal, 2011; Halal, 2010; Rifkin, 2009). Even some plants' responses to the environment are similar to empathic behavior (in metaphorical sense) (Karban, 2015). Empathy is not just a positive quality determining all communicative processes in the world. It is also an essential mechanism that ensures evolutionary development.

For several centuries, empathy was in the field of attention for ancient Greek philosophers who developed oratory and knew the role of empathy in understanding the feelings and moods of the audience and managing it (Aristotle, n.d.; Plato, 1998). In the middle of the 19th century, at the birth of psychology as a science, empathy became one of the important objects of research in German psychology, which set the traditions of its study for many decades ahead (Lipps, 1903; Titchener, 1909). By the middle of the 20th century, empathy became one of the leading concepts in the new—humanistic—psychology. This trend spread to some other humanitarian and social fields of knowledge and practice, including education (*Abraham Maslow's Humanistic Psychology*, 2020; Rogers, 1951).

In the third millennium, the study of empathy has again found itself at the forefront of science. It happened because our civilization has entered a new stage of its development—an event occurred comparable in significance to the discovery of writing, the invention of machines, and the global industrial revolution; maybe even superior to them. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has entered the arena of extreme discoveries and is rapidly changing our world: humans, their activity, and all social and production processes, including education. Moreover, the changes taking place in society will affect education almost first of all.

Under the influence of the digital paradigm, the learning environment, classroom dynamics, the teacher's role and competencies, and teaching and learning methodologies and strategies, will undergo transformation. Certain aspects of education will be delegated to AI. However, researchers suggest that emotional communication and its essential component, empathy, will continue to be uniquely human traits (Черниговская, 2024). It appears that one of the teacher's enduring competencies will stay the ability to empathize with students, thereby fostering both meaningful communication and effective knowledge acquisition. Empathy can be considered an essential mechanism that preserves human civilization.

In our work, we studied empathic understanding in university graduate students preparing for the teacher's career. Developed research methodology recreated a real situation of teaching-learning and communication between a student and adult mentors. The main question we attempted to answer was what promotes and hinders the development of such important pedagogical competence as empathic understanding.

Theoretical Frame

According to a definition, empathy is "the ability to imagine oneself in another's place and understand the other's feelings, desires, ideas, and actions" (Britannica, n.d.). In the 19th century, when describing the phenomenon of empathy, Theodore Lipps and Edward Titchener used a literal translation of the German word "Einfühlung," which means "empathy" and "understanding." Interestingly, although Sigmund Freud did not use the concept of empathy, his theoretical and practical key-concepts, such as "identification" and "affective transfer,"

were directly related to empathy, and they formed the basis of this theory in psychoanalysis and beyond (Freud, 1990, pp. 232, 256). Since then, the definition of empathy as the ability to deeply understand another person's various psychological experiences from their perspective has been firmly established.

Later this approach was used by Carl Rogers and formed the basis of his theory, which was widely applied in psychotherapy and pedagogy. And although the object of perception and influence in Rogers' practices was different (in one case—a patient, in the other—a student), it was empathic understanding, as he showed, that ensured greater effectiveness of communication.

With the further development of psychological knowledge, new ideas about the nature of empathy appeared. Today it is a complex concept described differently across various theories. According to the Two-Factor's Theory, it was distinguished between cognitive and emotional empathy (Davis, 1983). The cognitive one was defined as the ability to understand others without necessarily sharing their ideas and feelings; the emotional one—as the ability to feel and share others' emotions. The involvement of neuroscience and brain imaging studies advanced this theory, proving its relevance (Decety & Jackson, 2004).

Daniel Goleman finds empathy to be a key component of his Theory of Emotional Intelligence. He categorizes empathy into cognitive, emotional, and compassionate types, where the latter means helping others based on understanding their ideas and feelings (Goleman, 1995, 42–43, 96–99).

Mark Hoffman, in his Developmental Model of Empathy, argues that empathy changes its properties at each stage of a man's development (Hoffman, 2000). An infant is "infected" by the feelings of others; a toddler shows egocentric empathy; empathy of the child from middle years to puberty is already adequate to the state of another person, and s/he understands that others may have other emotional experiences. The empathy of a mature teenager and an adult is subordinated to moral reasoning and is often accompanied by helping behavior. Empathy grows as cognitive abilities and morality develop.

With all the diversity of empathy's definitions, its understanding as an ability to put oneself in another person's place remains constant. Not always, they do even distinguish its object—it may be feelings, thoughts, attitudes, or intentions. Any manifestation of human personality and activity can be an object of empathy. In such an approach, empathy is a holistic psychological phenomenon. This is the view that we will adhere to in our work.

Methodology

The Study Goal, Tasks, and Hypotheses

This study aimed to assess the ability of graduate students, who have already started or are preparing for a teaching career, to empathize with a student struggling academically. The expression of this teaching competency was analyzed in an online course through a homework assignment that simulated the challenges faced by a falling-behind learner, the main character of a literary piece.

The study tasks were 1. analyzing how the study participants explored the causes behind the narrative protagonist's failure and 2. investigating how they applied scientific concepts from Vygotsky's theory to describe the protagonist's academic challenges.

The study was based on the following hypotheses: 1 Literary work in the psychological prose genre serves as an adequate representation of reality and a suitable stimulus for the study; 2. Vygotsky's learning theory is entirely relevant to the educational situation depicted in the plot of the selected realistic narrative; 3. The study participants' ability to correctly recognize the causes of the protagonist's failure during arithmetic problem solving shows their empathic understanding; 4. The ability to identify Vygotsky's concepts in explaining the learner's failure reflects both the participant's knowledge of the theory and their empathic understanding.

Study Participants

Sixty graduate students, most of them current schoolteachers, took part in this study. They all attended the author's online course, Child Development and Learning in Cultural Context, at the Touro Graduate School of Education in 2023. Among the participants, there were 45 women and 15 men. With regard to ethnicity, 30 students (50%) were Caucasians, 10 students (17%) were African Americans, 11 individuals (18%) were Latin Americans, and 9 individuals (15%) were Asian Americans. The average age of the students was approximately 30 years.

Instrumentation

To explore our study participants' empathic understanding, we used an episode from the story *Schoolboys* by N. Nosov (Nosov, 1954). This reading material contained numerous illustrations of Vygotsky's concepts. The episode presents a scene from the life of a 10-year-old boy, Vitya, who struggles with arithmetic. One evening, a conversation took place in Vitya's family—his parents tried to find causes of their son's poor academic performance and even to help him to do his assigned homework in arithmetic. The prehistory of this episode consisted of the following. In the evening, Vitya came home late after a prolonged football game with his friends. He was very tired and wanted to sleep; however, there were homework assignments left for tomorrow, and he decided to do them. At first, Vitya did the easy homework, and at the end he took up arithmetic, the most difficult one. Vitya was a lagging student in arithmetic.

Procedure

First, an expert procedure was carried out. Two experts, a psychologist and a linguist, who had extensive experience working with texts were invited. Together with the author, using the group discussion method, they analyzed the episode, found all its key fragments that contained causes hindering Vitya's fruitful learning, and determined which of Vygotsky's theoretical concepts were illustrated in these fragments. The opinions of the expert group were taken as a standard with which the answers of the study participants were subsequently compared. Experts were also involved at the stage of analyzing the data obtained in the study.

Then, the main study procedure was carried out. At the first stage of the study, its participants were delivered a lecture on Leo Vygotsky's theory by their professor (the study author). It was an online lecture in a visual conference mode. In the lecture, we discussed Vygotskyan

concepts usually used to describe learning; they were "joint activity," "positive emotional support," "mediation," "exteriorization," "internalization," "mental tool," "self-organization," "motivation," "zone of proximal development (ZPD)," and "scaffolding." Vygotskian doctrine of everyday and scientific notions was also discussed (Karpov, 2014, 15–29).

At the second stage, students were provided with the text of the episode for reading and an assignment to do with the text. This part of the study was organized as a computerized survey. Students worked individually, presented their answers in "question-answer" format, and submitted their completed work to their course site. No communication between the study participants was allowed at this stage. The students were requested to perform this assignment "in one sitting."

The instruction consisted of the following: "You are offered an episode of the text about a 10-year-old boy, Vitya, a character from the popular book *Schoolboys*. He has problems with arithmetic. Your task is to interpret his difficulties from the perspective of Leo Vygotsky's theory, which you recently studied. In every small fragment of the episode, some cause can be found that determines Vitya's learning failure. Your task is to identify these causes and support your opinion using Vygotsky's concepts."

After all assignments had been submitted, the third stage of the study occurred. In a written conversation, when exchanging messages with participants, the professor (the study's author) clarified how the fragments were analyzed by them.

Results

Data Representation

Table 1 presents the data obtained from the study. The first column numbers the fragments given to students for analysis. The second column arranges these fragments chronologically. The third column contains experts' assessments of the cause(s) behind Vitya's learning difficulties, expressed in simple, everyday language for clarity. The fourth column aligns these simple explanations with corresponding Vygotskian scientific concepts. The fifth column, labeled "CA" (short for "correct answer"), indicates the number of participants who accurately identified the causes of Vitya's learning failure and correctly associated them with Vygotskian concepts. Lastly, the sixth column lists common errors students made while analyzing the episode.

Table 1

The Results of the Analysis of the Episode by the Experts and the Study Participants

1 Fr. #	2 Content of fragments	3 Factors preventing Learning	4 Corresponding Vygotsky' concepts	5 CA	6 Typical errors
1	The teacher gave us one of those nasty problems, and I did not have the faintest idea how to do it.	Unattractiveness of arithmetic problems Poor skill in solving problems	[no] motivation [no] mental tool	3 27	–
2	Mama began telling me how to do it, but for some reason I could not understand anything.	Tiredness due to poor control of one's activity	[no] self-organization	11	Exteriorization 39
3	"But it is exactly the same as the one the teacher gave you to do at home!" cried Dad. "It is not the same," I said. "Silly boy," said Dad." Both problems are solved in the same way.	Ineffective form of passing knowledge Unreadiness in solving this type of problem Abuse by the father	[no] exteriorization [no] growth within one's ZPD [no] positive emotional communication and support / [no] dad's self- control	15 24 45	Scaffolding 18
4	Dad began explaining how to solve the problem, but my had was so fuzzy that I could not make anything out.	Tiredness due to poor control of one's activity	[no] self-organization	15	Exteriorization / mediation 42
5	Dad finally lost patience, "You are a dunce! How can you be so stupid!"	Abuse by the father	[no] positive emotional support/no dad's self-control	58	–
	[…] he begins doing problem himself. "Look," he said. "Look how easy it is." I watched when he worked. Is it clear?" To tell the truth it was not the least bit clear.	Authoritarian suppression by the father	[no] joint activity	33	Scaffolding 9 Exteriorization 18
7	I thought he would never finish the awful problem. But at last, he did, and I quickly copied it into my exercise book and went out to bed.	No interest in arithmetic	[no] motivation	7	–

Recognition of Vygotsky's Concepts

Seven concepts that were considered the correct answers were "joint activity," "mental tool," "self-organization," "motivation," "exteriorization," "the zone of proximal development (ZPD)," and "positive emotional communication/support." Some other Vygotsky's concepts that made up the category of incorrect answers were "exteriorization" and "scaffolding." In a few cases, the concept of "mediation" was mentioned by students, which they used in the sense of "exteriorization." The concept of "self-control," although not a Vygotskian concept, was the correct answer for two fragments; it was included in a category of "positive emotional support" when analyzing and counting the study participants' responses.

A procedure for data normalization was carried out. The students' correct answers for each concept in each fragment were summed up; these data are presented in the 5th column of Table 1. The proportion of correct answers for each concept identified in the study was then determined in relation to the total number of correct answers in the investigated population. The results of these calculations are shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1
Vygotsky's Concepts Illustrated in the Episode and Recognized by the Study Participants
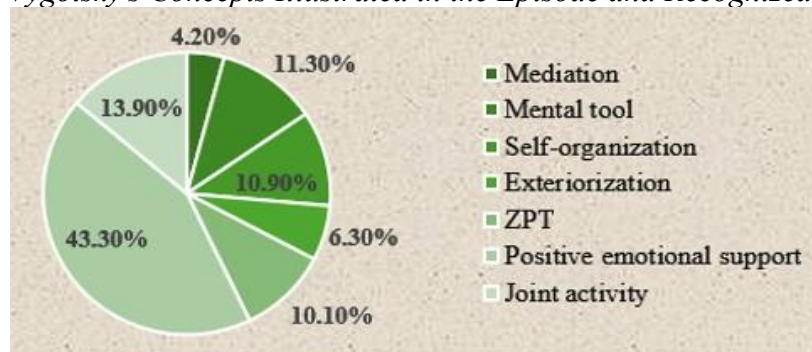
Analysis of the text showed that all correct answers were concepts in their negative meanings. Vitya failed because he is NOT motivated; he has NO mental resources to solve arithmetic problems, even those appropriate for his age; he demonstrates NO self-organization; NO growth in his arithmetic ZPD is illustrated, as happens when a student acquires and assimilates something new; he has NO necessary emotional support and NO joint activity, even when his father helps him solve arithmetic problems.

The incorrect answers presented in column 6 of Table 1 were similarly normalized: the proportion of wrong answers for each concept identified in the study was determined in relation to the total number of wrong answers in the investigated population. The results of this calculation are shown in Figure 2. In contrast to the correct answers, all wrong answers involved concepts in their positive meaning. Students frequently attributed "exteriorization" and "scaffolding" to the episode's situations where they were absent.

Figure 2
Vygotsky's Concepts Mistakenly Attributed to the Episode's Content
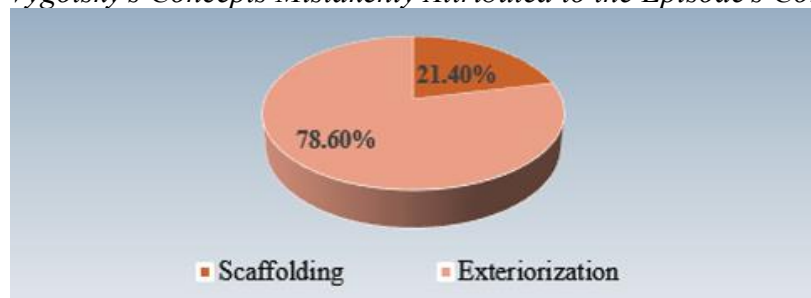
Common Types of Errors in Recognizing Vygotsky's Concepts

The study participants' incorrect responses in applying Vygotsky's theory to explain the protagonist's educational difficulties are particularly significant. Two main types of such errors were observed: misinterpreting concepts and isolating fragments without context.

Misinterpreting Concepts

Many students mistakenly interpreted the dispute between Vitya and his father (fragments 3 and 6 in Table 1) as an example of scaffolding. However, true scaffolding requires a meaningful exchange of information through dialogue, which was absent in their interaction.

Isolating Fragments Without Context

In two instances (fragments 2 and 4), students analyzed the protagonist's actions solely within the given fragment, ignoring the broader context of the narrative, which they knew about. As a result, they identified a superficial and incorrect cause for Vitya's failure rather than uncovering the deeper, underlying one.

Discussion

To the Nature of Empathic Understanding

The first task of the study set for the students was to find the causes preventing the story protagonist from successfully learning arithmetic and to formulate them in everyday terms, i.e., in simple and understandable language. Completing this task required the students to have empathic understanding, which means the ability to "put yourself into another person's shoes." In some cases, the phenomenon was possible to register. The following reports from the study participants serve as evidence:

> To understand why this student called the problem 'nasty,' I pictured myself as a struggling student.

> It took time to figure out why the protagonist did not see the similarity between the problem they solved at school and the one the teacher assigned for homework. I imagined this situation and myself in it. I wanted to understand what was wrong with me.

> I would not want to be in that boy's place. His father's rudeness greatly harms. Is successful learning possible with such a tutor?!

The second task of the study was to explain the causes of Vitya's failure in terms of Vygotsky. This required the ability to look at the boy's problems not from the standpoint of everyday knowledge, but from the standpoint of theoretical knowledge, and to clothe each of his problems discovered in a scientific concept. On the one hand, completing this task relied on knowledge of Vygotsky's theory, learned in the course, and on the other, it required a developed ability for empathic understanding. Especially in cases where the indirect empathic understanding 'came into action.' This phenomenon was also possible to register. Evidence can be found in the following students' reports:

> If you consider how deeply hurt this child feels due to his father's abusive behavior, it becomes clear why he lacks motivation to learn. He hastily copies the solution his father provided into his exercise book and rushes out of the room, eager to erase the distressing family interaction from his memory, as if it were a bad dream.

> I see myself in the protagonist. As a child, I took piano lessons and struggled with one musical etude. I cried and hated it. When reading the story, I recalled my teacher telling me that it was likely too soon for me to play that piece, that I simply wasn't ready yet. Similarly, the character in the story isn't prepared to tackle the problems they are expected to learn at school.

Only the ability to imagine oneself in the character's place and experience his feelings of confusion and embarrassment allowed the students to understand that the inability to see the similarity between problems of the same type and to transfer the knowledge gained at school to home conditions is evidence of the student's cognitive unpreparedness, his inadequacy to the zone of proximal development in the field of arithmetic typical for his age.

Types of Empathic Understanding

Two types of empathic understanding were found in the participants of our study when analyzing the text fragments—direct and indirect. To a certain extent, it was conditioned by the structure of the text itself.

In one case, the causes of the character's failure could be found directly in the fragment. For example, "The teacher gave us one of those nasty problems, and I hadn't the faintest idea how to do it" (Nosov, 1954, p. 23). "Nasty problem" indicates that Vitya has no interest in arithmetic; moreover, that he finds it unpleasant. The expression "I had no faintest idea" means that the boy lacks problem-solving skills. In these and similar cases, the study participants demonstrated direct empathic understanding.

In other cases, based on the text, it was difficult to understand why the story's character does not comprehend arithmetic. For example, Vitya says, "Mom read the problem and began telling me how to do it, but for some reason I couldn't understand anything" (p. 24). He also complains, "Dad began explaining how to solve the problem, but my had was so fuzzy that I could not make anything out" (p. 25). Many of our study participants saw the problem in poor parental tutoring; however, this was a mistaken opinion because the episode says nothing about how Mom and Dad explained their solutions to the problems; the words "began telling" and "began explaining" themselves are not indications of poor teaching.

However, there were students who consciously or unconsciously went beyond the fragment, turning to the context and the prehistory. From the context, it is known that Vitya came home late, after playing soccer, and was very tired. Fatigue explains why he did not absorb his parents' explanations about how to solve the arithmetic task; fatigue, in turn, was caused by his lack of time management skills and self-discipline. Those study participants who gave the correct answers in these cases demonstrated indirect empathic understanding.

Ability to Empathic Understanding

One-third of the study population—18 out of 60 students—coped with both tasks set in the study, and each of them gave the correct answers for at least 6 out of 7 fragments of the text. They were deeply concentrated on the assignment given to them. It can be concluded that they had developed an empathic understanding. The ability to empathize was a stable characteristic of their personality.

More than half of the study participants—36 out of 60 students—were able to complete both tasks for only 3 to 5 fragments of the text. This suggests that their empathic understanding was not fully developed, as their ability to empathize appeared spontaneous and inconsistent.

Meanwhile, six students out of 60 were unable to complete the assignment, correctly answering a maximum of 2 out of 7 fragments. This indicates that they had not developed an empathic understanding.

Determinants of the Concepts Identified and Non-identified

If a child is not doing well in arithmetic, it is natural to assume that he is not interested in it. However, the vast majority of study participants did not recognize this cause in the text of the episode and did not find Vygotsky's concept of 'motivation' associated with it. Only 4.2% of them gave the correct answers, which means they showed empathic understanding towards an F student.

At first glance, this result seems to contradict logic. As schoolteachers, our study participants regularly engage with the interest, curiosity, and motivation of their own pupils. The issue of low academic motivation among many schoolchildren remains a significant challenge in modern education. However, only a small number of the surveyed population identified this theme in the episode about the student struggling with arithmetic problems.

One possible explanation is that most of our participants were simply indifferent to Vitya's struggles. Another interpretation is that our study revealed signs of psychological defense mechanisms—an unconscious avoidance of a literary scenario that reminded them of an anxiety-inducing and difficult-to-manage situation in their own classrooms. This defensive response likely hindered their ability to fully engage with the text, preventing a deeper understanding of the character and limiting their capacity for empathy.

If the development of learning motivation still remains a difficult scientific and practical task, then the attitude to abusive behavior as a social problem is extremely clear both in the educational and other social environments. In our society, abuse, especially in relation to children, is condemned and may be legally punished in some cases. The abusive style of the father's behavior—"You are a dunce! How can you be so stupid!" —and the related concept of emotional support were identified by students relatively often—43.3%. In this case, our

students, current schoolteachers, showed empathic understanding and sympathy for the failing child.

The two main errors in finding concepts were exteriorization (78.60%) and scaffolding (21.40%). They were used incorrectly due to a misunderstanding of their meaning. According to the definition, 'exteriorization' refers to the process of generating and expressing knowledge. Merely stating that characters spoke or acted—such as "Mama began talking," "Dad began explaining," or "Dad starts solving a problem"—without detailing their words or actions does not constitute exteriorization.

Students used "scaffolding" to describe any kind of message exchange, ignoring that it should be a positive interaction and guided support. Dad's help provided was not guided support—he just solved the problem himself, not even realizing that Vitya' was still confused. Their interaction was not positive; it was an argument in which the father humiliated his son:

"But it is exactly the same as the one she gave you to do at home!" cried Dad.

"It is not the same," I said. […]

"You silly boy," said Dad.[1] (Nosov, 1954, p. 25).

Students used 'exteriorization' and 'scaffolding' when analyzing those fragments in which they could not determine the cause for Vitya's failure, and indirect empathetic understanding was needed. Unable (or unwilling) to delve into the content of the text, to read it carefully, or to think about it, they were content with a superficial impression, and for the analysis, they used not Vygotsky's concepts but their own interpretation of these concepts.

Conclusions

Literature, especially in the genre of psychological prose, serves as a powerful reflection of reality, enabling readers to relate to characters and analyze their behaviors and thought processes. This opens up great prospects for exploring deep personality traits, such as, for example, empathic understanding.

Findings from the study revealed that one-third of the surveyed group of current and prospective teachers demonstrated a stable capacity for empathy. At the same time, more than half of the participants' group showed unstable and spontaneous empathic understanding. This is an encouraging result, as empathic understanding can be cultivated through communication and real-life experiences. For young teachers, completing the assigned coursework was a necessary step in developing one of the essential teaching skills, alongside their practical experience in the classroom.

The study identified two forms of empathic understanding: direct and indirect, i.e., simple and more complex, appealing to the event context. However, factors hindering empathy included fragmented perception and weak contextual thinking skills. Some participants viewed the storyline not as a cohesive whole but as a collection of disconnected elements.

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[1] The quotation literally corresponds to the original text of the novella's translation. In it, the rules of punctuation and syntax may differ from today's requirements.

This cognitive limitation impedes not only deep empathic understanding. Consequently, multiple teaching competencies may be at risk.

It is likely that an underdeveloped ability to think contextually contributed to a more superficial interpretation of the given text by such students, leading to difficulties in completing the assignment successfully. Another possible explanation could be their inadequate reading skills, though the study lacked sufficient data to confirm this hypothesis.

The research utilized a computerized survey, allowing for the rapid collection of a large and statistically significant sample. Written self-reports of many study participants also served as an important source of information. However, conducting the study within an online learning environment limited the ability to observe behavioral indicators of empathic understanding, which could have enriched the findings.

The author's future research will focus on verifying the reliability of results obtained and developing new practical exercises to foster empathic understanding among graduate students directly within university courses.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

I used Quill Bot AI to improve syntax and check grammar and punctuation in my article. Also, ChatGPT helped me to formulate two-three important phrases whose clear understanding by the readers is mandatory.

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Organizational Contexts That Influence Social Capital Formation Among PTA Volunteers in a Philippine Public School

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Abstract

Lower-income communities often lack the financial and human capital needed for strong social capital, hindering civic participation like Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs). However, a Philippine public school PTA defied this trend. A 2017/2023 qualitative study, involving focus groups and interviews, revealed that despite limited resources, local reciprocity norms fostered strong ties among PTA volunteers. This generated social capital, providing crucial resources for the school. Using Coleman's social capital dimensions, the study details the interaction quality that built these ties and networks. It demonstrates how civic organizations in resource-scarce settings can leverage social capital to overcome contextual disadvantages

Keywords: social capital, parent-teacher associations, Philippines, public schools, organizational contexts

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Introduction

Social capital is often seen as lacking in less affluent communities due to limited financial and human resources (Wilson, 2013). In contrast, wealthier communities benefit from more effective social capital because of their existing resource base (Warren et al., 2001). Wilson's (2013) "neighborhood effect" explains these arguments by emphasizing how community context—economic, educational, and social—shapes the formation of social capital.

This context influences the functioning of Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). While PTAs in affluent schools often engage in strategic initiatives, those in poorer communities may focus on addressing basic needs. Yet, a public school PTA in Quezon City challenges these assumptions. Despite limited resources, its members actively supported school operations, built strong ties, and mobilized social capital to benefit the wider community. In this case, the volunteers became social capital themselves.

Coleman (1990) and Putnam (2000) describe PTAs as forms of social capital that produce public goods and reflect civic trust. However, as studies show (Noguera, 2001; Wacquant, 1998; Wilson, 2013), community context—especially in areas of concentrated poverty—shapes the availability and effectiveness of social capital. When public and private institutions fail, formal social capital breaks down, limiting opportunities for civic engagement (Kuhn, 2005).

Despite these barriers, residents in poor communities can build connections through civic organizations, expanding their access to resources (Warren, 2005). In such cases, social capital can compensate for material deficits (Edin & Lein, 1997; Stack, 1974). Government support for civic engagement, especially in education, can strengthen these efforts. As Noguera (2001) notes, empowered parents can help mobilize limited school resources for collective benefit.

Ultimately, PTAs in under-resourced communities demonstrate that strong relationships and civic participation can generate valuable social capital—even in the absence of wealth.

The main objective of this study is to describe and explain how dimensions of social capital (levels of trust and obligations, information channels, norms and sanctions) available within the organization are formed among PTA volunteers. Since this study's level of analysis is at the meso level, the PTA as the unit of analysis will be explored in terms of its social capital dimensions and processes. This study attempts to do this by answering this research question - How did the PTA volunteers form social capital in the organization?

Literature Review

Adopting a meso-level approach, this examines the PTA as a unit of analysis to understand the organizational processes that generate social capital. The study is grounded in Coleman's (1988) and Putnam's (2000) theories on social capital and civic associations, while also considering how the PTA's embeddedness in a less affluent school community (Small, 2009) shapes these processes.

Trust

Coleman (1990) emphasizes that a trustworthy social environment enables obligations and expectations, serving as a reservoir of social capital. Social trust, often driven by reciprocity and civic networks, includes both personal and generalized trust (Robinson & Jackson, 2001). Small's (2009) study of daycare centers illustrates how organizational membership fosters trust—even among relative strangers—through shared norms, institutional practices, and proxy-based trust. For instance, mothers relied on each other for child pick-up duties, with trust facilitated by the center's structured interactions.

Putnam (2000) expands on Coleman's (1990) work by distinguishing thick trust (strong, personal ties) and thin trust (generalized trust in broader networks), both of which emerge through frequent interaction and shared experiences. Organizational structures that nurture these interactions strengthen communal trust and encourage participation (Murray et al., 2020). Jones and George (1998) further relate these ideas to conditional and unconditional trust—where the former supports cooperation with minimal risk, and the latter involves deeper commitment rooted in shared values. Weak ties, though less intimate, are essential for broadening access to information and opportunities (Granovetter, 1973; Putnam, 2000), contributing to organizational efficiency and cohesion.

Information Channels

Information channels, according to Coleman (1988), are vital for mobilizing social capital. They facilitate access to timely, relevant information through frequent interpersonal interactions (Li & Ye, 2014). Trust within the organization promotes open communication and enhances the effectiveness of information exchange (Kwon et al., 2013). These channels also transmit reputations and past collaborations, reinforcing norms of trustworthiness (Field, 2008). At both individual and organizational levels, nurtured relationships and trust-rich environments are conduits for valuable information—making social ties critical assets for members (Bhandari & Yasunobu, 2009; Bian et al., 2020).

Norms and Sanctions

Norms and sanctions help regulate behavior in organizations by promoting collective interests and minimizing negative externalities (Coleman, 1988, 1990). Coleman's concept of intergenerational closure, particularly in educational settings, illustrates how dense social networks enable shared oversight of behavior. Putnam (2000) reinforces this by noting that closed networks strengthen trust through reciprocity and accountability. When networks are open or fragmented, reputational transmission and the enforcement of sanctions weaken, undermining communal trust and cohesion.

Appropriable Organizations and Public Good

Coleman (1988) introduces the concept of "appropriable organizations"—structures formed for one purpose but usable for others. For instance, PTAs initially formed for governance may be repurposed for roles like school discipline enforcement or community organizing. These organizations generate social capital by providing members access to shared resources, often beyond their original scope (Edwards et al., 2019). Because the benefits extend to the wider community, the social capital they produce functions as a public good (Coleman, 1988, 1990).

Civic Associations

Putnam (1994, 2000) argues that active participation in civic associations builds trust and social capital. He emphasizes that meaningful engagement—not just nominal membership—is key. Volunteering, in particular, strengthens social networks and enhances individuals' access to social resources (van Ingen & Kalmijn, 2010). Organizations that facilitate shared experiences foster strong interpersonal connections and trust. As Kwon et al. (2013) note, understanding individual ties requires examining the organizational contexts in which they are embedded. The depth and type of participation within these associations are critical determinants of the resources members can access.

Methodology

This qualitative case study focuses on Holy Spirit Elementary School (HSES), a large public school in Barangay Holy Spirit, Quezon City, with over 8,000 students (Holy Spirit Elementary School, 2023). The barangay, home to 111,901 residents, is one of the most populous in the city, with 70% classified as urban poor (Barangay Holy Spirit, 2023).

Data collection included face-to-face interviews with the principal, guidance counselor, and PTA officers in 2017 (pre-pandemic) and 2023 (post-pandemic), involving different individuals each time. FGDs with PTA volunteers were only conducted in 2023, divided into two groups: 7 pre-pandemic and 8 post-pandemic volunteers. All 14 participants were unemployed mothers from low-income, two-parent households, averaging 39 years of age with two children.

The study has several limitations. First, the lack of 2017 FGDs prevents comparison of pre- and post-pandemic social capital. Second, participant selection was based on PTA officers' familiarity, possibly excluding diverse perspectives. Third, the all-female, intact-family profile of volunteers may have shaped the data in ways that overlook other family structures and gender roles. Fourth, their demographic homogeneity may limit insights into bridging social capital. Lastly, as a single case study, findings cannot be generalized or compared with other contexts.

Results

Conditions in the School That Influence the Nature of PTA Engagements

Holy Spirit Elementary School (HSES), located in Barangay Holy Spirit, Quezon City, serves 8,121 students in two shifts due to classroom shortages. With a classroom-learner ratio of 1:61 and toilet-learner ratio of 1:77 (Holy Spirit Elementary School, 2023), far above the recommended 1:50, the strain on resources is evident. In School Year 2022–2023 alone, the school lacked 73 classrooms. Some teachers manage as many as 85 students per class.

This strain directly affects teachers' capacity. As the principal shared, "the teachers are already burdened with their heavy workload." The Teacher Board Member echoed this, "Especially when it comes to paperwork, we don't know what to prioritize anymore… When K to 12 was implemented, our workload doubled with heavier responsibilities but our salaries remain the same."

In this context, PTA involvement becomes vital. The same teacher emphasized, "Yes, their work means a lot, especially when the school needs them most. The volunteers make sure that they are here and ready to help. They have a significant contribution toward the improvement of the school. The teachers cannot do everything—we need their help."

HSES's SBM Level III accreditation (Holy Spirit Elementary School, 2023) affirms the school's commitment to shared governance and active community participation. The principal noted, "plans to improve the school should also come from the members of the community so that they will have ownership… they will be committed, and they will perform." This shared responsibility is reflected in how the PTA acts on community needs without waiting for directives.

This proactive culture, supported by the principal's recognition of strong barangay and PTA ties—"they protect the school… that's a good thing that I capitalize on"—enables trust-based collaboration. The PTA's embeddedness in a civically engaged school and barangay facilitates the formation of organizational social capital. Decisions to involve the PTA in non-teaching functions are rooted in the belief that they will deliver.

The School Consolidates and Stocks Resources for the School Community by Fostering External Ties

HSES actively brokers partnerships to expand its resources, as mandated by Republic Act No. 9155. Through participation in *Guro, Barangay Lingkod Mamamayan* (GBLM), the school links with civic actors, NGOs, and institutions. GBLM fosters social capital as an appropriable organization focused on public good.

Teachers affiliated with GBLM led the school's award-winning *Gulayan sa Paaralan*, later adopted by the PTA. Barangay reps offered urban gardening training for teachers and parents, while GBLM also conducts mass feeding for malnourished students and responds to barangay emergencies.

Through GBLM, HSES partnered with AFNI Philippines for donations, feeding programs, and support for *Brigada Eskwela*. It also maintains long-standing ties with Ateneo de Manila University through the Ateneo Center for Educational Development (ACED) and Ateneo Gabay. ACED's *In-Visible* program shifted from in-school meals to weekly rations during the pandemic—still ongoing. Ateneo Gabay continues to provide academic support, including online tutorials during remote learning. The LGU also contributes school supplies, tablets, and hygiene kits.

The School Forms Internal Ties Through Structures That Make Use of Accessible Online Platforms

Given its large population, HSES developed a structured system of Facebook Messenger group chats that mirrors the hierarchical organization of the PTA. These online structures enable fast and efficient communication across levels and reinforce organizational routines.

The first layer of this structure is a group chat that includes the school principal, PTA officers, and core PTA volunteers. PTA officers consist of the President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Auditor, PRO, and the Parent and Teacher Board Members. The label "PTA volunteers" refers to a group of 15 core members who regularly assist in school activities.

This main group chat serves as the direct communication line from the principal, who shares announcements and urgent information. PTA officers then cascade these messages to grade-level officers.

In the second layer, the PTA President communicates with the seven Grade-Level PTA Officers—one for each grade from Kindergarten to Grade 6. These officers form the next link in the communication chain, ensuring consistency in the dissemination of school information.

The third layer connects Grade-Level Officers to Homeroom PTA Presidents. In this group, homeroom-level concerns and updates are discussed and passed on to class-level parents.

The fourth layer consists of individual group chats per homeroom class, managed by the Homeroom PTA Officers. These chats allow parents from each section to stay informed about daily school matters and receive updates from their teachers.

Finally, there is a fifth group chat that includes all PTA officers, volunteers, and general PTA members. This group serves as a common platform for all parents to raise concerns, share information, and build a sense of community. The PTA President described it as their "virtual bonding space," where "the parents share their grievances and air out their concerns." She added that if an issue is too sensitive, she encourages parents to message her privately to avoid gossip.

These nested communication channels facilitate rapid, structured coordination while also allowing organic parent-to-parent interaction. In this way, HSES builds internal social capital not only through physical presence but also through intentional digital engagement that fosters wider networks and deeper trust.

The School Forms Internal Ties Through Programs That Are Consistent With the Mandated Roles of PTAs

The roles of PTA officers and volunteers are closely aligned with DepEd's guidelines and are tailored to address HSES's internal challenges. PTA members assist during morning and afternoon shifts as marshals, ensuring order as students arrive and leave. Volunteers help children enter the school, particularly during poor weather, and monitor dismissal to ensure that students are picked up by the correct guardians. One volunteer described how they remind parents to properly prepare their children: "We remind the parents to check if all their children's things are complete… sometimes they ask us 'please get my cell phone in my child's bag,' so we remind them to put everything in ahead of time."

When teachers are absent or delayed, PTA volunteers step in as temporary proctors. They supervise students in classrooms, encourage them to complete their assignments, and monitor behavior. One volunteer reported telling students, "If you still have assignments and projects to do, do them now while your teacher has not yet arrived," while also assuring them, "I'm just here, okay? Teacher asked us to check on you."

PTA members also respond to emergencies. They accompany sick or injured students to the clinic or, if necessary, to the hospital. They assist children who haven't been picked up, offering snacks and, in some cases, walking them home. According to the guidance teacher, "Especially when it's raining, they're the ones who take charge of the students who are not yet fetched by their parents."

Beyond daily support, PTA members contribute significantly to school-wide programs. They play an active role in the implementation of *Gulayan sa Paaralan* by collecting recyclable materials, preparing and tilling soil, planting vegetables, and maintaining the garden. These labor-intensive tasks provide opportunities for consistent engagement, shared labor, and frequent interaction—conditions that promote strong internal ties and the cultivation of social capital.

How the PTA's Active Participation in School Serves as a Resource of the School

The PTA functions as an indispensable resource for HSES. By extending the school's human capital, PTA members allow teachers to focus on their core responsibilities. The principal stressed the importance of this arrangement, emphasizing that the support provided by the PTA lightens the teachers' workload. The Teacher Board Member added, "If not for them, only the teachers will do the work and we cannot do it on our own. That's why the role of the PTA is very important."

This dynamic reflects how PTAs mobilize organizational social capital through routine and trusted participation. The level of PTA involvement at HSES demonstrates how generalized trust can be translated into institutional support, echoing Murray et al.'s (2019) finding that PTAs in civically engaged schools function within a "virtuous cycle" of trust, participation, and social resource generation. In a resource-constrained context like HSES, such support is especially critical, consistent with Warren et al.'s (2001) findings on the role of PTAs in less affluent communities.

The PTA's Legacy Framing of Its Participation in School Programs

PTA officers and volunteers at HSES describe their involvement as leaving a "legacy" for the school. This framing reflects a desire to contribute something lasting and meaningful. A sound system donated by the 2017 officers is still used during major events, serving as a tangible reminder of their contribution.

The current PTA has embraced *Gulayan sa Paaralan* as their legacy project, even though it originated under GBLM. Their deep involvement in preparing for competitions and maintaining the garden reflects a strong sense of ownership. One volunteer mentioned how busy they were during the critical days of competition, proud of their hard work and investment.

The Teacher Board Member offered a broader perspective, saying, "They are able to provide guidance to the school. That's why their presence matters—because they are able to give their time and efforts to the students. They are able to provide help to the students who need help the most."

In this sense, the PTA's legacy is not only material but relational and emotional. It demonstrates the PTA's role in sustaining collective efficacy, trust, and solidarity—echoing Putnam's (1994) framework for social capital rooted in civic life.

Discussion

Local Norms of Reciprocity Prompted Social Capital Formation

The formation of social ties among HSES PTA volunteers is shaped by local norms rooted in pakikipagkapwa or reciprocity. These norms—pananagutan (responsibility), pakikisama (cooperation), and pakikiramay (empathy)—reflect collective values that guide behavior and underpin social capital formation.

The First Local Norm of Reciprocity: Pananagutan or Social Responsibility

At the core of the local norms of reciprocity, *pananagutan* expresses a deep sense of responsibility toward others, often described in the language of being a *kapitbahay or* neighbor. This norm thrives in contexts of generalized trust, such as HSES, which has earned SBM Level III accreditation and hosts civic organizations like GBLM that model community engagement.

This sense of duty is evident in how volunteers care for students left behind at school. One said, "We really pity the students because they are already hungry after school, that's why we bring them to their homes." Another shared, "If no one fetches the student and they live nearby, I take them home… it feels good to be able to help. You will carry the good deeds that you do." These actions show how volunteers take on the role of surrogate caregivers, driven not by obligation but by *pananagutan*.

Even when dealing with difficult parents, volunteers remain committed. "You need to be approachable even if some parents are already calling you names," one said. Another noted, "If they are saying hurtful things… our President tells us to walk away. Don't argue. If it's too much, ask the guard for help." Despite the tension, the volunteers respond with tolerance and continued service.

These interactions reflect *weak ties* (Granovetter, 1973) that are not emotionally intimate but provide practical, domain-specific benefits—even to children of non-active members. What sustains these efforts is *pananagutan*—a sense of service stronger than personal inconvenience.

The Second Local Norm of Reciprocity: Pakikisama or Cooperation

Pakikisama, or harmonious cooperation, reflects the willingness to prioritize group goals. Volunteers described always being ready to respond when called: "When Pres calls us, we go as long as we have time." Another added, "Whatever Pres asks us to do, we do. We're in the school even on Saturdays."

Volunteers also recognize and build on each other's strengths. "Some are good at planting, so we let them do that. Another hauls soil. Another is artistic, so she decorates pots made from bottles." Their collective effort is visible not only in task-sharing but also in daily uniform wearing and having IDs—symbols of shared identity and cohesion.

This strong sense of samahan builds *role clarity* and trust, reducing friction and enhancing stability in the PTA's operations. Volunteers internalize their roles not just as individuals but as a team committed to supporting the school.

The Third Local Norm of Reciprocity: Pakikiramay or Empathy

Pakikiramay, the broadest of the three local norms of reciprocity, emphasizes shared suffering and compassion. Among veteran PTA volunteers—those who had been active for over five years—this norm became especially meaningful during the pandemic. Their long-standing collaboration created strong, kinship-like ties that were tested by job losses, remote learning challenges, and the deaths of loved ones.

Despite the hardship, they relied on each other. "You can say whatever you need to say because you're already comfortable. You're able to open up," one said. These ties provided not only emotional but also material support. They pooled *ayuda*, shared food, and appealed for additional assistance. One volunteer recalled a message in their group chat: "I have sardines here. Who needs it?" Another replied, "Me, I need that." A volunteer even messaged their Ateneo feeding coordinator: "Ma'am, I think they're really having a hard time already. They have nothing to eat since they all lost their jobs."

Their ability to mobilize support—especially through Facebook Messenger—demonstrated how *bonding social capital* worked in practice. They acted as *brokers* (Small, 2009), connecting their network with external aid. These acts of *pakikiramay* show how deep relationships can evolve into survival systems in moments of crisis.

Conclusion

The Formation of Social Capital in the HSES PTA

The formation of social capital among HSES PTA volunteers began as they moved from closed kinship networks into the broader school-based network of the PTA. This shift marked a widening of their "radius of trust" (Realo et al., 2008), as they transitioned from relying solely on family ties to forming relationships based on "trust by proxy" (Small, 2009). The HSES PTA thus served as a space (Flanagin et al., 2006) for parents to socialize beyond their immediate circles and build ties with others from diverse backgrounds. As a civic association, the PTA reflected Putnam's (2000) argument that active participation in such groups fosters social capital. It became part of what Murray et al. (2019) call a "virtuous cycle," where trust and participation generate new social resources accessible to the broader school community.

Organizational embeddedness was key. The PTA's role as a sub-organization of the school created conditions where members could form both weak and strong ties—depending on the frequency and intensity of engagement (Small, 2009). The school's ability to set norms and implement policies influenced the ties formed among volunteers. Through mandated structures and school-designed engagements, the PTA provided both opportunity and structure for the development of interpersonal trust.

The School's Role as Enabler of Social Capital

The school's efforts to respond to contextual challenges—particularly overburdened teachers—while adhering to DepEd mandates served as major enablers of social capital. To address staffing gaps and draw on existing community trust, HSES developed parent engagement programs that mobilized PTA officers and volunteers for non-teaching roles. These programs fostered regular collaboration and expanded the school's human resource base, particularly in a high-poverty context.

The school's approach aligns with evidence that generalized trust increases civic participation (Murray et al., 2020; Sønderskov, 2011; Uslaner & Conley, 2003), and supports Tschannen-Moran et al.'s (2014) conclusion that trust fosters local norms of reciprocity. The HSES PTA became a mechanism for enacting government policy through collaboration, with parents taking on support roles typical in under-resourced schools (Christianakis, 2011). This combination of structural need and social trust gave rise to conditions where social capital could take shape.

School Engagements as Catalysts for Tie Formation

Through school engagements—both face-to-face and online—the PTA volunteers formed internal ties that reflect the structural dimension of social capital. Participation in these engagements placed volunteers in communication networks, particularly Facebook Messenger group chats, where generalized trust was transmitted and weak ties began to form (Granovetter, 1973).

These online channels supported the flow of timely, relevant information, providing an accessible platform for coordination and relationship-building. Just as face-to-face tasks fostered collaboration, these digital spaces also functioned as sites of social capital formation.

The school also sustained external ties, such as its long-standing partnership with Ateneo de Manila University, which persisted even during the pandemic. These external linkages ensured access to additional resources and strengthened the PTA's capacity as a civic association. The nature of the school engagements mattered: *Gulayan sa Paaralan* was identified as the strongest catalyst of tie formation due to the high collaboration and daily interaction it required. Other engagements, such as serving as marshals, proctors, or aides, facilitated moderate collaboration and also contributed to tie formation.

These structured engagements underscore the importance of organizational context in deliberately involving parents in school life and creating opportunities for trust-based ties to develop.

PTA Structures and Mechanisms as Enablers

The structure of the HSES PTA and the leadership style of its officers further enabled social capital formation. PTA officers were seen to lead by example, fostering a sense of solidarity and mutual effort—what volunteers described as *samahan* (teamwork). Volunteers' initial motivation often stemmed from wanting to watch over their own children, but over time, their participation evolved into something broader and more collective.

Volunteers described their roles as being guided not by hierarchy, but by informal norms, relationships, and associability (Leana & van Buren, 1999). These social contracts encouraged cooperation and shared responsibility. A clear example of this collective effort is the PTA's involvement in the award-winning *Gulayan sa Paaralan*, which they came to identify as their legacy. Their pride in this initiative illustrates the project's public-good aspect, as harvests from the garden benefit the entire school (DepEd - Quezon City, 2022).

The PTA's commitment to *Gulayan* symbolizes the group's collective efficacy and shared ownership of their contributions to school life. It also signals how internal motivations and organizational support can align to sustain social capital over time.

From Trust to Reciprocity

The school's existing generalized trust provided a foundation for the emergence of local norms of reciprocity, which deepened through repeated collaboration among PTA volunteers. These norms—particularly *pananagutan* (responsibility)—shaped how volunteers navigated their daily duties. Their sustained involvement, despite the demands and challenges of the role, reflects how *pananagutan* became a force that drove continued participation.

As volunteers formed ties through these engagements, social capital solidified as something built through ongoing experience and interpersonal connection.

Mobilizing Social Capital in a Low-Resource Context

The HSES PTA demonstrates how civic associations in less affluent communities can compensate for resource shortages through the formation of social capital. As Noguera (2001) and Coleman (1988) argue, such associations can produce egalitarian outcomes when they mobilize community participation.

Yet, as Murray et al. (2019) remind us, context matters. The PTA's effectiveness at HSES is tied to its embeddedness in a school with limited staff and funding, where help labor provided by volunteers is not just welcome but essential. Consistent with Christianakis (2011), PTA volunteers in such contexts take on practical, day-to-day responsibilities that directly reduce teachers' workloads.

Through these contributions, PTA volunteers become both a **resource to the school** and **embodiments of social capital**, formed through local norms of reciprocity and made possible by enabling structures, shared motivations, and institutional trust.

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The Mediating Role of Brooding Rumination in the Relationship Between Positive Strivings Perfectionism and Depressive Symptoms

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Abstract

Perfectionism is a complex characteristic linked to psychological distress and reduced well-being. This study explores the potential mediation of brooding rumination in the relationship between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms. Using a cross-sectional design, 274 undergraduate students from a private university in Quezon City, Philippines, participated in the research. The medmod module of Jamovi 2.3 was utilized for mediation analysis. The results indicated a positive correlation between positive strivings perfectionism and brooding rumination, as well as between brooding rumination and depressive symptoms. Furthermore, a positive correlation was observed between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms. The mediation analysis revealed that brooding rumination fully mediates the relationship between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms. This finding underscores the complex interplay between cognitive patterns and emotional well-being. Individuals with positive strivings perfectionism may set high standards and goals, which can be motivating. However, when these standards are unmet, it can lead to brooding rumination. This brooding rumination, in turn, exacerbates depressive symptoms, creating a cyclical pattern that can be challenging to break. This study highlights the significance of addressing brooding rumination, offering insights for more inclusive mental health interventions and support networks.

Keywords: brooding rumination, positive strivings perfectionism, depressive symptoms, mental health

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Introduction

Perfectionism, a multidimensional personality construct, has garnered significant attention in psychological research due to its complex relationship with mental health. Traditionally, perfectionism is divided into two distinct dimensions: evaluative concerns perfectionism and positive strivings perfectionism. While evaluative concerns perfectionism is often viewed as maladaptive, characterized by a preoccupation with avoiding failure, fear of criticism, and self-doubt (Flett & Hewitt, 2002), positive strivings perfectionism is considered more adaptive. Positive strivings perfectionism is marked by setting high personal standards, a strong motivation for achievement, and a focus on self-improvement (Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Individuals with this trait tend to take pride in their accomplishments and are driven by personal growth rather than fear of failure.

However, recent research suggests that even adaptive forms of perfectionism, such as positive strivings, can contribute to psychological distress when paired with maladaptive cognitive patterns like brooding rumination (Macedo et al., 2017). Brooding rumination, a subtype of rumination, involves a passive and repetitive focus on negative emotions, especially related to perceived failures or shortcomings (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). This form of rumination has been consistently linked to depressive symptoms, as it perpetuates negative thinking without promoting active problem-solving (Treynor et al., 2003).

Despite the association between positive strivings perfectionism and positive outcomes, it remains unclear how individuals with this trait might experience depressive symptoms, particularly when they engage in brooding rumination. This study seeks to address this gap by exploring whether brooding rumination mediates the relationship between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms. While most research on perfectionism has focused on its maladaptive aspects, this study will examine how even adaptive forms of perfectionism can contribute to mental health issues.

Although the relationship between perfectionism and depression has been extensively studied, the specific mechanisms that explain how positive strivings perfectionism might lead to depressive symptoms remain underexplored. Existing literature has largely concentrated on the maladaptive aspects of perfectionism, such as evaluative concerns, which are more overtly linked to negative outcomes like anxiety and depression (Hill et al., 2010). However, fewer studies have investigated whether individuals with high positive strivings perfectionism are also vulnerable to depression, particularly when they engage in brooding rumination.

Brooding rumination is a well-documented risk factor for depression (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008), but its role as a mediator between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms has not been fully explored. It is possible that individuals with high positive strivings, when faced with setbacks or unmet expectations, may engage in brooding as a response to perceived failure, which in turn exacerbates depressive symptoms. Addressing this gap is crucial for understanding the full spectrum of perfectionism's impact on mental health.

The purpose of this study is to examine the mediating role of brooding rumination in the relationship between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms among undergraduate students. Specifically, it aims to answer the following questions:

1. Is there a significant relationship between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms?

2. Does brooding rumination mediate the relationship between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms?
3. To what extent does brooding rumination mediate the association between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms?

This study is significant because it challenges the assumption that positive strivings perfectionism is entirely adaptive, offering new insights into how cognitive processes like brooding rumination can turn adaptive traits into potential risk factors for depression. The findings could have practical implications for mental health professionals and educators, providing them with a deeper understanding of how to support students who may appear outwardly successful but struggle with internal distress. The results could inform interventions designed to reduce brooding rumination, ultimately helping to prevent depressive symptoms in individuals with high perfectionistic tendencies.

Literature Review

Research on perfectionism has consistently highlighted its multidimensional nature. Evaluative concerns perfectionism, characterized by fear of failure and self-criticism, is associated with poor mental health outcomes such as anxiety and depression (Flett & Hewitt, 2002). In contrast, positive strivings perfectionism involves a focus on setting high goals and achieving excellence, often leading to positive outcomes like academic success and resilience (Stoeber & Childs, 2010). However, the literature has begun to reveal that even positive strivings can lead to psychological distress when individuals ruminate over their failures (Macedo et al., 2017).

Rumination, especially brooding rumination, is a cognitive process where individuals repetitively focus on negative emotions, amplifying depressive symptoms (Nolen-Hoeksema, 2000). Treynor et al. (2003) differentiated between brooding and reflection, with brooding being the more maladaptive form. The role of brooding rumination as a mediator between perfectionism and depression has been supported in prior research, though the focus has primarily been on evaluative concerns perfectionism. The present study aims to fill the gap by exploring whether positive strivings perfectionism can also lead to depression via brooding rumination.

While PSP is typically considered beneficial, it can lead to negative psychological consequences when individuals engage in excessive self-evaluation and unrealistic goal setting (Macedo et al., 2017). When perfectionistic individuals fail to meet their high standards, they may engage in brooding rumination as a response to perceived failure. This relationship has been supported by empirical studies demonstrating that PSP is significantly associated with brooding rumination, suggesting that perfectionistic individuals may be prone to overanalyzing their failures instead of adopting constructive coping mechanisms (Treynor et al., 2003).

Depression is a common mental health condition characterized by persistent sadness, loss of interest, and cognitive disturbances (Radloff, 1977). Research has shown that brooding rumination is a key mediator in the relationship between perfectionism and depressive symptoms (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Specifically, individuals high in PSP may not directly experience depressive symptoms but may develop them when their perfectionistic tendencies lead to excessive rumination over perceived shortcomings. The current study builds on prior research by examining whether brooding rumination fully mediates the

relationship between PSP and depressive symptoms, which could help refine existing theoretical models such as the Response Styles Theory (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991).

This study is anchored in Response Styles Theory (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991), which posits that individuals' habitual responses to negative emotions can influence the onset, severity, and duration of depressive symptoms. Specifically, brooding rumination is considered a maladaptive response that intensifies negative affect by focusing attention on distress rather than actively addressing the underlying problems. Within the context of perfectionism, individuals with high positive strivings may experience distress when their high standards are not met, leading them to ruminate on their perceived failures rather than adopting healthier coping strategies. This rumination may serve as a mechanism through which perfectionism contributes to depression, even in individuals with otherwise adaptive tendencies.

This study focuses on undergraduate students enrolled in a private university, specifically targeting a sample of 274 students selected through stratified random sampling. The figure below illustrates how the study will utilize self-reported measures of positive strivings perfectionism, brooding rumination, and depressive symptoms. The scope is limited to the cross-sectional design, meaning the data will be collected at a single point in time, which may not fully capture the dynamic nature of rumination or depression over time. Any generalizations made in this study will be limited to the research sample composed of students enrolled in the first semester of A.Y. 2024-2025. Results will not be categorized according to certain demographic profiles such as gender, age, and socio-economic backgrounds. Although the instruments will be answered in its entirety, this study will not explore other dimensions of perfectionism (evaluative concerns) and rumination (reflection).

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework
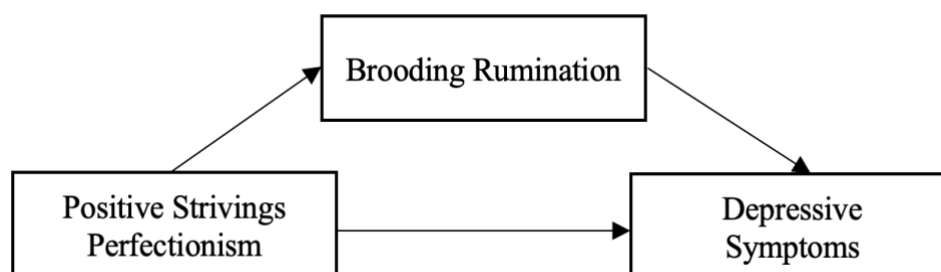
The following terms were operationally defined as:
1. *Brooding Rumination* - A maladaptive form of rumination involving a passive and repetitive focus on negative emotions, particularly related to perceived failures (Treynor et al., 2003).
2. *Depressive Symptoms* - Psychological symptoms associated with depression, including sadness, lack of interest, fatigue, and feelings of worthlessness, as measured by the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (Radloff, 1977).
3. *Perfectionism* - A multidimensional personality trait involving the pursuit of high standards, which can manifest in both adaptive (positive strivings) and maladaptive (evaluative concerns) forms (Flett & Hewitt, 2002).
4. *Positive Strivings Perfectionism* - The dimension of perfectionism characterized by setting high personal standards and striving for excellence, typically associated with goal achievement and self-improvement (Stoeber & Otto, 2006).

5. *Response Styles Theory* - A theory proposing that individuals' habitual responses to negative moods, such as brooding rumination, can influence the onset and persistence of depression (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991).

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional research design to examine the mediating role of brooding rumination in the relationship between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms among undergraduate students. The cross-sectional design is appropriate for exploring relationships between psychological constructs at a single point in time, allowing for the investigation of potential mediation effects in a relatively efficient manner.

The research was conducted in a private university in Metro Manila, Philippines, which offers a diverse range of undergraduate programs. This setting was chosen to target a population of students who are likely to experience perfectionism and its psychological consequences, as university environments often foster high expectations and competitive pressures.

The target population for this study consists of undergraduate students enrolled in various academic programs at the university. The sample is representative of a broad demographic, including students from different year levels, academic disciplines, and socio-economic backgrounds. The age range of participants is expected to be between 18 and 24 years old.

Stratified random sampling was utilized to ensure representation across different year levels and academic programs. The stratification process divided the student population into subgroups based on their program of study, ensuring that each subgroup was proportionally represented in the final sample. From these strata, 274 undergraduate students were randomly selected to participate in the study.

Data were collected using a self-administered questionnaire, which included the following standardized measures:

1. *Perfectionism (Positive Strivings Perfectionism Subscale)*: The positive strivings dimension of perfectionism was measured using the Frost Multidimensional Perfectionism Scale—Brief (FMPS-B), adapted from Burgess et al. (2016). This scale assesses individuals' pursuit of high personal standards from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree), for a minimum total score of 8 and a maximum of 40, and minimum subscale score of 4–20. It obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.79 when validated in the Filipino sample (Simon, 2022).
2. *Brooding Rumination*: Brooding rumination was assessed using the Rumination Scale by Treynor et al. (2003). Using a 4-point Likert scale (4 = almost always; 1 = almost never), this measure focuses on the tendency to dwell on negative feelings and thoughts in response to stress or perceived failure. With a Cronbach's alpha of 0.65, the possible scores range from 5 to 20 for each of the instrument's subscale.
3. *Depressive Symptoms*: Depressive symptoms were measured using the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CESD) by Radloff (1977), which evaluates the frequency of depressive symptoms experienced in the past week. The responses were scaled from 0 (never) to 3 (all of the time), with total scores ranging from 20 to 80, and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85.

Data were analyzed using the SPSS statistical software. Specifically, mediation analysis was conducted using Jamovi version 2.3.28 using the medmod analysis. This model is designed to test for mediation effects, which is appropriate for examining whether brooding rumination mediates the relationship between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms (Hayes, 2013). The following steps were performed in the analysis:

1. Descriptive Statistics: Initial descriptive statistics were computed to summarize the demographic characteristics of the sample (e.g., age, gender, academic year) as well as the mean scores for each of the psychological constructs measured (perfectionism, brooding rumination, locus-of-hope, and depression).

2. Correlation Analysis: Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between positive strivings perfectionism, brooding rumination, and depressive symptoms, along with locus-of-hope as an additional control variable.

3. Mediation Analysis: A mediation analysis was performed using PROCESS Model 4 to test whether brooding rumination mediates the effect of positive strivings perfectionism on depressive symptoms. The analysis followed a three-step procedure:

    a. The direct effect of positive strivings perfectionism on depressive symptoms was assessed.

    b. The indirect effect of positive strivings perfectionism on depressive symptoms via brooding rumination was calculated.

    c. The total effect was analyzed to determine the overall strength of the relationship.

4. Bootstrapping Method: To confirm the significance of the mediation effect, the bootstrapping method (5,000 resamples) was employed, as it provides a more robust estimate of indirect effects, especially in non-normally distributed data.

In keeping a low psychological risk for the participants, the researcher observed ethical considerations in confidentiality, anonymity, and data privacy. A letter of permission from authorities and an informed consent from the respondents were obtained before conducting the study. The consent form along with the Google Form questionnaire contains the purpose of the study, expectations from the participants, their right to withdraw, and agreement to the terms of the study. Should the need to consult a professional arises, the contact information of a psychologist was provided.

In adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012, the anonymity of the participants was preserved by excluding their names and identities from the data collection, analysis, and publication of the study's findings. All collected information were kept and processed in password-encrypted digital tools solely accessible to the researcher. Upon the study's publication, the research data will be disposed of accordingly and the participants may request a copy of the findings. Although there are no direct benefits, their involvement in the study contributed to a better understanding of the various factors influencing college students' mental health.

Results and Discussion

The study was conducted to examine if brooding rumination (BR) mediates the relationship between positive strivings perfectionism (PSP) and depressive symptoms. Before the test of these hypotheses, the descriptive statistics were examined first to ensure that there were no irregularities in the data set.

Descriptive statistics for positive strivings, depressive symptoms, and brooding rumination are presented in Table 1. The means and standard deviations indicate moderate levels of each variable. Skewness and kurtosis values suggest that all three variables were approximately normally distributed, as their values fell within the acceptable range ($\pm$ 1 for skewness and $\pm$ 2 for kurtosis; George & Mallery, 2013).

Pearson correlation analyses were conducted to examine the relationships among positive strivings, depressive symptoms, and brooding rumination. The correlation matrix is presented in Table 1. Positive strivings were significantly positively correlated with depressive symptoms, $r = .150$, $p = .013$, and brooding rumination, $r = .300$, $p < .001$. Additionally, brooding rumination was significantly positively correlated with depressive symptoms, $r = .374$, $p < .001$.

The significant association between positive strivings perfectionism and brooding rumination highlights the potential for even adaptive perfectionistic tendencies to foster maladaptive cognitive patterns. Positive strivings perfectionism is often characterized by high personal standards and the pursuit of excellence. While these traits can lead to success and achievement, the pressure to consistently meet such high standards can become overwhelming, particularly when individuals encounter failure or perceive that they have not reached their goals. The current findings align with previous research (Macedo et al., 2017) that suggests individuals with high positive strivings perfectionism may be prone to rumination, particularly brooding, when they fail to meet their expectations. The focus on unmet goals and perceived inadequacies can lead to a pattern of negative thinking, whereby individuals dwell on their perceived failures instead of adopting active problem-solving strategies.

Table 1
Descriptive and Correlation Analyses

Variable	Descriptive Statistics				Correlations		
	M	**SD**	**Skewness**	**Kurtosis**	**(1)**	**(2)**	**(3)**
(1) Positive Strivings Perfectionism	14.10	2.94	-0.09	-0.32		0.30**	0.15*
(2) Brooding Rumination	15.30	2.66	-0.49	0.23			0.37**
(3) Depressive Symptoms	51.50	9.23	-0.13	-0.33			

Note: ** *Correlation is significant at p < .01, * at p < .05.*

A mediation analysis was conducted to examine whether brooding rumination mediated the relationship between positive strivings and depressive symptoms. The mediation estimates are displayed in Table 2. The indirect effect of positive strivings on depressive symptoms through brooding rumination was significant, $b = 0.341$, $SE = 0.0833$, 95% CI [0.196,0.523], $z = 4.092$, p < .001, accounting for 72.3% of the total effect. The direct effect of positive strivings on depressive symptoms was not significant, $b = 0.131$, $SE = 0.1800$, 95% CI [−0.223,0.500], $z = 0.727$, $p = .468$. The total effect was significant, b = 0.472, SE = 0.1762, 95% CI [0.124,0.832], z = 2.677, p = .007. These results suggest that the relationship between positive strivings and depressive symptoms is fully mediated by brooding rumination.

As expected, brooding rumination was found to be a significant predictor of depressive symptoms. This finding aligns with extensive literature that establishes brooding rumination as a key risk factor for the onset and maintenance of depression (Nolen-Hoeksema et al., 2008). Individuals who engage in brooding rumination tend to focus on negative emotions and unresolved issues, perpetuating a cycle of negative thinking that impedes emotional recovery. The tendency to ruminate passively, without actively addressing the source of distress, can intensify feelings of hopelessness, guilt, and sadness, which are core symptoms of depression (Treynor et al., 2003). Thus, the current study reinforces the well-established link between rumination and depressive symptoms, particularly in populations prone to perfectionism.

Perhaps the most significant finding of this study is the full mediation effect of brooding rumination in the relationship between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms. This result indicates that brooding rumination serves as the primary mechanism through which positive strivings perfectionism contributes to depressive symptoms. While positive strivings perfectionism alone does not directly lead to depression, the tendency to engage in brooding rumination when high standards are not met explains the pathway to depressive symptoms.

This full mediation finding is particularly important because it challenges the traditional view of positive strivings perfectionism as purely adaptive. Although striving for excellence and setting high personal standards can be beneficial in many areas of life, these traits can also increase vulnerability to depression when combined with maladaptive cognitive styles like brooding rumination. This result supports the growing body of literature that calls for a more nuanced understanding of perfectionism, where even adaptive forms can have negative consequences under certain conditions (Macedo et al., 2017; Stoeber & Otto, 2006). Specifically, the mediation by brooding rumination highlights how adaptive traits, such as positive strivings, can turn maladaptive when individuals respond to failure or setbacks in a ruminative manner.

Table 2
Mediation Estimates

Effect	Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval		Z	p	% Mediation
			Lower	Upper			
Indirect	0.341	0.0833	0.196	0.523	4.092	< .001	72.3
Direct	0.131	0.1800	-0.223	0.500	0.727	0.468	27.7
Total	0.472	0.1762	0.124	0.832	2.677	0.007	100.0

Path estimates from the mediation model are presented in Table 3. Positive strivings significantly predicted brooding rumination, $b = 0.272$, $SE = 0.0526$, 95% CI [0.172,0.379], $z = 5.166$, $p < .001$ Additionally, brooding rumination significantly predicted depressive symptoms, b = 1.255, SE = 0.1985, 95% CI [0.861,1.652], Z = 6.324, p < .001. However, the direct path from positive strivings to depressive symptoms was not significant, $b = 0.131$, $SE = 0.1800$, 95% CI [−0.223,0.500], $z = 0.727$, $p = .468$, further supporting the full mediation model.

Table 3
Path Estimates

			Estimate	SE	95% Confidence Interval		Z	p
					Lower	Upper		
Positive Strivings	→	Brooding Rumination	0.272	0.0526	0.172	0.379	5.166	< .001
Brooding Rumination	→	Depressive Symptoms	1.255	0.1985	0.861	1.652	6.324	< .001
Positive Strivings	→	Depressive Symptoms	0.131	0.1800	-0.223	0.500	0.727	0.468

The present study sheds light on the intricate relationship between positive strivings perfectionism, brooding rumination, and depressive symptoms. By demonstrating that brooding rumination fully mediates the relationship between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms, this study reveals how an adaptive trait like perfectionism can turn into a psychological vulnerability. The findings emphasize the importance of addressing cognitive processes like rumination in individuals with high perfectionistic tendencies to prevent the onset of depressive symptoms.

Conclusion

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the complex relationship between positive strivings perfectionism (PSP), brooding rumination (BR), and depressive symptoms. The results revealed three critical patterns: (1) positive strivings perfectionism significantly predicted brooding rumination, (2) brooding rumination significantly predicted depressive symptoms, and (3) brooding rumination fully mediated the relationship between positive strivings perfectionism and depressive symptoms. These findings have important theoretical, clinical, and practical implications.

The findings contribute to the refinement of Response Styles Theory (Nolen-Hoeksema, 1991), which posits that the way individuals respond to distress influences their vulnerability to depression. This study extends the theory by demonstrating that even individuals who engage in positive strivings perfectionism—a trait traditionally considered adaptive—are susceptible to depression if they respond to perceived failures with brooding rumination. It emphasizes that maladaptive response styles, such as brooding rumination, can neutralize the potential benefits of adaptive traits, thus promoting emotional distress. Future theoretical models of perfectionism and mental health should account for the role of cognitive styles like brooding in turning adaptive traits into risk factors for depression.

The clinical implications of these findings are substantial. While perfectionism, particularly positive strivings, has often been encouraged in high-achieving environments such as academics or professional settings, this study suggests that clinicians and educators should be cautious about promoting such traits without addressing the accompanying cognitive risks. Specifically, interventions for perfectionistic individuals should focus not only on reducing maladaptive perfectionism (i.e., evaluative concerns) but also on identifying and modifying cognitive patterns like brooding rumination that might undermine the potential benefits of positive strivings perfectionism.

Cognitive-behavioral interventions that target rumination, such as Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT) or Rumination-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (RFCBT), may be particularly beneficial for individuals with high positive strivings perfectionism. These therapeutic approaches could help individuals break the cycle of ruminative thinking and promote healthier, more adaptive responses to perceived failures. Teaching individuals to shift their focus from self-criticism and unmet goals to self-compassion and constructive problem-solving may prevent the development of depressive symptoms in this population.

In educational and professional environments that foster high achievement and perfectionistic tendencies, this study underscores the importance of promoting psychological resilience and adaptive coping strategies alongside academic or professional excellence. Teachers, mentors, and supervisors should be aware that students and employees with positive strivings perfectionism may appear to be high achievers but could be silently struggling with brooding rumination, which can lead to emotional distress.

The results advocate for a reevaluation of how perfectionism is addressed both in clinical settings and high-achieving environments. While the pursuit of excellence can indeed drive success, it is also important to recognize and mitigate the cognitive risks associated with perfectionistic tendencies by encouraging adaptive problem-solving strategies. Programs aimed at enhancing mental health in these settings should incorporate strategies that address perfectionistic tendencies and their potential cognitive consequences. Workshops on mindfulness, stress management, and cognitive restructuring could equip individuals with the tools they need to manage perfectionism in a healthy way, thereby reducing their risk for depression. Additionally, fostering environments where failure is viewed as a learning opportunity rather than a reflection of personal inadequacy may help perfectionistic individuals avoid falling into patterns of rumination.

Future research and interventions should continue to explore how adaptive traits can be managed to protect against mental health issues, particularly in high-achieving environments.

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Developing an Instrument to Measure Health Promotion in a Youth Environment: A Pilot Study From a Norwegian Context

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Abstract

Due to increased challenges among children and youth, many health-promoting measures have been implemented in Norway. Finding appropriate measuring instruments has been problematic, as most scales measure indicators of mental and physical health, rather than the degree to which an environment promotes health. Existing scales, such as the Sense of Coherence Scale, the Basic Psychological Needs Scale and the General Self-Efficacy Scale were applied in a lower secondary school context as part of a health-promoting project. Many students found these scales somewhat confusing or reacted negatively to their wording. The scales, along with a new scale developed to measure health promotion in the environment, were presented to a group of 10 youths during a workshop organized by a voluntary organization. This workshop was part of a health-promoting project aimed at supporting vulnerable youths through group reflections and paid working activities. Based on the feedback from the workshop, the three validated scales were dismissed, and the new scale was further developed and adjusted into two different versions for the contexts of 1) work or other leisure activities for youth and 2) secondary school. The revised scales were piloted in the voluntary organization's project (n = 107) and in an upper secondary school (n = 267) where a related health-promoting project was implemented. Factor analyses indicate that the scales have good potential, though further validation is needed.

Keywords: health promotion, mental health, motivation, scale development

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Introduction

Over years, also before the pandemic, there has been an increase in mental health issues in Norway (Bakken, 2018; Løvgren & Svagård, 2019; Reneflot et al., 2018). As a result of this, several initiatives were started, and a national public health programme was initiated (The Norwegian Directorate of Health, n.d.). Some of the projects included in the programme concerned creating a health promoting environment for children and youth, either in school or in other arenas. Different research approaches such as interviews, observations and self-reported evaluations from students have been applied in the developing phases of the projects (Helmersen & Stiberg-Jamt, 2019; Horverak & Helmersen, 2023; Horverak & Jenssen, 2020; Horverak, 2024, 2023; Horverak et al., 2020; Horverak & Langeland, 2023, 2022a, 2022b). There have been attempts to measure effects (Canrinus & Matre, 2019; Rosef, 2021), but finding a good measuring instrument has proven to be a challenge.

Some of the instruments that have been applied in one of the health promotion projects called SAMM – A Systematic Approach to Mastering Life – the Five-step Motivation Method (https://samm.uia.no/en/frontpage/) are Academic Motivation Scale (Vallerand et al., 1992), Academic Self-Regulation Questionnaire (Oga-Baldwin et al., 2017; Ryan & Connell, 1989), Basic Psychological Needs Satisfaction Scale (Center for Self-Determination theory, n.d.; Ryan & Deci, 2017), General Self-Efficacy Scale (Røysamb et al., 1998), Sense of Coherence Scale (Antonovsky 1987, 2012; Nordkvelle, 2008; Torsheim & Wold, 1998), and the Learning Climate Questionnaire (Hoff, 2016). The challenges with these scales have been either that the language is poorly adapted to youths and a Norwegian context, or that they do not really measure what is intended with the project (Langeland & Horverak, 2021), which is to create a health promoting learning environment that facilitate self-regulation, self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation and a sense of coherence through comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness (Antonovsky, 1987, 2012).

When the mentioned scales were applied in lower secondary school, there were several reactions from the students on the wording of the scales, and content, both from students and teachers (Canrinus & Matre, 2019; Rosef, 2021). For example, the Academic Motivation Scale had a question that assumed that the students had chosen the subject, which was not right, as the scale was used in an obligatory subject, the Learning Climate Questionnaire (Hoff, 2016) was by some teachers considered a teacher evaluation rather than a measurement of learning climate, and the General Basic Psychological Needs Scale (Center for Self-Determination theory, n.d.) was considered somewhat personal. There were strong reactions to the language in the Sense of Coherence Scale (Antonovsky, 2012), and there were arguments between researchers and practitioners whether it would be possible to change the language somewhat. Due to much frustration concerning the existing scales, the work with developing a new scale to measure effects of health promotion initiatives was started.

As several health promotion projects in the national public health programme were based on Antonovsky's (1987, 2012) salutogenic theory of sense of coherence (SOC), this theoretical construct was chosen as basis for scale development, and a framework inspired by a description of OAS in the working environment (Bakken, 2012), as well as relating theories in the SAMM-project was developed (Figure 1, see also Horverak et al., 2024). The aim has been to develop a scale that measures how health promotion efforts affect the school environment - more specifically, how youths perceive the school environment, and whether sense of coherence is facilitated.

Figure 1

A Framework for Facilitating SOC in School
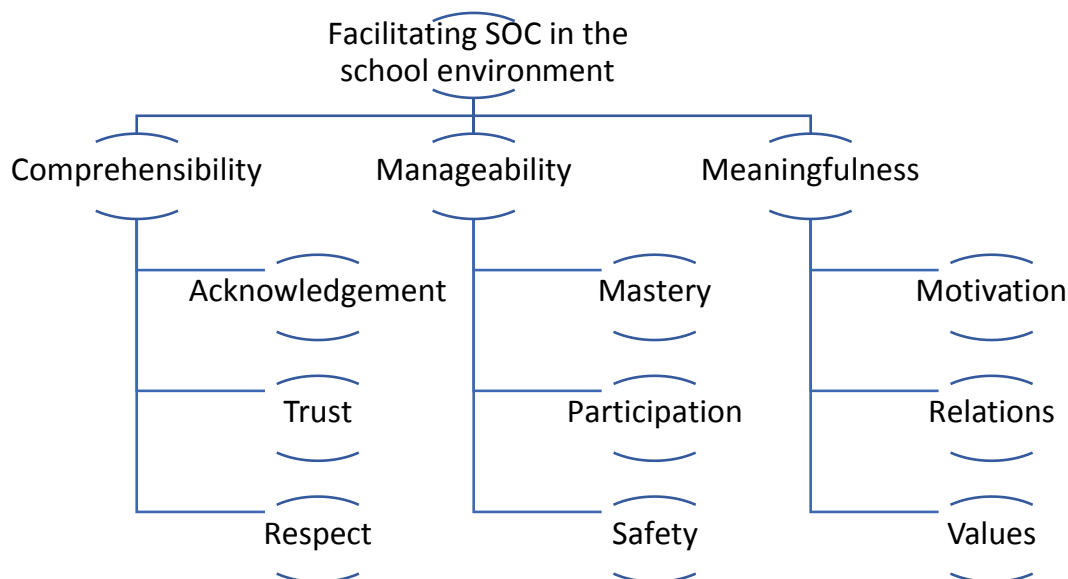
Comprehensibility is about understanding one's own situation (Antonovsky, 1987, 2012). Concerning comprehensibility, the three concepts of acknowledgement, trust and respect are included as subcategories. This concerns getting feedback from others, which is central to experience an understanding of one's environment (Bakken, 2012). People mirror themselves in their surroundings, and how they are met influences their perceptions of the situation. Understanding of one's own identity requires acknowledgement from others (Jakobsen, 2013). Acknowledgement means that actions and utterances are declared as valid (Jordet, 2020). This is closely related to respect, which can be understood as seeing other humans with their resources and opportunities (Damsgaard, 2010).

The second category, manageability, concerns identifying resources in oneself or one's surroundings to cope with different situations (Antonovsky, 1987, 2012). Manageability includes the three subcategories mastery, participation and safety. In the description of health promoting learning environments (Bakken, 2012), mastery is about having competence to solve assignments, participation is about having a possibility to influence, and safety means that there is support and predictability in situations. Mastery is also about expecting to handle situations in the future, meaning having self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), and participation concerns self-regulation and having agency, setting one's own goals and working towards them (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2018).

The third category, meaningfulness, concerns seeing a value in one's own contributions (Antonovsky, 1987, 2012). Meaningfulness includes the three subcategories motivation, relations and values, which reflect the description of health promotion in the learning environment (Bakken, 2012). Motivation, or more specifically intrinsic motivation, concerns having a wish to work with something (Ryan & Deci, 2017). According to self-determination theory, intrinsic motivation relies on experiencing 1) competence, which includes mastery, 2) autonomy, which concerns participation and influencing one's situation, and 3) relatedness, which concerns relations. This shows that there are theoretical overlaps in the subcategories, and the subcategories of participation, relations and mastery could be seen as conditions for motivation. Relations concern interaction, or collaboration, with others (Klinge, 2021). There

is a certain theoretical overlap between this and the three subcategories of comprehensibility – interactions include situations where a person experience acknowledgement, trust and respect – so these subcategories say something about the quality of interactions. Hence, relations could be interpreted as a condition for experiencing acknowledgement, trust and respect, rather than a subcategory on its own. Values can be related to justice, ethics, and what is important for a person (Bakken, 2012), which again overlaps with motivation. The framework for health promotion is a theoretical basis for this study investigating the following: How may the effects of health promotion initiatives be measured? As most of the health promotion initiatives in the public health programme were based on Antonovsky's (1987, 2012) salutogenic theory, the process of developing a new scale, as described in the following chapter, was inspired by this theory.

Methodology

The aim of this work has been to develop a scale measuring whether a sense of coherence is facilitated in the environment. The first phases of this process (Figure 2) are presented in this article. The procedure has followed recommendations for scale development (DeVellis & Thorpe, 2022).

Figure 2
Initial Phases in Scale Development

Phase 1
• Expert group
• Developing items

Phase 2
• Focus group workshop
• Response on items and other scales

Phase 3
• Health promotion initiative for youths in spare time
• Piloting questionnaire

Phase 4
• Health promotion initiative in upper secondary school
• Piloting questionnaire
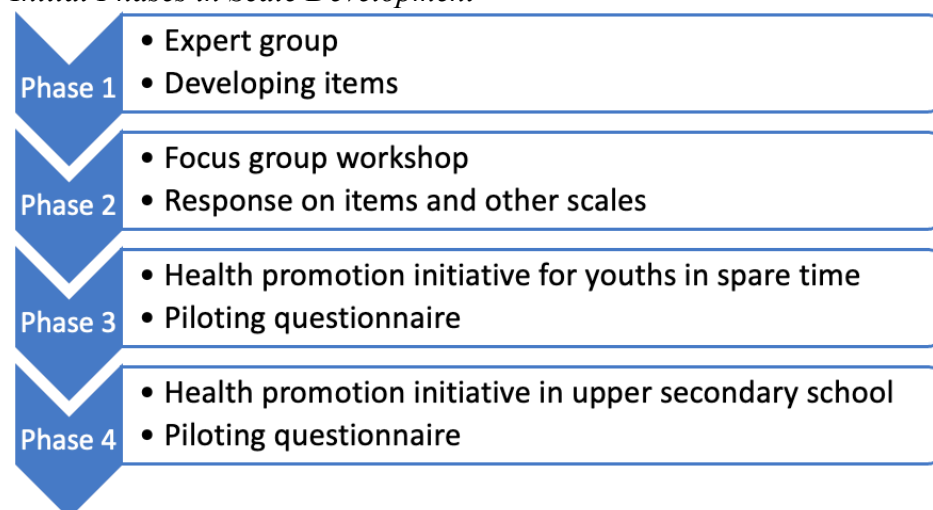
Phase 1 included developing items for a new scale based on the framework for health promotion as presented above (Figure 1). An expert group consisting of an associate professor, two senior researchers and a teacher from upper secondary school discussed the theoretical foundation and developed the framework for health promotion (Figure 1) and the items for the questionnaire.

Phase 2 included a separate workshop with youths taking part in a health promotion project run by a voluntary organization (Blue Cross Kristiansand) - in their spare time, the youths were taking part in paid working activities and discussion groups applying the SAMM-approach (Langeland & Horverak, 2021). There were 10 participants in the workshop, of which seven were boys and three were girls, all aged between 15 and 18 years. In the workshop, the youths were presented with three established scales related to Antonovsky's (1987, 2012) salutogenic theory, Ryan and Deci's (2017) self-determination theory and

Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory. In addition, they were presented with the scale developed to measure health promotion in the environment.

Table 1
Scales Presented in Workshop

Scales	Description
SOC	Sence of coherence scale (Antonovsky, 1987, 2012)
BPNS	Basic psychological needs scale (Center for Self-Determination Theory, n.d.; Schistad & Bergstøl, 2007)
SE	General self-efficacy scale (Røysamb et al., 1998)
New health promotion	Developed to measure health promotion in the environment, based on Antonovsky (2012) and Bakken (2012)

The youths had several critical responses to the scales, among others, they reacted to the negatively formulated items (reversed items). They said that this could influence how they thought about the topic in a negative way – a negative focus suggested a negative response. In addition, they reacted to the wording in some items, and some were perceived as somewhat invasive. The reactions on the SOC-scale were the strongest, as they perceived this scale as "mean", as there were items there that made them feel like "losers" – they said that reading this made them feel like losers (Table 2).

Table 2
Youths' Responses to Scales (Translated From Norwegian)

Scale, range	Item	Responses
SOC 1–7: "Very rarely or never" to "very often"	1. Do you experience that you do not care about your surroundings?	It's a shame that there's a focus on the negative, this influences how the question is perceived. "Surroundings" is unprecise. It would have been different without "not".
	10. All people can feel as losers sometimes. How often do you feel like this?	This seems mean (3 similar comments) It makes us feel like losers. "Losers" is not an okay formulation.
	12. How often do you feel that the things you do everyday are meaningless?	Strange, it has focus on what is not okay, it shouldn't focus on the negative Where? What kind of things?
	13. How often do you have feelings that you do not know if you can control?	Confusing, what type of feelings and where? This is easy to misunderstand.
BPNS 1-4: "Completely wrong" … "completely correct"	18. It seems like those I spend time with do not like me very much.	A bit too personal for a work context.
	20. I rarely get to decide how things are done	At work, one has to do what the boss decides. One has rules at work.

SE	2. If someone works against me, I find ways to get things the way I want.	"Work against" – it is unclear what this means. (3 comments).
1-5: "Completely disagree" … "completely agree"		This could be understood negatively in some contexts, as at work, to think that someone is working against you, this can be misunderstood. The last part can be perceived negatively in a work context, as one defies messages.
	7. I stay calm when faced with difficulties because I trust my ability to cope.	This will vary whether it is small or big difficulties Why is the ability to cope included here? One may stay calm without this being related to one's belief in own ability to cope More specific, what is this about

Note. SOC = Sense of coherence, BPNS = Basic psychological needs, SE = self-efficacy.

There were few critical comments on the scale developed to measure degree of health promotion in the environment, just a couple of small suggestions to make the wording clearer. In general, the responses were positive, and the participants commented that the language was easy to understand, that the questions were okay, and that it was in general well written. Small adjustments according to comments were made.

Phase 3 included piloting the scale in the project run by the voluntary organization, providing youths with paid working activities as well as group gatherings. The questionnaire applied included 18 items (Table 3) with a Likert-scale from 1 "Completely disagree" to 5 "Completely agree". The youths filled in the form anonymously on paper. There were 107 respondents, of which 37 were girls, 55 were boys, and 15 did not report on gender. The respondents are mainly between 15 and 19 years.

Phase 4 included adjusting the scale to a school context, by adding "in school" to items 9, 13, 14, 15 and 16, and making small adjustments to the items. The questionnaire was distributed at one upper secondary school through an anonymous link. This resulted in 267 respondents from both general studies classes and vocational classes.

Principal component analyses with Varimax rotation were applied to reveal underlying factors in the data from phase 3 and 4. IBM SPSS Statistics V.29 was used for the analyses. In line with other studies (Comrey & Lee, 1992; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007) variables with factor loadings over 0.45 are kept, as this is defined as fair. The results are presented in tables.

Results

The factor analysis of the data from the pilot rounds both revealed five underlying factors (Tables 3 and 4). The items are coded based on the framework presented in Figure 1, for example "I feel seen and heard by others" are coded as "Co – Acknowledgement1", "I listen to others" is coded as "Co-Acknowledgement2", and "I master exercises I get" is coded as "Ma – mastery1" (to get access to the full scale, contact author). The scales were piloted in Norwegian.

The factor structure was somewhat unclear, particularly in the first pilot round (Table 3), and the factors only aligned to a certain extent with the three main factors of the salutogenic theory – comprehensibility (C), manageability (Ma) and meaningfulness (Me). Some items had cross-loadings between factors.

Table 3
Factor Analysis Pilot Round 1 (n = 107)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
1. Co – Acknowledgement1	,478			,499	,491
2. Co – Acknowledgement2			,840		
3. Co – Trust1	,638				
4. Co – Trust2			,498	,479	
5. Co – Respect1	,569				
6. Co – Respect2			,769		
7. Ma – Mastery1				,536	
8. Ma – Mastery2			,534		
9. Ma – Participation1	,736				
10. Ma – Participation2		,828			
11. Ma – Safety1		,674			
12. Ma – Safety2	,471				
13. Me – Motivation1				,758	
14. Me – Motivation2		,476		,516	
15. Me – Relations1					,815
16. Me – Relations2	,827				
17. Me – Values1		,724			
18. Me – Values2	,607				

Note. Co = Comprehensibility, Ma = Manageability, Me = Meaningfulness

The pattern was clearer in the second pilot round (Table 4), with the scale adjusted to the school context and a larger sample. Factor 2 includes items on comprehensibility, factor 3 includes items on manageability, and factor 1 includes factors on meaningfulness, in addition to some items on manageability concerning participation.

Table 4
Factor Analysis Pilot Round 2 (n = 267)

Item	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5
1. Co – Acknowledgement1		,693			
2. Co – Acknowledgement2					,720
3. Co – Trust1		,745			
4. Co – Trust2					,575
5. Co – Respect1		,766			
6. Co – Respect2		,544			
7. Ma – Mastery1			,765		
8. Ma – Mastery2			,615		
9. Ma – Participation1	,525				
10. Ma – Participation2	,592				
11. Ma – Safety1			,779		
12. Ma – Safety2					
13. Me – Motivation1	,609				
14. Me – Motivation2	,675				

15. Me – Relations1		,759
16. Me – Relations2		,781
17. Me – Values1	,703	
18. Me – Values2	,607	

Note. Co = Comprehensibility, Ma = Manageability, Me = Meaningfulness

Discussion

This study examines how effects of health promotion efforts may be measured based on Antonovsky's (1987, 2012) theory on sense of coherence. As the items included in the scale have been evaluated and discussed with a focus group of youths, and adjusted accordingly, there is an increased chance that the youths may relate to the questions, compared with the scales that were criticized. The items included are meant to be sensitive and respectful to the youths, and no reversed items with negative wording are included, as this is something they reacted strongly to. The youths were quite clear that negative wordings would direct their thoughts in a negative direction. Also negatively loaded words, such as "loser", which occurs in the original sense-of-coherence scale, were avoided.

The factor structure in the first pilot round was quite unclear, but some patterns emerged. The second pilot round, which included a somewhat larger sample, showed more promising results, aligning to a certain degree with Antonovsky's theory of sense of coherence (1987, 2012). The three factors of comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness are revealed in the analyses, but there is some overlapping between meaningfulness and participation. The reason for this could be that participation and motivation, which is placed under meaningfulness, are two closely related theoretical constructs, as participation in decision-making, or autonomy, is a condition for experiencing intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Some items also appear to be separate factors.

However, both samples were rather small, and there is a need for more extensive piloting to validate the new scale, aiming at measuring health promotion in the environment, or to what extent the environment supports a sense of coherence. Tests of concurrent and discriminant validity are also needed. Still, the scale developed is a good starting point to evaluate how secondary school youths perceive their situation, and it has a potential to be further adjusted and investigated.

Conclusion

There is a need to measure effects of health promotion efforts in school, and this study set out to develop a scale to meet this need. More specifically, a scale for measuring sense of coherence support in the environment has been developed and piloted. The preliminary findings from the first phases of the development process shows that the scale developed has potential, though further validation with a larger sample is needed. The scale needs to be tested for correlations in relation to related scales, as well as for reliability over time. Still, according to the responses from the focus group students, this is a scale with appropriate language and content, and depending on further validation, this may provide a useful tool for evaluating health promotion measures in the future.

Acknowledgements

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Improving the Mental Health of Student-Artists Through the Life Skills Intervention Program: An Evaluation Study

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Abstract

This paper aims to evaluate the life skills intervention program in terms of improving the mental health of student-artists. In the needs assessment survey conducted, it was revealed that the majority of student-artists are more likely to have severe mental health problems. The life skills modules were developed to address this need through the development of ten important core life skills: self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationships, critical thinking, creative thinking, problem-solving, decision-making, coping with stress, and coping with emotions; and were compressed into four workshop modules – Heart, Hand, Head, and Health. The researcher consulted the Culture and Arts Office and used her knowledge and understanding of the student-artists to develop the activities and strategies for each module based on their applicability and relevance to the student artists' needs. After running all modules, a post-test survey called the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) was conducted, which was also utilized as a pre-test survey. Seventeen student-artists who completed all four modules and the pre-test and post-test surveys participated in the evaluation following the Input-Process-Outcomes evaluation framework. The paired t-test results reveal a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores of student-artists, which means that the life skills intervention program effectively improved their mental health. This is supported by numerous pieces of literature that claim that life skills programs benefit students' mental health. Following this positive outcome, conducting regular life skills workshops for student-artists as well as other student populations (e.g., athletes, scholars, etc.) is highly recommended.

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Introduction

Student-artists, similar with other college students, are facing numerous challenges everyday not only in terms of academic-related concerns but as well as with career and personal-related concerns. As a result, this leads to students feeling distressed in juggling various responsibilities. As for student-artists, the demands and responsibilities are even higher knowing that they also need to balance and fulfill expectations being a part of a creative organization in the university. As students and as artists at the same time, they are expected to develop the needed skills for adulthood. They are also expected to work on their age-specific student competencies while at the same time deal with the challenges and expectations they face as artists who perform and represent the school.

As with any other college students, the demands, expectations and challenges faced by student-artists at school can cause stress that may lead to mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances and substance abuse (Pascoe et al., 2019).

Improving the mental health of students in order for them to positively cope to stressful situations especially in school has been one of the main concerns of mental health professionals especially counseling professionals (Savoji & Ganji, 2013). Individuals, especially students, need to develop certain skills in order to cope to any difficult and stressful events and experiences brought not only by school but life in general. Thus, life skills intervention is gaining attention worldwide especially in terms of helping individuals overcome the struggles and tensions they are facing in their day-to-day lives (World Health Organization, 1999). Moreover, coping with academic life requires different skills; therefore, integration of life skills intervention into university curriculum is necessary to examine (Savoji & Ganji, 2013).

According to Azeez (2015), mental health is very significant nowadays that it deserves to be promoted to everyone. He also suggested that like with any other health concerns, mental health should have preventive measures as well. In relevance to this, Azeez (2015) suggested that life skills education deserves a high position in regard with positive intervention. Specifically with student-artists, in order to cope with the increasing pace and change of modern life, they need new life skills such as the ability to deal with stress and frustration as well as the impact it brings to their mental health. On top of being students, they are also artists who need to be equipped with necessary skills in managing life in the creative or artistic environment and creating a well-balanced student-artist life (Choudhary & Rani, 2019).

To respond to the need of improving the mental health of student-artists, the Life Skills Intervention Program was developed. It utilizes a commonly used framework in the implementation of the program modules from the World Health Organization (WHO) Department of Mental Health (1997) and the 4-H Targeting Life Skills Model (Hendricks, 1998). According to WHO (1999), life skills has ten core skills: self-awareness, empathy, effective communication, interpersonal relationship, creative thinking, critical thinking, problem solving, decision making, coping with emotion, and coping with stress. Moreover, the program developed modules corresponding to each life skill.

Generally, this paper aims to evaluate the life skills intervention program in terms of improving the mental health of the student-artists. Specifically, it seeks (1) to assess the mental health of student-artists before and after the implementation of the life skills intervention program (pre-test and post-test scores), (2) to present the workshop module evaluation scores, and (3) to

determine if there is a significant difference in the mental health of student artists after implementing the life skills intervention program.

Figure 1
Conceptual Framework for the Life Skills Intervention Program for Student-Artist
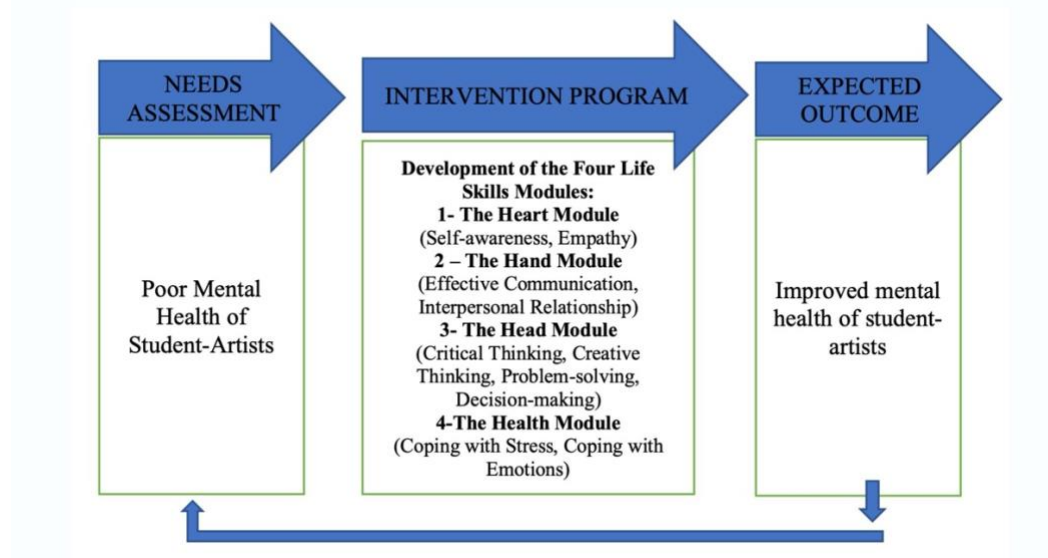
Literature Review

College Life and Mental Health

College students face multifaceted stressors ranging from academic demands and financial responsibilities to social and emotional transitions. This period is recognized as one of the most stressful life stages due to the growing expectation for self-management (Cress & Lampman, 2007). National surveys reflect increasing mental health concerns; for instance, Reilly (2018) noted that visits to college counseling centers rose by 30% from 2009 to 2015, with a significant portion of students reporting overwhelming anxiety and depression. Ross et al. (1999) categorized the main sources of stress among students as intrapersonal (38%), environmental (28%), interpersonal (19%), and academic (15%).

Mental health challenges persist across the college years, with students reporting difficulties managing academic load, financial stress, and limited family interaction (Tosevski et al., 2010; Zivin et al., 2009). The developmental task of individuation and adjustment to adulthood also exacerbates stress levels (Dyson & Renk, 2006).

Mental Health of Student-Artists

Student-artists experience distinct psychosocial stressors due to their immersion in both academic and creative domains. They often face heightened performance anxiety, body image concerns, irregular schedules, and financial instability (Thomson & Jaque, 2017). Carlsson (2002) and Cox and Kenardy (1993) emphasized the prevalence of performance anxiety, particularly in musicians, which often begins days or even weeks before a performance, significantly disrupting daily functioning.

Additionally, dancers exhibit a higher risk of disordered eating, fueled by industry norms that prioritize thinness (Friesen et al., 2011; Scoffier-Meriaux et al., 2015). These pressures, combined with intensive training and public scrutiny, contribute to elevated risks of anxiety, depression, self-harm, and substance abuse (Tosevski et al., 2010). Despite these challenges, many student-artists are reluctant to seek help due to stigma and fear of being misunderstood (Mainwaring & Shulamit, 2019). Educational institutions play a critical role in providing targeted mental health resources and skill development programs to support this vulnerable population (Osborne et al., 2014).

Life Skills in Improving Mental Health

Life skills are psychosocial competencies that enable individuals to effectively navigate daily challenges, manage emotions, and foster healthy interpersonal relationships. These skills build self-esteem, resilience, and a sense of responsibility (Sobhi-Gharamaleki & Rajabi, 2010). Life skills training has been shown to reduce symptoms of anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal while promoting decision-making, self-awareness, and communication skills (Jamali et al., 2016; Smith, 2004).

Studies by Kaligis and Setiastuti (2012) and Singla et al. (2020) highlight the effectiveness of embedding life skills into educational settings. They recommend using existing school platforms to integrate these programs for broader reach and impact on youth mental health.

WHO and 4-H Life Skills Frameworks

The WHO (1997) identifies ten core life skills: self-awareness, empathy, communication, interpersonal relationships, creative and critical thinking, decision-making, problem-solving, emotional regulation, and stress management. These are considered universally relevant for promoting psychosocial competence. Complementing this, the 4-H Model (Hendricks, 1998) organizes life skills into four domains—Head, Heart, Hands, and Health—emphasizing cognitive, social, vocational, and physical competencies. Together, these frameworks offer a comprehensive foundation for structured mental health interventions.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a pre-experimental one-group pre-test/post-test design to assess the effectiveness of a Life Skills Intervention Program on the mental health of student-artists. The research design allowed for a direct comparison of psychological distress levels before and after the intervention using both quantitative and qualitative measures.

Participants

A total of seventeen student-artists (13 females and 4 males) voluntarily participated in the intervention. All participants were currently enrolled in university and active members of recognized artistic organizations. Inclusion criteria required that participants identify as student-artists, be between the ages of 18 to 25, and have no known diagnosed psychiatric condition that would prevent participation. All participants signed informed consent forms prior to the intervention and have completed all four modules.

Program Structure

The Life Skills Intervention Program was based on two widely respected frameworks: the World Health Organization (1997) Life Skills Framework and Hendricks' (1998) 4-H Targeting Life Skills Model. The intervention consisted of four thematic modules: (1) Heart: focused on self-awareness and empathy; (2) Hand: covered communication and interpersonal relationships; (3) Head: addressed critical and creative thinking, problem-solving, and decision-making; and (4) Health: emphasized coping with emotions and stress.

Each module was conducted online through a combination of synchronous sessions, interactive activities, and reflective exercises, lasting approximately 2 hours per session across four weeks.

Data Collection Instruments

Two primary tools were used for data collection. The Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) was administered before and after the program. The K10 is a validated self-report questionnaire designed to measure levels of non-specific psychological distress. Scores classify participants into levels of distress ranging from "likely to be well" to "likely to have a severe disorder." After each module, participants completed a workshop evaluation form, a standardized feedback form, rating their satisfaction and engagement with the content on a Likert scale, and open-ended reflections.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data from the K10 were analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and a paired sample t-test to determine significant changes in psychological distress scores pre- and post-intervention. Satisfaction scores were analyzed through mean ratings per module.

Qualitative data from open-ended feedback were examined using thematic analysis, identifying key patterns in participants' reflections on their learning experiences and emotional responses.

Results and Discussion

The findings of this study affirm the effectiveness of the Life Skills Intervention Program in improving the mental health of student-artists, a population that often experiences compounded psychological stress due to the demands of academic and creative performance. A significant reduction in psychological distress scores after the intervention, moving from severe to mild levels, suggests that equipping students with core life skills such as emotional regulation, decision-making, and interpersonal communication can have a profound impact on their psychological resilience. Participants' consistently high satisfaction with each module, particularly those targeting cognitive and emotional competencies, reinforces the relevance and applicability of the program's content. These outcomes are supported by existing literature that underscores the value of life skills education in reducing anxiety, depression, and maladaptive coping strategies among youth (Jamali et al., 2016; Kaligis & Setiastuti, 2012; Sobhi-Gharamaleki & Rajabi, 2010).

Qualitative reflections further enrich the findings, revealing that participants not only learned new skills but also developed a deeper understanding of themselves and how they respond to stress. This dual focus on skill acquisition and self-awareness is particularly valuable for

student-artists, who face unique psychosocial stressors including performance anxiety, body image concerns, and fear of failure. The structure and delivery of the program, rooted in the WHO's core life skills and Hendricks' 4-H Model, allowed for a holistic approach that addressed both cognitive and emotional dimensions of well-being. While the absence of a control group and the limited sample size are notable limitations, the strength and consistency of the results suggest that this model holds promise for broader implementation. Institutions should consider integrating similar interventions into their student development programs to address mental health concerns and equip students with lifelong skills for navigating personal and professional challenges.

Improved Mental Health Outcomes

The Life Skills Intervention Program produced a statistically significant improvement in participants' mental health, as measured by the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). Pre-intervention scores indicated that most participants were "likely to have a severe disorder" (M = 31.29, SD = 6.41). Following the intervention, post-test scores reflected a reduction in the "likely to have a mild disorder" category (M = 24.41, SD = 5.84). A paired samples t-test revealed a significant difference between the pre- and post-test scores (t = 4.460, p < .001), confirming the effectiveness of the program.

Notably, this mental health improvement was consistent across demographic groups (e.g., gender and year level), suggesting that the intervention is broadly applicable among student-artists, regardless of their specific backgrounds. This supports the idea posited by Kaligis and Setiastuti (2012) that life skills training, when adapted to specific populations, remains universally beneficial.

Table 1
Pre-test Scores of Student-Artists in K10 When Taken as a Whole and Classified According to Sex and Year Level

Category		Mean	SD	Interpretation
Entire Group		31.29	6.41	"Likely to have a severe disorder"
Sex				
	Female	31.23	7.37	"Likely to have a severe disorder"
	Male	31.50	1.29	"Likely to have a severe disorder"
Year Level				
	2nd Year	30.20	9.31	"Likely to have a severe disorder"
	3rd Year	31.75	5.24	"Likely to have a severe disorder"

Table 2
Post-test Scores of Student-Artists in K10 When Taken as a Whole and Classified According to Sex and Year Level

Category		Mean	SD	Interpretation
Entire Group		24.41	5.842	"Likely to have a mild disorder"
Sex				
	Female	24.62	6.449	"Likely to have a mild disorder"
	Male	23.75	3.862	"Likely to have a mild disorder"
Year Level				
	2nd Year	22.40	1.949	"Likely to have a mild disorder"
	3rd Year	25.25	6.757	"Likely to have a moderate disorder"

Table 3
Paired T-Test for the Significant Difference Between the Pre-test and Post-test Scores of K10 among Student-Artists

Category	t-value	df	Sig-value	Interpretation
Pre-Test Score (Kessler) - Post-Test Score (Kessler)	4.460	16	0.000	Significant Different

Consistent Satisfaction Across Modules

Participants evaluated each of the four modules using a Likert scale ranging from 1 ("Not Satisfied") to 4 ("Very Satisfied"). All modules scored exceptionally high, with the "Head" module (focused on decision-making and problem-solving) receiving the highest average rating (M = 4.00), followed by "Heart" (M = 3.94), "Health" (M = 3.88), and "Hand" (M = 3.76). These ratings reflect the participants' perception that the content was relevant, engaging, and applicable to their real-life challenges.

These results are consistent with findings by Singla et al. (2020), who noted that effective life skills programs often focus on strengthening self-regulation, improving peer relationships, and enhancing child-parent dynamics—each of which were covered in this intervention. Furthermore, the strong positive feedback supports Azeez's (2015) claim that life skills education is a critical preventive approach to mental health issues and deserves more emphasis within academic curricula.

Table 4
Student-Artists Level of Satisfaction on the Life Skills Intervention Modules

Category	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Entire Group	3.90	0.199	"Very Satisfied"
By Module			
Heart	3.94	0.24	"Very Satisfied"
Hand	3.76	0.39	"Very Satisfied"
Head	4.00	0.00	"Very Satisfied"
Health	3.88	0.34	"Very Satisfied"

Qualitative Reflections and Thematic Patterns

Open-ended responses further validated the program's impact. Participants reported increased self-awareness, better control over emotions, improved communication, and greater clarity in managing stress. Themes such as "gaining insight into personal triggers," "feeling more confident in decision-making," and "learning to articulate emotions in healthy ways" emerged consistently across responses.

These outcomes align with previous literature (e.g., Jamali et al., 2016; Kaligis & Setiastuti, 2012) highlighting how life skills training enhances coping strategies and emotional regulation, especially in high-stress academic environments.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the effectiveness of a Life Skills Intervention Program tailored for student-artists, aiming to enhance their mental health through the development of core psychosocial competencies. Grounded in the frameworks of the World Health Organization (1997) and Hendricks' (1998) 4-H Targeting Life Skills Model, the intervention focused on modules addressing self-awareness, emotional regulation, communication, decision-making, and stress management. The findings demonstrated a significant reduction in psychological distress, with participants shifting from severe to mild levels of mental health risk as measured by the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10). High satisfaction ratings and positive qualitative feedback further affirmed the relevance and impact of the program on student-artists' well-being. These outcomes align with existing literature that supports life skills training as an effective, low-cost, and scalable approach to mental health promotion in educational settings (Singla et al., 2020; Sobhi-Gharamaleki & Rajabi, 2010).

Recommendations

Given the encouraging results, it is recommended that similar life skills programs be integrated into the regular student support services and curricula of higher education institutions, especially for vulnerable populations such as student-artists, athletes, and scholars. Incorporating life skills training into academic environments not only supports emotional well-being but also enhances academic performance and interpersonal functioning (Jamali et al., 2016). Future iterations of the program should consider implementing a hybrid delivery format (combining in-person and online modules) and expanding participant groups to ensure wider applicability and engagement. Additionally, longitudinal studies with larger sample sizes and control groups are encouraged to strengthen the evidence base and assess the long-term benefits of such interventions. Educators, counselors, and program designers are urged to champion life skills education as a proactive measure in addressing the growing mental health challenges within college campuses today (Azeez, 2015; Kaligis & Setiastuti, 2012).

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Short Version of the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21:
Is it Valid for Jordanian Adults?

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Abstract

Given the potential utility of depression anxiety stress scale-21 and the availability of a reliable Arabic version, the current study aimed to collect information about the factorial structure and psychometric properties of the Jordanian version by administering it to adult members of the community. Thus, the depression-anxiety-stress scale was used in examining mental disorders in Jordanian adults. The study included adults of both sexes aged 18 to 72 years. The reliability of the overall DASS-21 scores and the three DASS-21 subscales were calculated. Exploratory factor analysis was used to test construct validity. Confirmatory factor analysis was performed for the two models (one-factor and three-factor models) for DASS-21 to determine the best factor structure for DASS-21 in the adult sample. The findings revealed that the DASS-21 has high reliability and validity indicators, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.80. Pearson's correlation between DASS-21 and the Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II) and the Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI) were strongly positive, indicating that DASS-21 has sufficient convergent and divergent validity. The exploratory factor analysis showed that the three-factor model had the best indicators, and the confirmatory factor analysis results confirmed that the three-factor model was the fittest and most appropriate. The current study's findings suggest that the Jordanian version of the DASS-21 can be used as a reliable and valid scale for measuring depression, anxiety, and stress in adults.

Keyword: DASS-21, depression, anxiety, stress, adult, Jordan

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Introduction

In low- and middle-income countries, especially in resource-poor countries, depression and anxiety are the two most common mental disorders (Fisher et al., 2012; Goldberg & Huxley, 1992). Briefly, the early detection of these problems in primary health care is essential to treat the injured and reduce community disability (World Health Organization, 2001) and mental awareness issues, as the health focus on infectious diseases and malnutrition in these countries is declining. Mental health awareness is growing. There is an increasing need for screening measures that primary care professionals can use to screen patients with common mental illnesses in the community, and clinicians and researchers are interested in the link between depression and anxiety (Murad, 2020; Tran et al., 2013).

Although there is a large amount of empirical evidence that mental disorders are on the rise worldwide, it is regrettable that medical authorities and psychiatrists have failed to identify people with mental disorders, such as depression and anxiety (Prince et al., 2007; World Health Organization, 2008). Individuals with mental disorders in clinical and non-clinical samples show why early recognition of people is important for early psychological intervention (Prince et al., 2007). Clark and Watson (1991) proposed a three-pronged model of depression and anxiety, and this model indicates that both conditions share several symptoms of a high negative impact, such as discomfort and irritability. Depression is characterized by low levels of positive emotions, including happiness, self-confidence, and excitement, while anxiety is characterized by physiological hypertension (Coker et al., 2018).

Most of the development of DASS is done on non-clinical samples (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995a, 1995b). DASS was originally designed to have only two subscales: one for anxiety and the other for depression. Each includes items that are considered unique. However, fuzzy items that are not related to depression or anxiety are not included in the evaluation, but they serve as controls. Several items were added to this group, and the third subscale (the stress scale) was born. Lovibond & Lovibond (1995a) pointed out that although the scale is related to a combination of depression and anxiety, it is a consistent measure.

The trial version was revised using a factorial analysis, and the third factor emerged from word analysis, which led to no difference between anxiety and depression, defined as stress. Its main characteristics are irritability, nervousness, difficulty relaxing and arousal (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995a). The latest version of DASS includes 42 items, divided into three subscales: depression, anxiety and stress (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995b). There are two versions of DASS: the full version (42 items) and the short version (21 items).

With the intent of developing concise forms that can be used for research and time-limited situations, Lovibond and Lovibond (1995b) selected seven representative items for each subscale of the questionnaire from the original DASS. The selected items should have good loading factors in the original scale and each score, and a short scale should be very close to the corresponding half of the total score. The internal consistency results for all three parameters (depression = 0.81, anxiety = 0.73, stress = 0.81) were published in a non-clinical sample. Despite the potential relevance of DASS-21, the factor analysis and psychometric characteristics of the aforementioned short scale are not documented (Bottesi et al., 2015). Several studies have examined the psychometric properties of the scale in clinical (Antony et al., 1998; Apóstolo et al., 2006) and non-clinical (Henry & Crawford, 2005; Mahmoud et al., 2010; Osman et al., 2012; Sinclair et al., 2012) adult samples. These surveys show that the three subscales have greater internal consistency, with scores ranging from 0.80 to 0.91. The

significant convergent validity ranges from 0.50 to 0.80. The correlation between the three aspects of DASS-21 is moderate to significant, ranging from 0.46 to 0.75.

The psychometric properties of DASS-21, tested in clinical samples from various adult groups with different cultural backgrounds, generally gave positive results (Bottesi et al., 2015; Clara et al., 2001; Osman et al., 2012; Wang et al., 2016). These studies showed that all three subscales have strong internal consistency. Internal consistency for the scale, ranging from 0.92 to 0.96., as a whole was not often reported but has been published in studies (Gloster et al., 2008; Henry & Crawford, 2005; Wang et al., 2016).

Many studies use exploratory and confirmatory methods to evaluate the factor structure of DASS-21, but the results are usually uncertain. Multiple studies have confirmed the three-factor structure of DASS-21 (Antony et al., 1998; Sinclair et al., 2012). Although some perform well, they are less adaptable (Bados et al., 2005). It was also found that the 21-items form has a clearer factor structure and lower factor correlation than the longer version (Henry & Crawford, 2005). However, some studies have shown that the four-factors structure, including depression, anxiety and stress, and general psychological distress factors, provide a better indicator (Alfonsson et al., 2017; Bottesi et al., 2015; Henry & Crawford, 2005; Osman et al., 2012).

In terms of the convergence and discriminative significance of (DASS-21) shows an acceptable correlation with other anxiety and depression scales. It was found that there was a significant correlation between the BAI and DASS-21 anxiety scales and the BDI and DASS-21 depression scales ($r = 0.74$) ($r = 0.81$), respectively. However, clinical samples showed similar patterns of association (Antony et al., 1998). (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995b) found that the reliability assessed by Cronbach's alpha is satisfactory for depression, anxiety, and stress and is equivalent to the value obtained by (Antony et al., 1998; Brown et al., 1997). The influence of demographics on DASS scores has not been extensively studied during the development of DASS. The analysis was limited to gender and age, although the author of the test did not specify whether age or gender had a significant effect (Crawford & Henry, 2003).

In the current study, the shortened version of DASS was chosen, as a meta-analysis study that directly checked the two scales in the clinical group showed that DASS-21 was associated with a cleaner factor structure relative to DASS-42 (Antony et al., 1998; Clara et al., 2001). In addition, there is no Arab study investigating the applicability of DASS-21 validity to general adults. The lack of normative data can be explained by his statement (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995a) that the DASS-21 score doubled can be directly compared with the DASS-42 score because DASS-21 covers the entire range of symptoms recorded in the longer version of DASS.

DASS-21 has been translated and verified in many languages, including Chinese (Chan et al., 2012), Malay (Musa et al., 2007), Italian (Severino & Haynes, 2010), and Spanish (Bados et al., 2005). It was also translated into Arabic and tested on Arab immigrants in Australia (Moussa et al., 2017). Its effectiveness and reliability have not been tested in the Arab world. DASS-21 is considered a valuable testing scale because it assesses multiple areas and is psychologically effective in both English and non-English contexts (Tran et al., 2013), but its understanding and the psychometric properties are still to be determined in low-income countries (Brown et al., 1997). Therefore, one of the issues currently being investigated is to determine the understanding of characteristics, psychological indicators, including internal

reliability, and the effectiveness of the anxiety and depression stress scale as a standard for the study of depression, anxiety, and stress in Jordanian adults. DASS-21 proposes a modern understanding of the nature of negative emotions and its built-in psychological characteristics and assesses depression, anxiety, and stress. DASS-21 is often used in Australian and international research and clinical trials and evaluation of the results (Moussa et al., 2017). Generally, it is an effective instrument for dealing with clients who do not understand English. It is particularly important to evaluate the psychometric properties of solutions such as DASS-21 in the Arabic context because the psychometric properties recorded in previous studies are culturally different from those in Arab culture.

Some Arab studies of the psychometric properties of the DASS-21 were available within the researcher's knowledge, the first of which was on a sample of Arab immigrants in Australia (Moussa et al., 2017) and another new one on a sample of university students in Jordan (Al-Dassean & Murad, 2024). The studies were on the following: (a) a sample of nursing workers in Saudi Arabia (Al-Zahrani, 2019), (b) a group of mentally ill and quarantined patients in Saudi Arabia during the COVID-19 pandemic (Ali et al., 2021), (c) the psychometric properties of the DASS-21 on a sample of Egyptian drug users (Ali & Green, 2019), (d) a Syrian sample during the COVID-19 pandemic (Mohammed, 2021), and (e) the confirmatory factor analysis of the DASS-21 on a sample of Algerian secondary school students (Rasheed, 2016). Several Arab studies have highlighted that they studied specific clinical and non-clinical samples from the community. Their findings typically concluded that they support the triple structure of DASS-21, comparable to the original version in Australia. These studies identified a strong correlation between each item, the subscale to which it belongs, and the overall DASS-21 score, as well as a high Cronbach's alpha stability value ranging from 0.91 to 0.94. Ali and Green (2019) showed that the single factor structure was best suited in a sample of drug users. Its findings revealed that the modified version of 17 items demonstrated that DASS-17 was appropriate for measuring total pressure, and the results of close validation demonstrated that DASS-17 was superior to DASS-21. The first Arabic version (Moussa et al., 2017), which issued the first Arabic version of DASS-21, revealed that the Arabic version of DASS-21 discriminated between negative emotional syndromes of depression, anxiety, and tension, and its internal consistency was high. The Arabic DASS-21 was thought to be particularly suitable for regular evaluation and treatment outcome evaluation.

Additionally, DASS-21 is an easy-to-use instrument that can be used for clinical and research purposes. Thus, it is necessary to study its psychological measurement and application characteristics on Jordanian samples. Consider the potential use of DASS-21 and its inaccessibility to the adult population of Jordan and the entire Arab region. The main purpose of this study is to collect information about factor structure and psychometric characteristics by distributing the Jordanian version of the questionnaire to key members of adult communities in non-clinical settings. Earlier studies in English-speaking and non-English-speaking countries found significant associations between the scales (Bados et al., 2005; Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995b). However, the current study aimed to investigate especially the structure of the Jordanian DASS-21 factor by performing confirmatory, exploratory factor analysis and internal consistency assessment and checking the construct validity of the scale, using several mental health and well-being scales, such as Beck's depression scale and Beck's anxiety scale.

Method

Participants

Nine hundred and thirty-five individuals (51% males) from the general adult population, residing in various cities across Jordan's three regions (North, Central, and South), responded to the study and completed all study elements. The participants (M = 33.55, SD = 13.43) ranged from 18 to 72 years. Among them, 50% had completed their university education, 50.3% were married, 48.3% were unmarried, 1.4% were divorced, and 58% were not employees. All participants are Jordanians, except for 120 participants of other nationalities. One hundred and twenty-seven students from Al-Balqa Applied University (57% male, mean age = 21, SD = 6.7) completed the DASS-21 questionnaire twice, separated by two weeks, to collect data on the temporal stability of DASS-21. All participants were from a non-clinical sample and had no mental or psychiatric illnesses.

Procedure

Participants were recruited from many sources in the public and private sectors. Each participant received an introduction letter and a DASS-21 form; a subset of participants received and completed two additional self-report scales (Beck for depression, Beck for anxiety). The information was gathered through an anonymous online questionnaire sent across Jordanian WhatsApp, Facebook, and Twitter groups between March 20, 2023, and April 28, 2023. The participants attest that they are over 18 years old and exclusively of Jordanian nationality. Non-Jordanian nationals made up 120 of the competitors. Data were collected from participants who clicked on the questionnaire link on the first page, which included an explanation of the study and its aims in basic English. Data registration of participants has been verified, an anonymous name was provided, and a statement stating that they have the choice to withdraw from the survey at any time was added. Participants indicated their informed permission digitally by opting to participate in the study.

Measurements

Depression, Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21)

The Arabic translation phrase was obtained from the DASS official website [http://www2.psy.unsw.edu.au/dass/Arabic/Arabic percent 20DASS-21.pdf] (accessed on January 25, 2022). It was validated (Moussa et al., 2017) from the original DASS-21 scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995b), which is a 21-item self-report instrument in three sub domains that assesses depressive, anxiety and stress on a scale of 0 to 3 and shows participants' level of support for symptoms during the previous week's session. The researcher went over the common Arabic version of DASS-21 to ensure that no slang is restricted to a specific category. The scale's translation from English to Arabic was also double-checked by experts to ensure its accuracy. An Arabic language expert proofread and edited it. It turns out that items 1 and 12 were translated from English to Arabic with the same translation and the same meaning, resulting in the item being repeated in the common version. An English language and psychology experts translated the two items into English. A new translation that precisely matches the intended meaning has been approved. Expert assessments of the original version of the DASS-21 revealed excellent clarity for all three subscale items: depression, anxiety, and stress.

The Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II)

The Jordanian version of the Single Beck Depression Scale developed by Al-Dassean (2004) was used in this study. It is a 21-item self-report scale used to assess the severity of depression's emotional, cognitive, motivational, vegetative, and psychomotor components. Al-Dassean found that the BDI-II had excellent psychometric properties and the internal consistency coefficients were good to excellent. In the current study, Cronbach's alpha was 0.85 for the scale's internal consistency.

The Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI)

It is a self-report inventory of 21 items that assess the severity of anxiety. Research (Al-Shatti, 2015) on non-clinical samples found that the Arabic version of the BAI has a good psychological scale. Cronbach's alpha ranged from good to excellent (0.88-0.92), the coefficient of stability was 0.79, and the value of Cronbach = 0.87 in the current study.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, SD, skewness, and kurtosis) were calculated for the DASS-21 items to examine the distribution indicators. Cohen et al. (2003) proposed cutoff scores of less than 2 for skewness and less than 7 for kurtosis to test the normality of each DASS-21 item. Internal correlations between the three subscales, depression, anxiety, and stress, and the overall DASS-21 score were used to assess test-retest repeatability. Values ranging from 0.40 to 0.74 were considered to indicate good reliability (Fleiss, 1986). Product moment correlations were calculated to investigate the correlations and temporal stability of the DASS-21 results. In addition to calculating the different correlations between the DASS-21 scores and other measures of similar constructs such as the BDI-II and BAI (convergent/divergent validity), differences in correlations within the sample were tested. In the adult sample, Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to compare the scores of the DASS-21 scales based on demographic variables such as age, gender, educational level, place of residence, marital status, and employment status. Furthermore, using linear regression analyses, the impact of demographic factors on adults' responses to the three subscales was investigated. Varimax rotation, an exploratory factor analysis of the principal axis components, was used to assess construct validity. Factor loading values greater than 0.40 were regarded as robust (Osman et al., 2012). A series of CFAs were performed on a sample of study participants to test the different internal structures of DASS-21. Several indicators were used to assess each CFA's suitability. As the chi-square X^2 is very sensitive to sample size, two relative fit indices, non-normal fit index (NNFI) and comparative fit index (CFI), were considered, as both work well with different sample sizes. Acceptable values for these indices are greater than 0.95 and less than 0.97, respectively (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003).

<center>**Results**</center>

Internal Consistency

For DASS-21 items, distribution indices were computed. Table 1 shows the mean (0.77 to 1.47) for items, means, and standard deviations for the three subscales of depression, anxiety, stress, and the overall DASS-21 score. All DASS-21 items had skewness and kurtosis values less than 2, which are good indicators of normality (Cohen et al., 2003). Table 2 displays

Cronbach's alpha and the correlations between the three subscales of the sample of adults in the population as a whole. Cronbach's alpha coefficients exceeded 0.80, indicating good internal consistency for the subscales and the scale as a whole. Correlations between the three subscales were strong, ranging from 0.69 to 0.80, P = 0.01. The correlation between each DASS-21 subscale and the overall score was very significant, ranging from 0.87 to 0.94, and all DASS-21 subscales had two-week test-retest reliability (depression r = 0.76, anxiety r = 0.67, stress r = 0.69, total r = 0.80).

Table 1
Items Distribution (n = 935)

Item No.	Mean	SE	SD	Min.	Max.	Skewness	Kurtosis
1	1.24	0.03	0.97	0.0	3.0	0.207	- 0.994
2	1.19	0.03	1.0	0.0	3.0	0.394	- 0.931
3	1.29	0.03	1.05	0.0	3.0	0.301	- 1.114
4	1.19	0.03	1.0	0.0	3.0	0.410	- 0.915
5	0.80	0.03	1.0	0.0	3.0	0.883	- 0.455
6	0.97	0.03	1.02	0.0	3.0	0.666	- 0.787
7	0.82	0.03	1.0	0.0	3.0	0.938	- 0.361
8	1.03	0.03	1.0	0.0	3.0	0.598	- 0.787
9	1.28	0.03	1.11	0.0	3.0	0.286	- 1.267
10	0.91	0.03	1.02	0.0	3.0	0.766	- 0.675
11	0.84	0.03	1.0	0.0	3.0	0.915	- 0.377
12	1.0	0.03	0.98	0.0	3.0	0.619	- 0.686
13	1.47	0.03	1.09	0.0	3.0	0.081	- 1.258
14	1.15	0.03	0.95	0.0	3.0	0.410	- 0.779
15	1.42	0.03	1.06	0.0	3.0	0.175	- 1.182
16	1.28	0.03	1.09	0.0	3.0	0.341	- 1.811
17	0.77	0.03	1.02	0.0	3.0	1.05	- 0.196
18	0.88	0.03	1.0	0.0	3.0	0.848	- 0.488
19	1.07	0.03	1.05	0.0	3.0	0.547	- 0.947
20	1.46	0.03	1.12	0.0	3.0	0.083	- 1.365
21	1.20	0.03	1.20	0.0	3.0	0.408	- 1.40

Table 2
Summary Statistics for the DASS-21 (N = 935), Convergent and Divergent Validity

	Cronbach' alpha	M	SD	Range	1	2	3	Total
DASS-21								
1. Depression	0.89	15.6	11.64	42	1.0	0.80**	0.69**	0.92**
2. Anxiety	0.87	16.9	11.0	42		1.0	0.72**	0.94**
3. Stress	0.82	14.2	9.6	42			1.0	0.87**
Total	0.94	46.62	29.32	126				1.0
BDI-II	0.85	22.4	10.1	63	0.51**	0.41**	0.46**	0.51**
BAI	0.87	23.2	9.8	63	0.50**	0.62**	0.49**	0.63**

BDI-II: Beck Depression Inventory-II; BDI-II: Beck Anxiety Inventory.
**$p < 0.01$

Convergent and Divergent Validity

Pearson's correlation with the Beck depression scale and the beck anxiety scale was used to determine the DASS-21's convergent and divergent validity. According to Table 2, the depression score in the DASS-21 was more strongly correlated with the contralateral scale

BDI-II than with the other non-contrast scales, and the anxiety score in the DASS-21 was more strongly correlated with the contralateral scale BAI than with the other scales. Overall, the results indicated that the DASS-21 had sufficient convergent and divergent validity, and the overall DASS-21 score was similarly correlated with measures of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Data Distribution

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin sampling adequacy scale (KMO = 0.957) and Bartlett's test of sphericity (X^2 = 10173.778, Comp = 0.000, DF = 210) results confirmed that the data were suitable for factor analysis and that the model's adequacy was excellent (Cohen, 1988; Field, 2009).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

Various EFAs were performed, and two models (the one-factor model and the three-factor model) were tested. In the single-factor model, it was discovered that all DASS-21 items were loaded on one factor, with a loading factor ranging from 0.472 to 0.778, except for item no. 1, which was loaded on another factor of 0.421 and explained 43% of the total variance. Examination of the three-factor model discovered that items 3, 4, 5, 14, 15, and 19 were loaded on two factors, namely depression and anxiety, with a loading factor greater than 0.30. (Fleiss, 1986). Item 8 had a loading factor of 0.389 on the depression subscale and 0.422 on the stress subscale. With a loading factor of 0.343 and 0.419, respectively, item 12 loaded on the anxiety and stress factors. Due to deleting 8 DASS-21 items, we obtained a 13-item DASS-13 scale, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3
Exploratory Factor Analysis (DASS-21 One Factor, DASS-21 Three Factors, DASS-13 Three Factors)

Subscales	Item NO.	Communalities		DASS-12 One Factor	Factor Loadings DASS-21			Item NO.	Factor Loadings DASS-13		
		Initial	Extraction		1	2	3		1	2	3
	3	0.619	0.610	0.760	0.534	0.530		3	Deleted		
	5	0.532	0.526	0.726	0.513	0.406		5	Deleted		
	10	0.536	0.545	0.711	0.607			10	0.623		
Depression	13	0.570	0.584	0.720	0.590			13	0.597		
	16	0.578	0.624	0.730	0.699			16	0.698		
	17	0.448	0.489	0.624	0.640			17	0.655		
	21	0.525	0.593	0.677	0.714			21	0.730		
	2	0.340	0.360	0.550		0.507		2		0.503	
	4	0.612	0.619	0.778	0.492	0.547		4	Deleted		
	7	0.379	0.374	0.581		0.434		7		0.488	
Anxiety	9	0.550	0.581	0.716		0.625		9		0.639	
	15	0.487	0.478	0.661	0.471	0.486		15	Deleted		
	19	0.541	0.511	0.716	0.428	0.445		19	Deleted		
	20	0.560	0.635	0.718		0.691		20		0.732	
	1	0.320	0.244	0.421			0.405	1			0.355
	6	0.436	0.603	0.472			0.759	6			0.851
	8	0.420	0.416	0.629	0.389		0.422	8	Deleted		
Stress	11	0.495	0.536	0.608			0.619	11			0.529
	12	0.361	0.349	0.554		0.343	0.419	12	Deleted		
	14	0.471	0.425	0.654	0.407	0.388	0.330	14	Deleted		
	18	0.518	0.510	0.663			0.502	18			0.493

Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Three different CFAs were performed to determine the best factor structure for DASS-21 in a sample of Jordanian adults, per the recommendations (Reise et al., 2010). The following three models were tested for DASS-21: (a). one-factor, (b). three-factor DASS-21, and (c). three-factor DASS-13. The one-factor model for DASS-21 provided the worst fit (Table 4).

Table 4
Confirmatory Factor Analysis

Model	n	X^2	Df	P	NNFI	CFI	RMSEA	RMR	SRMR
Unidimensional	935	720.524	170	0.000	0.932	0.945	0.059	0.041	0.0384
DASS-21	935	628.169	167	0.000	0.942	0.954	0.054	0.038	0.0350
DASS-13	935	168.925	55	0.000	0.968	0.977	0.047	0.032	0.0290
Cut-off (Schermelleh-Engel et al., 2003)					>0.90	>0.95	<0.05	<0.05	<0.05

The three-factor DASS-21 model produced appropriate indicators, whereas the three-factor DASS-13 model produced the best indicators. This lends credence to the hypothesis that the three-factor is the best and most suitable.

DASS-21 Association With Demographic Variables

The results of the MANOVA to examine the significance of the means differences of the participants' responses to the DASS-21 sub-scales revealed that there are differences between males and females in the scores of the subscales and the total score of the DASS-21, in favor of females. While the analysis revealed no differences in the degrees of the sub-scales or the overall DASS-21 score as a result of other demographic variables (age, educational level, place of residence, marital status, and employment status). This result was confirmed by using linear regression to examine the effect of demographic factors on adults' responses to the three subscales (Table 5).

Table 5
Demographic Variables and Psychological Impact

Factor	N	Depression R^2	AR	B	Anxiety R^2	AR	B	Stress R^2	AR	B
Age	935	0.038	0.037	-0.196	0.037	0.036	-0.193	0.006	0.005	0.080
Gender										
Male	471	0.029	0.028	0.171*	0.047	0.046	0.216*	0.023	0.022	-0.151*
Female	464									
Education Level										
Elementary	16	0.002	0.002	-0.041	0.000	-0.001	0.000	0.002	0.001	0.144
Secondary	174									
Diploma	273									
Bachelor's	319									
Higher Education	153									
Residential Area										
North Province	211	0.005	0.004	0.073	0.005	0.004	0.068	0.000	-0.001	0.010
Middle Province	196									
South Province	528									
Marital Status										
Single	452	0.018	0.017	-0.135	0.017	0.016	-0.130	0.001	-0.001	-0.023
Married	470									

Divorced	13								
Employment Status									
Yes	394	0.001	0.000	0.030	0.000	-0.000	0.020	0.009	0.008	-0.094
No	541								

R^2: R –Squared; AR: Adjusted R –Squared; B: Beta 95%; * *p < 0.05*

Discussion

The current study employed methods to assess the internal reliability of the depression, anxiety, and stress subscales and the internal reliability of the scale as a whole. It is essential to assure that the scale is reliable across all population groups. However, there has only been one published assessment of the repeatability of the DASS-21 test and retest, and appropriate statistical tests were used for this purpose. Bottesi et al. (2015) reported values r = 0.75 for depression, r = 0.64 for anxiety, and r = 0.64 for stress, indicating a moderate positive correlation. The current study calculated Pearson's correlation between the three subscales and the overall DASS-21 score because the Pearson correlation coefficient effectively measures the relationship between the data test-retest rather than the agreement between them. The DASS-21 formulations were correlated with an acceptable positive correlation in this study. The relationship between anxiety, depression, and stress was at its peak, which supports previous research (Sica et al., 2009; Sinclair et al., 2012; Szabo, 2010). Positive correlations between the three subscales indicate that there are similarities between items associated with the different scales, which may pose difficulties in detecting signs of depression, anxiety, and stress. This does not fully explain the findings of the construction analysis based on three factors, as suggested by the original scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995b). These findings demonstrated excellent test and retest validity, indicating that the DASS-21 is appropriate for use with the general adult population in the community. Cronbach's alpha was calculated for each DASS-21 subscale separately and for the overall scale. The scale was found to be reliable in this study, with excellent internal consistency values when compared to those reported in other recent studies (Bottesi et al., 2015; Osman et al., 2012; Sica et al., 2009; Silva et al., 2016). Cronbach's alpha values for the scale as a whole were reported in four studies (Al-Zahrani, 2019; Bottesi et al., 2015; Sica et al., 2009; Silva et al., 2016), and these values, along with the values observed in this study, indicated that the DASS- 21 had good and acceptable internal consistency and was composed of independent items. The current findings may imply that using the overall DASS-21 score is just as appropriate as calculating the scores of the three subscales individually. This score represents the idea that the DASS-21 is a common overall measure of distress, and the DASS-21 appears to be equally appropriate for research purposes because it measures general distress in a very efficient and economical manner.

In light of the current findings, I believe that DASS-21 may enable the purposeful and effective measurement of depression-anxiety traits and general distress traits, per the findings of a study (Osman et al., 2012), and this finding is consistent with Clark and Watson (1991) model, which suggests that negative influence can be a common feature of depression and anxiety syndromes, each of which is distinguished by its items. For all DASS-21 scores, the two-week temporal stability was acceptable. In particular, the correlations between the measures were positive and good in the current study's sample of participants, which is consistent with previous findings (Apóstolo et al., 2006; Bottesi et al., 2015; Musa et al., 2007; Sinclair et al., 2012). Furthermore, the results of the associations between the three subscales and measures of the same different constructs are generally satisfactory, which is

consistent with previous research (Henry & Crawford, 2005; Oei et al., 2013; Sinclair et al., 2012).

The research examined the convergent and discriminatory validity of measures of anxiety and depression but did not include a measure of stress. Indeed, the stress scale was positively correlated with both the BDI-II scale and the BAI scale with high reliability, and this result is consistent with previous findings (Osman et al., 2012). The analyses revealed only minor associations between age and DASS-21 scores, indicating that the questionnaire is largely insensitive to age, as well as educational level, place of residence, marital status, and employment status. Because the analyses revealed no significant relationship between these demographic variables and any of the DASS-21 scale scores, the current findings regarding age, educational level, place of residence, marital and occupational status, and marital and occupational status provide evidence that the previous demographic characteristics do not affect the results of the Jordanian version of DASS-21, allowing it to be administered to a large population. The analyses revealed strong and positive correlations between gender and total DASS-21 scores on the one hand, and gender and DASS-21 sub-scales scores on the other, indicating the scale's gender sensitivity. Females scored higher on the overall scale and on the DASS-21 subscales, which is consistent with previous findings that show higher levels for women than men of depression (Apóstolo et al., 2012), anxiety (Mahmoud et al., 2010), stress (Mahmoud et al., 2010), and total score for DASS-21 (Apóstolo et al., 2012). These findings confirm that the three constructs have high, concordant, and motivating validity, and they are consistent with previous research that has looked at associations between the DASS-21 and other measures. While other studies have found no gender differences in any of the three DASS-21 subscale scores (Bottesi et al., 2015), Wang et al., (2016) found that males scored significantly higher on the depression scale than females in their validation study in China, which could be due to cultural differences.

The structural analysis of DASS-21 reveals some issues, such as forcing some items to be loaded on more than one structure or forcing them to be loaded on nominally unrelated structures, however, this study's finding do not differ from previous studies (Al-Dassean & Murad, 2024). The scale's 20 items were loaded onto a single factor, which is thought to be the general distress factor, except for item 1, which was loaded to a factor other than the general distress factor in the one-factor model. In the three-factor model, items 3, 4, 5, 14, 15, 19 were carried on the depression and anxiety factors, item 8 was carried on the depression and stress factors, and item 12 was carried on the anxiety and stress factors. After removing the eight items, the three-factor model achieved better item adjustment. According to the three-factor model of DASS-21, it was necessary to delete eight items from DASS-21 to achieve an acceptable model fit. Consequently, we obtained a new version, DASS-13, in the current study. A variety of appropriate indicators were used to evaluate the original three-factor model's suitability. The results showed a high level of model agreement, confirming that the Jordanian version measures three distinct structures as suggested by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995b). The current result is consistent with previous research (Ahmad et al., 2024; Clara et al., 2001; Gloster et al., 2008; Sinclair et al., 2012); this validated the original three-factor model as the best factorial structure. The current study's findings indicate that the representation of DASS-21 sub-scales remains questionable with its various models; however, the current study's findings do not differ from previous studies (Oei et al., 2013; Silva et al., 2016; Sinclair et al., 2012), with DASS-21 presenting a clear contrast.

Other exploratory factor analyses of DASS-21 in the adult population sample and previous studies (Apóstolo et al., 2006; Osman et al., 2012; Sica et al., 2009) noted the structural

problems encountered by the current study's three-factor model. These issues are the primary reason for further investigation, which should include alternative testing models that might fit better. The three-factor model was found to be the most appropriate for adults in most studies (Ahmad et al., 2024; Bottesi et al., 2015; Moussa et al., 2017; Pezirkianidis et al., 2018; Silva et al., 2016; Tran et al., 2013). Some of the limitations of the current study included the temporal stability that was made in one group of participants, so the temporal stability results were based on data from a sample of university students. Members of the Jordanian community were sought in the north, center, and south of the country. The characteristics of the participants revealed that the Southern Jordanian regions were more representative than the Northern and Central Jordanian regions. As a result, the population distribution of the participants in the study sample is uneven. Because the participants were from a non-clinical sample of community adults, it is unclear how their findings can be applied to clinical samples; therefore, the current study recommends that future studies on the psychometric properties of the DASS-21 include larger multicenter samples. Based on the current results of the exploratory factor analysis of the DASS-21 in the adult sample, additional studies to extract normative data for DASS-21 are required, as well as a review of some items and further analyses to determine the scale's reliability in other populations.

Conclusions

We conclude that the Jordanian version of the DASS-13 can be used as a reliable and valid tool for measuring depression, anxiety, and stress in an adult population in Jordan, and providing the psychometric properties of DASS-21 will assist Jordanian clinicians and researchers in quickly examining common mental disorders in the community. Furthermore, the current study's findings contribute to determining the potential benefit of using the scale's overall score as a measure of general distress, because CFA modeling revealed that DASS-21 is a significant common factor of general mental disorder.

Author's Note

This paper is still available as a preprint on Research Square and a DOI has been assigned to it. The preprint was not subjected to peer review and can be found here: https://www.researchsquare.com/article/rs-1300714/v1.

The pre-print and the paper that was submitted for the conference proceedings differ in a few small ways, including:
1. Spelling and typing errors were corrected: scale instead of scale, version 27.0 instead of version 22.0, scale instead of measure, depression instead of sadness, short version instead of bridged version, finally instead of in addition, and 2023 instead of 2021.
2. References have been updated, and a new one has been added: Al-Dassean KA, Murad OS.(2024). Factor structure and psychometric properties of the Jordanian version of the depression anxiety stress scale (DASS-21). Neuropsychopharmacology Report, 00:1–10. https://doi.org/10.1002/npr2.12442.
3. The following two figures were removed from the manuscript: Figures (1) and (2).

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Disclosure Statement

The author reports no conflict of interest.

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Does the Colour of a Word Affect the Speed With Which People Identify It As "Positive" or "Negative"?

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Abstract

Colour is a powerful communication tool that influences emotions and reactions. While previous studies suggest that colour impacts language processing, few have focused on Vietnamese-English bilinguals. Moreover, the unique tonal structure of Vietnamese, its culturally specific colour associations, and the cognitive differences in bilingual processing hinder generalising findings from other languages to Vietnamese-English bilinguals. This study contributes to the literature on embodied cognition and bilingual language processing by investigating whether the colour (black or white) of a word affects the speed with which Vietnamese-English speakers identify it as positive or negative and if the effect is stronger in their first language (L1) compared to their second language (L2). The theory of embodied cognition was used to support the hypothesised relationship between word meaning and colour. In the study, 16 participants saw words in a congruent colour (e.g., "angel" in white) or an incongruent colour (e.g., "angel" in black), against a grey – an unemotional colour background, presented along with the category labels "negative" and "positive". They were asked to quickly and accurately determine whether the word had a negative or positive meaning. The results indicated a statistically significant, though small, effect of word colour on response speed, with 14 out of 16 participants responding faster to words in a congruent colour. Additionally, participants were quicker to recognise words in L1 compared to L2, suggesting a stronger effect of colour in L1. These findings contribute to theories of embodied cognition and bilingual language processing, offering practical insights for marketing and cross-linguistic.

Keywords: colour psychology, colour metaphor, colour association, bilingual language processing

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Introduction

One can have a bright day, suffer dark times, be in someone's black books, be a white knight, etc. Black and white or dark and bright are perceptual characteristics of colours that are seen in metaphors to depict the social world (Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Meier & Robinson, 2005) and they are considered powerful in communication, especially in marketing, advertising and branding as colours can influence people's emotions and reactions. This paper explores whether the colour (black or white) of a word affects the speed with which Vietnamese English speakers identify it as positive or negative and if the effect is stronger in the first language compared to the second language. I give an overview of the background to the study and relevant research, before presenting my research questions and hypotheses. I then present my methods, results, and analysis. There follows a discussion of the limitations, recommendations for future studies and implications of the study.

Background of the Study

Conceptual Metaphor Theory

Metaphors are present in many aspects of our lives, not restricted to the poetic or rhetorical. This observation is reflected in the conceptual metaphor theory introduced in *Metaphors We Live By* (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). The conceptual metaphor theory puts forward the idea that metaphors are seen as conceptual mappings of a source domain and target domain, influencing the way we comprehend and respond to the target domain (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980). Lakoff and Johnson (1980, 1999) presented an array of linguistic evidence supporting the various ways in which metaphor is used to discuss and understand concepts (e.g., ARGUMENTS ARE WAR, TIME IS MONEY). The conceptual metaphor ARGUMENTS ARE WAR contribute to shaping the way we think, act and conceptualize arguments. For example, we can defend our arguments, attack someone's arguments, win or lose an argument, etc. The reference of arguments is related to wars in many ways shows our conceptualization of arguments as wars. Similarly, for the conceptual metaphor TIME IS MONEY, we can waste time, spend time, save time, put aside time, etc. This example also reflects how we understand and conceptualize time in terms of money. In short, we speak metaphorically because we think metaphorically (Meier, 2015).

Colour Metaphors

Many conceptual metaphors are related to colours and those are commonly used to describe different aspects of social life. Black and white are often associated with good and bad, respectively (e.g., black sheep, white knight). Blue is typically used to convey sadness (e.g. feeling blue), while red is aligned with anger (e.g., seeing red), green with envy (e.g., the green-eyed monster from the Shakespeare play *Othello*), etc. There are cross-cultural differences in terms of colour associations (Hupka et al., 1997) as cultures possibly shape the production and understanding of colour metaphors; however, some are found to have similar meanings in different cultures (Forceville, 2005; Kövecses, 2003; Rasekh & Ghafel, 2011). According to Meier (2015), anecdotal evidence seems to indicate that black and white are possibly the most used colour terms regarding colour metaphors. So how popular are metaphors deriving from our perceptions of black and white?

Metaphors Involving the Colours Black and White

The association of black with negativity and white with positivity is quite popular and can be observed in media portrayals, written texts and even the language that we use. In American films, characters wearing black are usually evil while those wearing white are usually good (Meier et al., 2004). Throughout history, terms related to brightness and darkness have been used to represent positivity and negativity, particularly in religious texts (Meier & Robinson, 2005). The association of black with negativity is further emphasised in the expressions that we use as in in blackmail, black sheep, black market, black magic etc. As for white, the positivity can be observed from expressions such as white knight, white lie, white magic, white hat, white glove, etc.

There has been a number of investigations exploring the association of black with negativity and white with positivity. The study by Frank and Gilovich (1988) found that there are biased perceptions of aggressiveness of sports teams wearing black uniforms (i.e., teams in black uniforms are more frequently penalized compared to teams in white uniforms) and the uniform colours are also related to how aggressive the team plays. Meier et al. (2004), investigating the associations using an implicit task, found that people spend less time to classify a word with good meaning (e.g., radiant) when it appears in white as opposed to black and the opposite was true with words with bad meanings (e.g., obnoxious). Similar findings were found in the study by Okubo and Ishikawa (2011). Overall, previous studies have suggested that positivity and negativity are represented by the colour white and black, respectively; and it's possible that the correlations between emotional valence and brightness are universal, as shown by Adams and Osgood's (1973) cross-cultural study, which included comparisons between 20 different nations.

Although a number of studies have investigated how black is associated with negativity while white is associated with positivity, not many have been conducted with Vietnamese participants. Therefore, the first aim of the present study is to investigate whether the colour (black or white) of a word affects the speed with which Vietnamese English speakers identify it as positive or negative. In the present study, I also attempt to explore if this effect is stronger in the first language compared to the second language.

To What Extent Are Conceptual Metaphors Experienced in the Second Language?

How people experience metaphors in the second language might be similar to how they experience the second language. Compared to the first language, second language has less emotional impact. Previous bilingual studies have consistently indicated that emotional words and phrases have significantly less emotional arousal in a person's second language compared to their first language (Caldwell-Harris, 2015; Pavlenko, 2012). Taboo words are a well-known example, there are studies suggesting that saying them in one's first language causes more anxiety (Ferenczi, 1916; Greenson, 1950). As metaphors are closely connected to our language and thoughts, emotion could be a potential impact on the difference in how conceptual metaphors operate in the first language and second language. It is also worth noting that the age when a person acquires their first and second language could possibly affect the emotional force they experience in the two languages. For late second language learners, emotional expressions (e.g., taboo words, sexual terms, childhood reprimands) have less impact on them compared to their first language but for early learners, no such difference was observed (Harris, 2004). The explanation to why learning a first language was not more emotional than a second language at a young age is "childhood provides an emotional context

of learning because emotional regulation systems are developing" (Harris et al., 2006, p. 277). It is possible to say that the acquiring process of the second language for late learners involve less "emotional contexts", leading to less emotional influence from words and phrases in the second language.

The Current Study

Research Questions

The current study asks whether the colour (black or white) of a word affects the speed with which Vietnamese English speakers identify it as positive or negative and if the effect is stronger in the first language compared to the second language. To address the objectives, the study intends to answer two corresponding research questions as follow:
  (1) Does the colour of a word affect the speed with which people identify it as "positive"or "negative"?
  (2) Is the effect stronger in the first language or the second language?

Hypotheses

Previous studies suggests that black is typically associated with negativity while the colour white is often aligned with positivity (Frank & Gilovich, 1988; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Meier et al., 2004; Okubo & Ishikawa, 2011). Based on these findings, for research question 1, I expect participants are faster to identify positive words when they appear in white as opposed to black. Conversely, they are faster to identify negative words when they appear in black as opposed to white. Additionally, bilingual studies have consistently suggested that emotional words and phrases have significantly less emotional arousal in a person's second language compared to their first language (Caldwell-Harris, 2015; Pavlenko, 2012). I believe the same effect could be expected when experimenting with metaphors. Therefore, for research question 2, I expect participants to identify words that are in their first language faster compared to those in their second language.

Methodology

Ethics Statement

The current study followed the ethical requirements of the University of Birmingham. Participants were informed that they were taking part in a study investigating people's response to English and Vietnamese words; their participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw from the study at any time during the questionnaire. The collected information would be strictly confidential and only used for the purpose of the study. The consent form was provided at the beginning of the questionnaire and participants could only proceed after giving their informed consent.

Research Design

To test the hypotheses, a within subject study was conducted, in which participants were exposed to: English and Vietnamese words in congruent colour (e.g., "angel" in white) (condition 1) and incongruent colour (e.g., "angel" in black) (condition 2).

Participants

17 participants with the age range from 20 to 28 responded to the questionnaire. 1 incomplete response (the participant did not answer one question) was removed, leaving 16 responses for analysis. All 16 participants with qualified responses are Vietnamese English speakers with 8 English-majored people and 8 people currently working/studying in an English-speaking country. In terms of learning background, all participants learned English as a second language in Vietnam. Generally, in Vietnam, students start learning English in the first grade; however, second language learning at this stage is not prioritised over other subjects learnt in Vietnamese.

Materials

Materials consisted of 20 English and 20 Vietnamese words. Regarding word selection, 20 positive and negative English words were chosen with reference from the studies conducted by Hutchinson and Lowerse (2012) and Meier et al. (2004). The Vietnamese words were translated from 20 different English words chosen from the two aforementioned studies. The 20 Vietnamese words and the 20 English words in the questionnaire are two set of different words. If words with nearly the same meanings appear in both the English and Vietnamese parts of the questionnaire, participants may answer based on memorisation, making the reaction time less accurate. After considering this aspect, I decided to select a total of 40 Vietnamese and English words, all different in meaning.

Procedure

Participants were given a two-part questionnaire with 20 words in English and 20 words in Vietnamese in Qualtrics. The randomiser function was used to ensure that the English and Vietnamese part of the questionnaire appeared first randomly. The words were presented one by one in a congruent colour (e.g., "angel" in white) or an incongruent colour (e.g., "angel" in black) along with the category labels "negative" and "positive". Participants were asked to quickly and accurately determine whether the word had a negative or positive meaning. They responded by ticking the label "negative" or "positive" and each of the response is timed.

Qualtrics recorded the "first click timing", "last click timing" and "page submit timing" and in this study, I decided to use the "page submit timing" as participants' reaction time. This is because an accidental tap on the screen could be counted as a first click or a last click, making the "first click timing" and "last click timing" inaccurate reflections of participants' reaction time.

Results and Discussion

The following results for research question 1 and 2 are reported using descriptive rather than inferential statistics due to the small sample size of the current study.

Research Question 1: Does the colour of a word affect the speed with which people identify it as "positive" or "negative"?

All 16 participants' response to whether each word shown was positive or negative aligned with the categorisation in Appendix 1; therefore, the data collected were all included in the analysis.

The average reaction time to words in congruent colour ranges from 1.9552 to 4.01515. The average reaction time to words in incongruent colour ranges from 1.80775 to 4.6569 (see Figure 1). Respondents spend on average 2.5834 (SD = 0.5917) seconds to react to words in congruent colour and on average 3.0574 (SD = 0.9754) seconds to react to words in incongruent colours. The ratio of the mean of the reaction time to words in congruent colour over incongruent colour of each participant was then calculated. If the ratio is smaller than 1, it reflects that people spend less time to identify whether a word is "positive" or "negative" when it is in congruent colour. The analysis shows that 14 out of 16 participants are quicker to identify positive and negative words when they are in congruent colour.

Figure 1
Average Reaction Time to Words in Congruent and Incongruent Colours
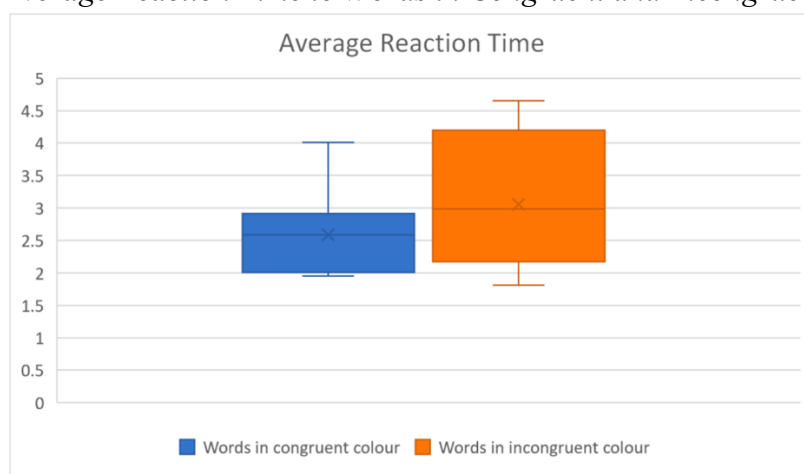
The current study aims to investigate whether the colour (black or white) of a word affects the speed with which Vietnamese English speakers identify it as positive or negative. The first hypothesis was that people would be faster in determining positive words when they appear in white as opposed to black. Conversely, they are faster to identify negative words when they appear in black as opposed to white. The findings supported this hypothesis with 14 in 16 respondents spending less time to identify positive or negative words when they are in congruent colour.

The findings are aligned with previous research exploring people's reaction time to words with good and bad meanings displayed in black or white of Meier et al. (2004), and Okubo and Ishikawa (2011). Additionally, the findings build on existing evidence of the associations of black being bad and white being good in Adams and Osgood's (1973) cross-cultural study. Despite the small sample size of the study, the fact that 14 in 16 Vietnamese English speakers are quicker to recognise positive words when presented in white font than in black font and the opposite was true for negative words supported the findings in Adams and Osgood's study of colour associations being universal. In the 20 countries mentioned in their study, Vietnam was not included; therefore, the findings possibly indicate that Vietnamese also associate black with negativity and white with positivity similar to other countries.

In the findings, 2 respondents are quicker to identify positive and negative words in incongruent colour than congruent colour which does not support the first hypothesis. The potential underlying reason could be due to the ambiguous connotations of the colour black and white across different cultures. In Western cultures, white is often associated with positive connotations of happiness and purity (Neal et al., 2002, as cited in Aslam, 2006, p.

20), but in Eastern cultures, white also carries negative connotations of sadness (Jonauskaite et al., 2019) and mourning or death (Ricks, 1983, as cited in Aslam, 2006, p. 20). As for black in Eastern cultures; Japanese, particularly subjects in Tokyo associate black with cleanness, tightness and sharpness as well as darkness and heaviness (Saito, 1996). For Taipei people, black symbolises proper dignity with nobleness and they do not agree with the association of black with anxiety, fear and sin (Saito, 1996). The difference in colour association could potentially affect the speed in which people identify a word in black or white as positive or negative.

Research Question 2: Is the effect stronger in the first language or the second language?

The average reaction time to words in the first language ranges from 1.5536 to 2.9665. The average reaction time to words in the second language ranges from 2.2236 to 6.0937 (see Figure 2). Respondents spend on average 2.0391 (SD = 0.4395) seconds to react to Vietnamese words (L1) and on average 3.6017 (SD = 1.2771) seconds to react to English words (L2). Comparisons of average reaction time to words in the first language and second language of each person show that all 16 respondents are quicker to recognise words in the first language than second language.

Figure 2
Average Reaction Time to Words in the First Language and Second Language
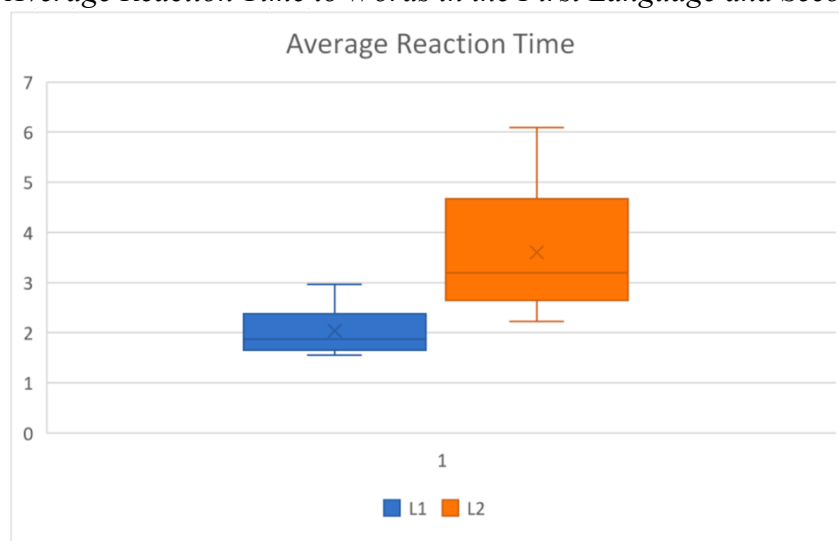
The findings support the second hypothesis and shows that the effect is stronger in the first language than second language. One possible explanation for this could be that the participants may not have prioritised learning English in their early years, which means that there are fewer "emotional contexts" for the language (see Section 2.4 and 4.3). With less "emotional contexts", there could be less emotional influence from words and phrases in the second language. Additionally, another explanation could be because the respondents do not fully understand the English words; therefore, they spend more time to identify the English words. In the findings, 3 participants spend triple the time to identify English words compared to Vietnamese words (2.1427, 1.783, 1.8374 and 6.0937, 5.8209, 5.355 for Vietnamese and English words, respectively). Moreover, for second language learners, they may find it more effective to comprehend the language by translating to their first language. For example, a study by Upton and Lee-Thompson (2001) found that some second language learners can understand a sentence in the second language directly without translation;

however, some learners need to break down each word and translate them into their first language to comprehend the sentence. If some respondents have a habit of translating, then a delay in reaction time could have occurred.

Furthermore, although the Vietnamese words are longer than English words (e.g., nhanh nhẹn, clean) in the questionnaire, participants were still quicker to identify Vietnamese words. In terms of the words selected for the study, the English words appear as a single word while the Vietnamese words appear as two words. For example, "angel" is one single word. If it is translated to Vietnamese, it would be "thiên thần", two words. Vietnamese linguists are still debating whether a Vietnamese word is just a single word or includes compound words and reduplicative words (Giáp, 2013). So, if we break down the meaning in the example above, then "thiên" means "sky" and "thần" means "god"; together, it makes a compound word. Additionally, when translating a word in English to Vietnamese, as there is no context, it is challenging to choose the word the most similar in meaning. For instance, if the word "devil" is translated into Vietnamese, several potential options could be presented: "quỷ", "ma quỷ" or "ác quỷ". So, if words are translated into Vietnamese, it could either appear as one or two words. Therefore, to ensure the consistency, I decided to select all Vietnamese words for the studying being compound words or reduplicative words. Despite the Vietnamese words being longer, participants were able to determine whether it is positive or negative faster compared to English words.

The findings for the two research questions suggested that participants were faster to identify positive words when they appear in white as opposed to black. Conversely, they are faster to identify negative words when they appear in black as opposed to white. In addition, the effect was stronger in the first language compared to the second language. However, several points need to be considered and improved to test the hypotheses with more reliability.

Limitations and Recommendations

Although findings appear consistent with prior research, this study has potential limitations. To be generalisable and see significant differences, a future study would need a larger and more representative sample. As the participants in my study are all my friends, it's possible that their answers are unconsciously influenced by knowing that I would read the responses and expect certain answers. In addition, future research should also consider investigating the association of white with positivity and black with negativity separately or together with other colours as there are literatures suggesting that people's view regarding white is neutral and that the positive association with white only emerges in opposition to the negativity of black (Lakens et al., 2012). A study investigating the two colours separately or with a range of other colours can confirm the association of white with positivity.

A future study should also consider the use of other platforms to conduct the questionnaire as I believe the reaction timing in Qualtrics has several issues. To get a reaction timing, first click timing should be used. However, in Qualtrics, if participants accidently tap on anywhere else on the screen, it would be counted as the first click timing, making it no longer accurate. Therefore, another platform should be considered to accurately measure participants' reaction time.

Research Implications

The field of advertising, marketing and branding may benefit from further research on colour psychology. Colours are used in advertisements, products, and brand logos. The choice of colours can attract customers and influence consumer behaviour. Colour is a powerful communication tool, especially in these fields because colours can influence people's emotions and reactions. In fact, marketers consider colour as an important part in marketing because they have significant impact on customers' decisions, accounting for 85% of the reason why someone decides to buy a product (Hemphill, 1996, as cited in Kumar, 2017, p. 2). The psychology of colour is associated with the concept of persuasion (Halkiopoulos et al., 2021); therefore, the use of colours in advertising, marketing, and branding can affect people subconsciously, leading to their preference or rejection. If there really is an automatic tendency to relate white with positivity and black with negativity, then advertisements using more white may be more favoured by customers and have a higher chance of success.

Conclusion

These results are by no means conclusive as a larger study with a more accurate platform to record the reaction time would be needed to obtain reliable results. However, there is evidence to support automatic association of white with positivity and black with negativity. Participants respond faster to negative words when they are presented in black as opposed to white. The opposite is true for positive words. Furthermore, participants identify the words faster in their first language compared to their second language.

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Measuring the Impact of Manualized Therapy on Transgender Acceptance in Baptist Families: A Mixed-Methods Pilot Study on Family Cohesion and Coping

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Abstract

This pilot study evaluates a novel brief, manualized therapy designed to enhance transgender acceptance within conservative Christian families in the USA, specifically within the context of Baptist religious beliefs. By integrating Jay Haley's Strategic Family Therapy model, a brief and strategic approach, with principles of cultural humility, this therapy addresses the unique challenges encountered by transgender individuals in these family systems. The study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining both quantitative and qualitative analyses, including pre- and post-assessments and follow-up interviews, to assess the therapy's effectiveness. Six 90-minute sessions were delivered via teletherapy, with a clear plan outlined in the manual, ensuring consistency and fidelity across sessions. Key techniques include reframing, symptom prescription, paradoxical interventions, and family bonding activities—each tailored to promote empathy, understanding, and positive change in family structure and dynamics. Cultural humility was prioritized through an approach centered on active listening and respect, ensuring an understanding of the family's religious and cultural contexts while incorporating core values such as love, unity, and respect. Both subtle and intensive interventions were then used to challenge restrictive religious views that undermine transgender acceptance. Quantitative results showed significant improvements in family cohesion, emotional regulation, and coping strategies, measured by the Closeness Scale and Brief COPE Scale. Qualitative findings corroborated these outcomes, highlighting increased family acceptance and strengthened relationships. Follow-up assessments conducted three months post-therapy indicated the sustainability of these changes, suggesting the intervention's long-term impact, with positive effects persisting for at least three months. This study contributes to the development of culturally responsive therapies and underscores the importance of respecting religious values while challenging restrictive ideologies in promoting transgender liberation within religiously conservative family systems. Future research is needed to explore the broader applicability of this therapy across diverse cultural and religious contexts.

Keywords: transgender acceptance, Baptist, strategic family therapy, diverse families, manualized therapy

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Introduction

Transgender individuals face elevated mental health risks, including depression and suicidality, often worsened by unsupportive religious family dynamics (Bosse et al., 2024). Acceptance—key to psychological well-being—is strongly linked to supportive familial relationships (Bosse et al., 2024). However, in Baptist contexts, traditional gender norms may conflict with transgender identities, increasing distress (Benson et al., 2018; Kashubeck-West et al., 2017). Teletherapy offers ethically sensitive, accessible support (Gamble et al., 2015; Glueckauf et al., 2018), but structured, culturally attuned interventions are critical. Manualized therapies, such as Jay Haley's Strategic Family Therapy model, offer adaptable, evidence-based strategies suited to conservative settings (Haley, 1963, 1984; Haley & Richeport-Haley, 2004; McCabe et al., 2020; Truijens et al., 2019). This pilot study evaluates a brief manualized intervention targeting transgender acceptance in Baptist families using the Closeness and Brief COPE Scales, employing mixed methods to assess efficacy and inform culturally responsive care (Dewan et al., 2023).

Background

U.S. societal views on transgender acceptance remain polarized—38% believe acceptance has gone too far, 36% say not far enough, and 80% recognize ongoing discrimination (Pew Research Center, 2022). Despite broad support for legal protections, 60% still view gender as biologically fixed (Pew Research Center, 2022). Transgender and nonbinary individuals face elevated risks of depression, anxiety, and suicidality, especially when lacking familial or social support (Bosse et al., 2024). Acceptance—particularly from parents and siblings—is a key buffer against adverse mental health outcomes (Bosse et al., 2024; Pariseau et al., 2019), especially in religious contexts where identity conflicts may intensify.

Familial acceptance—especially from parents and siblings—is a key protective factor for transgender mental health, mitigating depression and suicidality linked to stigma (Bosse et al., 2024; Pariseau et al., 2019). In conservative religious contexts like Baptist communities, rigid gender doctrines often conflict with transgender identities, intensifying psychological distress and identity-religion dissonance (Benson et al., 2018; Kashubeck-West et al., 2017). Manualized treatments provide structured, replicable interventions effective in navigating such complex dynamics, promoting acceptance and resolution within families (Dewan et al., 2023; Knutson et al., 2021; McCabe et al., 2020; Truijens et al., 2019). Haley's Model of Strategic Family Therapy—characterized by directive, goal-driven methods such as paradoxical interventions—remains foundational in addressing entrenched family resistance and enhancing transgender acceptance in faith-based environments (Haley, 1963, 1984; Haley & Richeport-Haley, 2004; Schmittel, 2024).

Key Stages of Haley's Model

Haley's Model progresses through six structured stages: (a) *Assessment and Diagnosis*—identifying dysfunctional patterns; (b) *Goal Setting*—defining clear therapeutic objectives; (c) *Intervention*—selecting appropriate strategies; (d) *Implementation*—applying and monitoring interventions; (e) *Evaluation and Adjustment*—reviewing outcomes and refining the approach; and (f) *Termination*—consolidating progress and planning for future challenges. This sequential process supports effective family change and promotes sustained acceptance.

Key Strategies of Haley's Model

Haley's Model emphasizes disrupting dysfunctional patterns through strategic interventions such as paradoxical techniques (exaggerating symptoms to prompt change) and ordeals (challenging tasks to confront behaviors) (Haley, 1963, 1984). Additional methods include reframing, directive interventions, and strategic questioning, all designed to provoke insight, guide behavior, and shift perspectives. These structured, often counterintuitive techniques form a comprehensive framework for facilitating change in resistant family systems, as detailed in Table 1.

Table 1
Strategic Techniques in Haley's Model

Techniques	Description	Example
Paradoxical interventions	Techniques where the therapist prescribes or exaggerates the problem to encourage clients to change behavior.	A therapist asks a client to intentionally practice the very behavior they want to stop, such as a child acting out more to reduce attention-seeking behavior.
Prescribing the symptom	Asking clients to engage in or exaggerate the behavior they wish to change to highlight its irrationality or reduce resistance.	Telling a client with insomnia to stay awake as long as possible during the day to make them more aware of their sleep patterns and reduce anxiety about sleep.
Ordeals	Unconventional tasks or challenges assigned to clients to confront and overcome problematic behaviors through structured methods.	A therapist asks a client to perform a difficult task whenever they engage in a problematic behavior, such as making the client write a daily journal whenever they argue with their spouse.
Reframing	Changing the way clients perceive a problem by altering its meaning or context.	Reframing a child's misbehavior as a sign of their desire for more responsibility rather than just acting out.
Directive interventions	Providing specific instructions or assignments to clients to alter their behaviors or interactions.	Directing a couple to have a daily positive interaction or to implement a structured time-out system for resolving conflicts.
Strategic questioning	Asking targeted questions to help clients explore and shift their patterns of thinking and behavior.	Inquiring about the specific circumstances that lead to a problem and how the client's responses contribute to it, such as asking how a family member's reactions influence the frequency of conflicts.

Note. The techniques listed in this table are integral components of Haley's Model for Strategic Family Therapy and are presented here as an original summary created for this manuscript. For detailed descriptions and additional context on these techniques, see Stanton, M. D. (1992). Strategic approaches to family therapy. In A. S. Gurman & D. P. Kniskern (Eds.), *Handbook of family therapy* (1st ed., pp. 361-402). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315803661

Case Presentation

This case study explores a Southern U.S. family's intersecting struggles with race, religion, and gender identity, emphasizing their impact on mental health—particularly for the eldest child—and underscoring the need for culturally sensitive therapy.

Family Background

This Louisiana family, consisting of two conservative Baptist parents and their biracial children, faces compounded challenges: the parents' interracial marriage, the mother's estrangement, and the eldest child's concealed male gender identity due to fear of rejection. The 17-year-old struggles with school bullying, a lack of acceptance, and minimal support

from both his church and community, deepening his isolation. His gender identity conflict, intensified by rigid gender roles within Baptist teachings, creates familial and social tensions. The family's limited access to secular therapy further underscores the need for culturally sensitive interventions in a region with scarce mental health resources. The broader socio-political climate, with ongoing division over transgender issues, adds external pressure on the family's internal struggles.

Method

This study employed a mixed-methods approach to enhance transgender acceptance within a Baptist family system, using manualized interventions. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected to assess treatment outcomes. Ethical considerations, particularly the protection and confidentiality of minors, were prioritized throughout the research process.

Study Design

This study used a mixed-methods approach to evaluate manualized interventions for enhancing transgender acceptance within a Baptist family, combining qualitative and quantitative data to assess treatment outcomes. This method, supported by Creswell and Plano Clark (2018) and Tashakkori and Teddlie (2010), integrates numerical data with personal insights to better understand changes in family dynamics. Ethical considerations were rigorously applied to protect participants' rights and confidentiality.

Participant Recruitment

Participants were recruited from a trans-affirming teletherapy practice identified through a managed care plan's referral list. The family chose this practice for its specialized care and availability. Inclusion criteria required participants to be part of a religious family system with a transgender or nonbinary member, excluding those with severe mental illness, a history of self-harm or suicidality, or significant prior therapeutic interventions.

Procedure

Informed consent was obtained from all participants, including family members and the therapist, with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Participants were assured of their right to withdraw without penalty, and written consent was acquired from adults, while minors provided verbal consent with guardian presence.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to stringent ethical standards to protect participants, especially the transgender minor. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with special procedures for minors and their guardians. Breakout sessions addressed sensitive topics in a supportive environment, ensuring privacy and emotional well-being. Crisis support, including online resources, was available to the minor throughout and after the study. While IRB approval was not required due to minimal risk and standard clinical procedures, ethical guidelines from the AAMFT Code of Ethics (2015) were strictly followed.

Teletherapy and Data Security

This study adhered to the guidelines set by the *Joint Task Force for the Development of Telepsychology Guidelines for Psychologists* (JFT, 2013) and used Zoom for therapy sessions, ensuring compliance with confidentiality and data security standards. Sessions were recorded locally on encrypted drives, with consent obtained from participants before each session. The therapeutic approach involved brief family therapy interventions across six 90-minute sessions.

Quantitative Assessment Scales

Two primary quantitative assessment scales were utilized to evaluate key dimensions within the study's scope.

Closeness Scale

The Closeness Scale is an original measure developed specifically for this study to assess the emotional connection and intimacy between family members in a therapeutic setting. Unlike established instruments, this scale addresses the unique dynamics of family relationships rather than focusing explicitly on transgender acceptance. It employs a 5-point Likert scale, where participants rate their relationships with each family member, with scores ranging from 1 (indicating minimal emotional connection) to 5 (representing a strong emotional bond). This self-reported tool captures shifts in family dynamics over time, providing valuable insights into relationship closeness throughout the intervention.

Brief COPE Scale

The Brief COPE Scale is a well-established inventory widely used in psychological research and clinical practice to assess coping strategies in response to stressors (Carver, 1997). A systematic review by Solberg et al. (2022) confirms its reliability and robustness across various studies, highlighting its consistent application and the various factor structures proposed. The scale consists of 28 items that evaluate a range of coping behaviors categorized into 14 subscales, including active coping, planning, positive reframing, acceptance, and others. Participants rate the frequency of their use of each coping strategy on a 4-point Likert scale, from 1 ("I haven't been doing this at all") to 4 ("I've been doing this a lot"). The Brief COPE Scale offers insights into individual differences in coping styles and their effectiveness in managing stress and adversity (Solberg et al., 2022).

Qualitative Data Collection

Qualitative data were gathered through follow-up phone interviews conducted three months after the teletherapy intervention. These interviews aimed to capture participants' ongoing experiences, their perceptions of the intervention's effectiveness, and any lasting impacts on family dynamics and acceptance. With participants' consent, the interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and anonymized to maintain confidentiality and ensure secure handling of data throughout the research process.

Assessment Procedures

Pre- and post-intervention assessments utilized both the Closeness Scale and the Brief COPE Scale. The Closeness Scale, designed to evaluate emotional connection and intimacy among family members, was administered at the beginning and end of the intervention. Similarly, the Brief COPE Scale was given before and after the intervention to assess changes in coping strategies. These assessments provided quantitative data regarding family dynamics and individual coping behaviors, which were analyzed to evaluate the intervention's effectiveness.

Data Analysis

This section details the methods used to analyze both quantitative and qualitative data collected during the study, providing a clear and systematic account of the data processing and evaluation.

Quantitative Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis assessed changes in family dynamics and coping behaviors using the Closeness Scale and the Brief COPE Scale. Descriptive statistics, including percentage changes and means, were used to analyze pre- and post-intervention data. The Closeness Scale evaluated emotional bonds, while the Brief COPE Scale measured shifts in coping strategies across 14 subscales. Effect size calculations highlighted the magnitude of improvements resulting from the intervention.

Qualitative Data Reporting

Qualitative data were collected through follow-up interviews three months post-intervention to capture participants' ongoing experiences and the long-term effects on family dynamics and transgender acceptance. The interviews provided insights into how participants' views transformed and highlighted challenges faced, enriching the understanding of the intervention's sustained impact.

Treatment Setup

The treatment plan for the Baptist family focused on transgender acceptance using a structured, directive approach within a limited timeframe. Cultural humility and sensitivity were integral to creating an environment of understanding and support, tailored to the family's unique needs and constraints.

Treatment Plan and Contextual Considerations

The treatment plan was structured around six 90-minute teletherapy sessions, utilizing a directive, manualized approach to efficiently address the family's needs within a limited timeframe. Given the family's rural location and limited access to gender-affirming care, teletherapy was crucial, offering flexibility, privacy, and convenience. However, challenges such as technical issues and difficulties in establishing rapport remotely were present.

Haley's Model was selected due to its ability to address entrenched family patterns and promote positive change within brief interventions. The model's confrontational approach was adapted with cultural humility to navigate the family's conservative Baptist beliefs while

supporting the 17-year-old's gender identity. Interventions aimed to foster family cohesion, reframing the family's perception, and empowering the 17-year-old to express their identity authentically. Techniques such as paradoxical strategies and exposure to positive transgender representations were employed to challenge assumptions and facilitate acceptance.

The treatment's primary goal was to create a safe environment for the 17-year-old to express their gender identity, with objectives focusing on reframing perspectives, promoting love and unity, and encouraging the 17-year-old to gradually disclose their identity. Ultimately, the intervention sought to foster resilience, acceptance, and well-being within the family system.

Manualized Treatment

Manualized treatment played a vital role in ensuring consistency and adherence to the therapeutic plan throughout the intervention. The manual provided a structured framework, outlining specific strategies and techniques for each session, which helped the therapist maintain focus and clarity in achieving the treatment objectives. It also facilitated collaboration between the therapist and family members, aligning their efforts towards common therapeutic goals.

The manualized treatment plan was designed to offer a consistent and tailored approach to each family's unique needs, ensuring that every session contributed effectively to the larger goal of promoting transgender acceptance and strengthening family cohesion. This structured framework allowed for an organized and purposeful intervention, ultimately fostering resilience within the family system. Table 2 illustrates the manual created and utilized in this pilot study, serving as a tool to guide each session towards meaningful progress in these areas.

Table 2

Treatement Manual for Promoting Transgender Acceptance in Diverse Family Context

Session	Objective	Activities
Session 1: Assessment and Diagnosis	Gather detailed information about the family's challenges related to transgender acceptance.	- Conduct comprehensive family assessment, including individual interviews. - Identify family dynamics, roles, and communication patterns. - Establish rapport and create a safe space for open dialogue.
Sessions 2–6: Progress Review and Targeted Interventions	Review progress and implement strategies to address identified challenges.	**Progress Review:** - Discuss insights and developments since the last session. - Revisit goals and adjust as needed based on family feedback. - Use breakout sessions to address resistance, secrecy, or sensitive issues. **Targeted Strategies:** - *Reframing*: Shift perceptions to highlight strengths and opportunities for growth. - *Symptom prescription*: Encourage engagement with issues in new ways. - *Paradoxical interventions*: Use counterintuitive methods to promote change. - *Ordeals*: Assign tasks that challenge family members. - *Directive interventions*: Provide clear strategies to guide interactions.
Session 7: Consolidation and Future Planning	Summarize progress, solidify gains, and prepare for ongoing challenges.	- Review intervention outcomes and their impact on family dynamics. - Discuss strategies for maintaining progress and resilience post-therapy. - Develop a continued support plan with relevant resources.
Additional Considerations		- *Cultural sensitivity*: Tailor interventions to respect the family's conservative Baptist beliefs. - *Empathetic listening*: Foster trust and open communication through active, compassionate listening.

Note. This seven-session treatment protocol was empirically developed and tested, this current pilot study, via teletherapy (Joint Task Force for the Development of Telepsychology Guidelines for Psychologists [JTF], 2013; Knutson et al., 2021) to promote transgender acceptance within a religious Baptist family system. Integrating Haley's Strategic Family Therapy (Haley, 1963, 1984; Haley & Richeport-Haley, 2004) with culturally sensitive adaptations addressing conservative religious values (Kashubeck-West et al., 2017; McCabe et al., 2020; Redding & Cobb, 2022) and rural resource limitations, the manual applies directive systemic interventions, ethical safeguards, and empathetic listening. Outcomes were measured using original and validated instruments, respectively—the Closeness Scale and the Brief COPE (Carver, 1997; Solberg et al., 2022)—demonstrating significant improvements in family cohesion and coping sustained at three months post-treatment (Pariseau et al., 2019; Ryan et al., 2010). This protocol offers a replicable, culturally-responsive manual for brief teletherapy supporting transgender individuals within religiously conservative families, guided by best practices in LGBTQ+ competency training (Yu et al., 2023).

Treatment Implementation

To effectively address the complexities of transgender acceptance within the Baptist family context, a structured treatment plan was developed. This plan integrated therapeutic interventions aimed at fostering understanding and support among family members. By focusing on both individual and relational dynamics, the treatment sought to create a nurturing environment for the 17-year-old to explore and express their gender identity.

Therapeutic Procedures

The treatment plan began by reframing the family's interracial marriage as a strength, emphasizing love and unity as a foundation for embracing the 17-year-old's gender identity. The disclosure of the 17-year-old's gender identity was positioned as an opportunity for growth, fostering a supportive environment. The 17-year-old was encouraged to express their gender identity in spaces outside the family, empowering them through interactions with supportive peers and LGBTQ+ organizations. A paradoxical intervention allowed the 17-year-old to continue presenting as their assigned gender at home while exploring their gender identity in other settings, challenging parental assumptions.

Gradual disclosure of the 17-year-old's identity to a trusted family member was promoted to secure an ally. The parents were exposed to positive transgender representations in media and community events to reduce stigma and cultivate empathy. Additionally, reflecting on their experiences with marginalization due to their interracial marriage helped the parents understand their child's struggles. Resources, including books and articles from other parents of transgender children, were provided to deepen the parents' understanding and support their journey toward acceptance. These interventions aimed to cultivate a supportive environment, enhance family cohesion, and promote transgender acceptance.

Therapy Sessions

This section outlines the therapeutic procedures designed to address transgender acceptance within the Baptist family system. Each session focused on relational dynamics, promoting understanding and support for the 17-year-old's gender identity. Using Haley's Model, the goal was to foster resilience, cohesion, and well-being within the family.

Overview of Therapy Sessions and Assessment Timeline

The therapy sessions were designed to address family dynamics and support the 17-year-old's gender identity journey. The pre-intervention phase included baseline assessments using the Closeness Scale and Brief COPE Scale.

- **Session 1**: Focused on identifying the presenting problem, gathering initial information, and establishing a working hypothesis. Breakout sessions were offered to manage disclosures and ensure confidentiality.

- **Session 2**: Explored family dynamics further, checking in with each member and addressing impacts of the identified issue. Additional breakout sessions were used for sensitive disclosures.

- **Session 3**: Addressed major family dynamics changes, preparing the 17-year-old for disclosure. Role-play and reframing techniques encouraged positive family support for gender expression.

- **Session 4**: Strengthened family support through bonding activities, open dialogue, and continued reframing of the 17-year-old's journey.

- **Session 5**: Implemented Haley's techniques like Ordeals, Paradoxical Injunctions, and Directives, promoting empathy and providing parents with resources to explore outside sessions.

- **Session 6**: Reviewed progress, celebrated achievements, and consolidated gains with paradoxical interventions, concluding with a focus on future resilience.

Pre- and post-intervention assessments measured changes in family dynamics and coping strategies, with follow-up interviews three months later to assess sustained impacts. This structured, manualized approach fostered resilience, cohesion, and positive change within the family unit, supporting the 17-year-old's gender expression and identity journey.

Treatment Progress

The treatment followed Haley's Model across six sessions, each designed with specific goals and tailored interventions to facilitate family growth.

- **Session 1**: Focused on assessment and diagnosis, using open-ended questions to identify presenting problems. Individual breakout sessions allowed each family member to safely share personal experiences, laying the foundation for understanding family dynamics and guiding future interventions.

- **Session 2**: Defined clear treatment goals and objectives, ensuring alignment among family members. The emphasis shifted to preparing the 17-year-old for their gender identity disclosure in **Session 3**, where role-play exercises helped build confidence and clarity for the 17-year-old to express their gender identity.

- **Session 4**: Focused on strengthening family bonds through bonding activities, like storytelling and collaborative projects. Reframing techniques reshaped perceptions of the 17-year-old's gender expression, addressing resistance and fostering acceptance.

- **Session 5**: Introduced advanced strategic techniques such as Ordeals, Paradoxical Injunctions, and Directives. The family was exposed to positive representations of transgender individuals to promote empathy, and the parents reflected on their own experiences of marginalization to foster solidarity with their child. Resources were provided to empower parents in their supportive role.

- **Session 6**: Focused on evaluating the strategies and celebrating progress. Reframing highlighted positive changes, and problem-solving discussions explored challenges around gender expression. This session culminated in a celebration of family growth and resilience.

In conclusion, the treatment emphasized termination and closure, ensuring the family felt confident in maintaining the progress they had achieved. The systematic approach and tailored interventions successfully addressed the family's unique needs, promoting understanding, acceptance, and support throughout the therapy process.

Treatment Outcomes

This section evaluates the effectiveness of the manualized therapy intervention in addressing the challenges faced by the Baptist family, particularly regarding transgender acceptance. The focus is on the impact of therapeutic strategies on family dynamics, individual well-being, and improvements in coping mechanisms, measured using pre- and post-intervention assessments.

Pre-Intervention Assessment

To assess the therapy's impact, the Closeness Scale and Brief COPE Scale were used before and after the intervention.

Closeness Scale

Pre-intervention ratings revealed varying levels of emotional closeness among family members. The father and mother rated their relationship as relatively close (4), while their relationships with the 17-year-old and 13-year-old were more moderate (3). The 17-year-old rated their relationships as more distant (2 with both parents and 3 with the 13-year-old), while the 13-year-old rated relationships as moderately close (3). These scores served as a baseline for assessing the impact of the therapy on family dynamics.

The Brief COPE Scale

The Brief COPE Scale was used to assess the baseline coping strategies employed by each family member in response to stressors related to transgender acceptance. The overall mean score for the family was $M = 50$ (SD = 8.00), indicating a moderate level of coping strategies. However, individual scores showed variability in coping levels: the father scored $M = 12$ (SD = 3.00), the mother scored $M = 10$ (SD = 2.50), the 17-year-old scored $M = 8$ (SD = 2.00), and the 13-year-old scored $M = 10$ (SD = 2.80). These scores indicated relatively low to minimal use of coping strategies prior to the intervention.

These initial scores served as a benchmark for evaluating the effectiveness of the intervention in enhancing coping strategies and overall family resilience. The mean and standard deviation calculations for each subscale of the Brief COPE Scale will be used to assess any significant improvements or changes in how family members managed stress related to transgender acceptance following the intervention.

Post-intervention Assessment

Following the therapy, post-intervention assessments showed substantial improvements in family dynamics and coping strategies.

Closeness Scale

Post-intervention ratings showed significant improvements in emotional closeness. Notably:
- The father's closeness ratings increased to 4 for the 17-year-old (up 2 points) and to 3 for the 13-year-old (up 1 point).
- The mother's closeness ratings also increased to 4 with both the 17-year-old (up 2 points) and the 13-year-old (up 1 point).

- The 17-year-old's ratings significantly improved to 4 for both parents (up 2 points from 2) and 4 for the 13-year-old (up 1 point from 3).
- The 13-year-old's closeness with the parents improved to 3, and their relationship with the 17-year-old reached a 4 (up 1 point from 3).

These improvements highlight a 100% increase in the 17-year-old's emotional connection with both parents, and a 33% increase in the parents' closeness towards each other.

The Brief COPE Scale

The Brief COPE Scale post-intervention showed significant improvements in coping strategies. The family's overall mean score increased from 50 to 70, signaling enhanced resilience. The individual scores reflected similar improvements:
- The father's score increased from 12 to 20.
- The mother's score increased from 10 to 18.
- The 17-year-old's score improved dramatically from 8 to 25.
- The 13-year-old's score rose from 10 to 50.

Notable improvements occurred in problem-focused coping and emotional regulation, suggesting the intervention fostered more adaptive and proactive coping strategies. These shifts in coping strategies indicate increased family resilience and better stress management.

Follow-Up Assessment

Three months after the conclusion of the brief, action-oriented, solution-focused systemic therapy, a comprehensive follow-up was conducted with the family via phone. The purpose of this follow-up was to assess the family's progress and overall well-being, revealing sustained improvements and positive outcomes since the intervention—presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Follow-Up Assessment: Family Reflections and Ongoing Changes

Family Member	Key Reflection	Ongoing Changes
Father	"Our family's come a long way. We've learned to speak from the heart and really listen to one another."	Improved communication tools; more openness in discussing sensitive topics; better support for family members.
Mother	"I feel like we've been lifted up by God's grace. The therapy helped us understand each other's struggles better."	Active advocacy for 17-year-old; stronger bond with family; less discussion of child's identity at church.
17-Year-Old	"I'm seeing a new therapist, and it's been a real comfort. It feels like I've found a place where I can be myself."	Continued therapy for gender identity support; increased security and understanding in the community.
13-Year-Old	"I'm more comfortable talking about my own questions and feelings now."	Increased comfort in expressing feelings; stronger family support system.
Overall Family	"We've learned to handle disagreements with more grace."	Continued improvements in family cohesion, conflict resolution, and open communication.

Note. The follow-up assessment revealed sustained improvements in communication, family dynamics, and support. The family members reported continued progress in their relationships and their ability to navigate challenges together.

Discussion

Summary of Key Findings

This pilot study demonstrates the effectiveness of a brief, manualized Strategic Family Therapy in fostering transgender acceptance within a religious family system. Significant improvements were observed in coping strategies (Brief COPE Scale score increased from 50 to 70) and family cohesion (Closeness Scale scores improved). Haley's Model proved effective in addressing transgender acceptance, especially within a religious context, linking theoretical models with practical application. Enhanced coping mechanisms and family closeness facilitated the family's ability to navigate stressors related to transgender identity, including societal discrimination, mental health challenges, and religious conflicts (Benson et al., 2018; Bosse et al., 2024).

Novel Contribution

As a pilot study, this research contributes a unique application of Haley's Model in a culturally and religiously specific context. It demonstrates the model's adaptability in promoting transgender acceptance while honoring cultural and religious beliefs. The study

emphasizes the importance of therapist competence in navigating sensitive topics, advocating for cultural humility and understanding of the intersectionality between faith and identity. These findings suggest Haley's Model's broad applicability in diverse cultural settings, offering a template for future interventions in similar family systems. Additionally, the study underscores the value of ongoing support and community resources to reinforce therapeutic gains post-intervention.

Future research should focus on the long-term effects of such interventions, including exploring support systems within religious communities that foster greater acceptance. Further studies could examine how adaptable these models are for other identity issues beyond gender, creating a ripple effect of broader community change and promoting more inclusive therapeutic practices across different cultural contexts.

This pilot study affirms that Strategic Family Therapy, underpinned by Haley's Model, is effective in enhancing transgender acceptance and improving family cohesion within religious family systems. The integration of cultural values into the therapeutic process fosters both family healing and the development of adaptive coping strategies, providing a valuable model for future interventions in similar contexts.

Clinical Implications

The findings from this pilot study have important implications for clinical practice, particularly in providing trans-affirming care within religiously diverse settings. The study highlights a novel application of Haley's Model, demonstrating how structured, manualized approaches can incorporate cultural humility and sensitivity within conservative religious frameworks. By respecting and navigating religious beliefs while supporting transgender individuals, therapists can create an environment that fosters both acceptance and understanding. Currier et al. (2023) emphasize the ethical integration of spirituality and religion in psychological services, aligning with the study's focus on balancing respect for family values and promoting acceptance.

Therapists are encouraged to foster safe, non-judgmental spaces for families to discuss gender identity issues, consistent with Redding and Cobb's (2022) recommendations for addressing sociopolitical values. Interventions such as reframing family narratives and paradoxical interventions help challenge assumptions and enhance mutual understanding and resilience (Yu et al., 2023). Directive approaches, central to this study, offer significant benefits compared to passive, non-directive therapy. By guiding families actively, directive techniques facilitate addressing complex issues like transgender acceptance more effectively. Research supports the efficacy of structural and strategic family therapies in managing mental health challenges, showcasing the benefits of directive interventions (Jiménez et al., 2019). Dewan et al. (2023) also highlight the effectiveness of manualized brief psychotherapies in achieving therapeutic goals.

The study's improvements in coping strategies and family closeness demonstrate the effectiveness of manualized interventions, with increased Brief COPE Scale scores indicating better tools for managing transgender identity-related stressors (Bosse et al., 2024). Higher Closeness Scale ratings reflect the value of strong emotional connections, critical for creating inclusive environments and improving mental health outcomes for transgender individuals (Ryan et al., 2010). By integrating cultural and religious considerations, this pilot study advocates for manualized therapies that address both coping strategies and family dynamics,

providing a framework for supporting transgender individuals and their families in challenging contexts.

Directive Compared to Non-Directive Therapy Approaches

Directive therapy methods actively guide families through specific issues, such as transgender acceptance, by reframing narratives and challenging deep-seated beliefs. Research shows that these approaches lead to constructive outcomes, helping families address sensitive topics directly (Jiménez et al., 2019). In contrast, non-directive approaches allow clients to explore issues at their own pace, but may fail to address pressing concerns, risking stagnation in the process (Dewan et al., 2023).

Directive strategies, including reframing and paradoxical interventions, foster deeper understanding and resilience within families (Yu et al., 2023). This structured approach equips families with tools to support one another in the long-term. In the context of religiously diverse families, directive approaches, as seen in Haley's Model, guide families through complex issues, facilitating profound shifts in dynamics while respecting cultural and religious values.

Theoretical Implications

This pilot study advances theoretical understanding by demonstrating how Haley's Model can be adapted to promote transgender acceptance within religious contexts through the integration of cultural humility and systemic strategies. It aligns with frameworks advocating for the ethical inclusion of spirituality in therapy (Currier et al., 2023), showing that respecting religious values and fostering acceptance can coexist in practice.

The study underscores the theoretical advantage of directive over non-directive approaches, supporting structured, manualized interventions as more effective in addressing identity-related family conflicts (Dewan et al., 2023; Jiménez et al., 2019). This approach not only facilitates engagement but also helps shift entrenched beliefs through culturally sensitive guidance. Finally, observed gains in coping and family cohesion validate the theoretical importance of addressing both emotional resilience and relational dynamics (Bosse et al., 2024; Ryan et al., 2010), illustrating how directive strategies infused with cultural humility can strengthen family systems facing complex identity challenges.

Strengths Related to Family Diversity

This pilot study's strength lies in its focus on a family with intersecting religious, cultural, and gender-related identities, situated in a Southern town context. By applying Haley's Model, it demonstrates how directive, culturally sensitive interventions can be adapted to meet the needs of diverse families navigating transgender acceptance in regions with limited therapeutic resources. The study highlights how intersectionality informs family dynamics, underscoring the value of tailoring systemic therapy to honor cultural and religious influences while fostering inclusion. This adaptability offers a practical framework for applying family therapy in similarly complex and underserved settings.

Limitations

This study presents several limitations that affect the interpretation and generalizability of its findings:

1. **Sample Size and Context**: The small, unique family sample limits the ability to generalize findings to other religious and cultural settings.
2. **Short-Term Assessment**: The study focused on short-term outcomes and lacks long-term data on the sustainability of improvements in coping strategies and family closeness.
3. **Self-Report Bias**: Reliance on self-reported measures (e.g., Brief COPE, Closeness Scale) introduces potential biases, such as social desirability and recall bias.
4. **Cultural and Religious Specificity**: The specific focus on religious contexts may limit the applicability of findings to other settings with different cultural or religious backgrounds.
5. **Therapist Variability**: Variations in therapist experience, training, and adherence to the manualized approach could affect the consistency and effectiveness of the intervention.
6. **Ethical Constraints**: Ethical and practical issues related to the sensitive nature of transgender issues within religious families may have influenced participants' willingness to fully engage or disclose certain information.

Future Directions

To enhance the generalizability and effectiveness of future research, the following directions are suggested:

1. **Longitudinal Research**: Future studies should investigate the long-term effectiveness and sustainability of the intervention's impact over time.
2. **Objective Data Collection**: More rigorous and objective data collection methods should be employed to minimize biases associated with self-reporting.
3. **Broader Cultural and Religious Contexts**: Expanding research to include a broader range of cultural and religious contexts will help validate and extend the findings.
4. **Comparative Studies**: Conduct comparative studies of different therapeutic modalities to determine the most effective approaches for diverse family settings.
5. **Standardized Therapist Training**: Standardizing therapist training is crucial for ensuring consistency in implementing manualized approaches and evaluating their impact on outcomes.
6. **Address Ethical Challenges**: Future studies should address the ethical challenges that may impact participant engagement and ensure a more comprehensive understanding of family dynamics.

Conclusion

This pilot study offers valuable insights into enhancing transgender acceptance within religiously diverse families through manualized strategies. Adapting Haley's Model to respect the family's cultural and religious context led to improvements in family cohesion, emotional well-being, and transgender identity acceptance. The study highlights the effectiveness of structured, directive approaches, though its exploratory nature and limitations—such as the single-case design and variability in therapist experience—should be considered. Future research should expand to larger-scale, longitudinal studies across diverse cultural and religious contexts to further validate these findings.

Data Availability Statement

The data collected for this study are not publicly available due to privacy considerations and the sensitive nature of the information involved. To ensure participant confidentiality, access to the data cannot be provided.

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The Relationship Between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior Among Japanese University Students: A Gender-Based Analysis

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Abstract

This study examines the relationship between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior among Japanese university students, with a focus on gender differences. Realistic Optimism, defined as maintaining a positive outlook while pragmatically assessing challenges, was hypothesized to positively influence Help-Seeking Behavior. Data were collected from 193 university students (77 male, 116 female) who completed questionnaire of Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior. Results indicated a significant positive correlation between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior among male students, but not among female students. These findings suggest that gender plays a significant role in the relationship between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior in the context of Japanese society.

Keywords: help-seeking behavior, realistic optimism, Japanese university students, gender differences

Introduction

Help-Seeking Behavior, defined as the tendency to seek support from others when faced with difficulties (Nakaya, 1998), is a critical aspect of mental health and well-being, particularly among university students who often face academic and social challenges. The transition to higher education often involves increased pressures, the need for self-sufficiency, and the development of new social networks, which can contribute to anxiety and depression (Eisenberg et al., 2013). Kanehara et al. (2015) found that low perceived need was the most common reason for not seeking mental health care in Japan, with structural barriers such as lack of information and accessibility also playing significant roles. Mizuno and Ishikuma (1999) found that low help-seeking preferences among Japanese individuals are influenced by cultural norms and a tendency to rely on informal social networks rather than professional services. This aligns with the broader cultural emphasis on self-reliance and interdependence in Japan, which may discourage individuals from seeking professional psychological help.

Realistic Optimism is characterized by a positive yet grounded outlook on the future (Magari, 2013) and the ability to maintain a hopeful outlook while acknowledging potential obstacles (Schneider, 2001).

Previous research has suggested that individuals with unrealistic optimism may be less likely to seek help (Spendelow & Jose, 2010; Stanley-Clarke et al., 2024). However, the role of Realistic Optimism in fostering Help-Seeking Behavior, especially among university students, has not been thoroughly studied. Furthermore, the intersection of cultural norms, gender expectations, and realistic optimism in shaping Help-Seeking Behavior remains underexplored, particularly in non-Western contexts like Japan.

This study aims to fill this gap by examining how Realistic Optimism influences Help-Seeking Behavior among Japanese university students. In addition, this study will also look into whether gender plays role in relation between Realistic Optimism and Help Seeking Behavior.

Literature Review

The complex interplay between psychological attributes and help-seeking behavior presents a nuanced landscape of individual and cultural dynamics, particularly within the context of Japanese social norms. Realistic optimism emerges as a critical psychological construct that potentially mediates an individual's approach to seeking support.

Defined by Schneider (2001), realistic optimism represents a sophisticated psychological approach that balances hopeful expectations with pragmatic assessment of challenges. Unlike naive positivity, this construct encourages individuals to maintain an optimistic outlook while critically acknowledging potential obstacles. Nishaat's (2021) conceptualization further elaborates on this, identifying three core components: future orientation, hope, and willpower/courage, which collectively distinguish realistic optimism from simplistic positive thinking.

In the Japanese cultural context, deeply ingrained norms of collectivism and social harmony create substantial barriers to help-seeking behavior. Mojaverian et al. (2013) highlighted significant cultural differences, demonstrating that Japanese individuals exhibit greater reluctance to seek professional psychological support compared to their American

counterparts. This reluctance stems from cultural values that prioritize self-reliance and group harmony, often interpreting help-seeking as a potential disruption of social equilibrium or a sign of personal weakness.

Gender emerges as a critical factor in understanding these psychological dynamics. Research consistently indicates that women demonstrate more sophisticated help-seeking behaviors and interpersonal support skills compared to men. Yamaguchi and Nishikawa (1991) found that women are more inclined to seek help, a tendency further supported by studies highlighting women's greater propensity to resolve problems within social relationship contexts (Mizuno et al., 2022; Nam et al., 2010).

While both men and women experience psychological challenges, their approaches to addressing these challenges differ significantly. Tamura and Ishikuma's (2001) framework of help-seeking behavior, which encompasses both motivational aspects and resistance barriers, provides a valuable lens for understanding these gender-based variations.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative survey to explore the relationship between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior.

Measures

Realistic Optimism Scale: Developed by Nishaat (2021), this scale consists of 12 items measuring three factors: future orientation, hope, and willpower/courage. Participants rated items on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree).

Help-Seeking Behavior Scale: Developed by Tamura and Ishikuma (2001), this scale includes 11 items assessing two factors: desire and attitude toward seeking help and low resistance toward seeking help. Participants rated these items on a 5-point Likert scale.

Participants

The study included 193 undergraduate students (77 male, 116 female) aged 18 to 24 from a Japanese university. Participants were recruited from first to fourth-year students. The sample was drawn from various academic disciplines to reflect the broader university population.

Procedure

Data was collected in July 2023. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study and provided consent before completing the questionnaires.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS software. Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated to examine the relationships between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior, both overall and by gender.

Results

Overall Correlation Between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior

The results revealed a significant positive correlation between Realistic Optimism and overall Help-Seeking Behavior. Specifically, there was a moderate positive correlation between low resistance toward seeking help and overall Realistic Optimism ($r = .26$; $p < .01$), and a weak positive correlation between overall Help-Seeking Behavior and overall Realistic Optimism ($r = .18$; $p < .05$). However, no significant correlation was found between the desire and attitude toward seeking help and overall Realistic Optimism.

Table 1
Help-Seeking Behavior and Realistic Optimism (N = 193)

Help-Seeking Behavior	Realistic Optimism
Desire and Attitude Toward Seeking Help	.07
Low Resistance toward Seeking Help	.26**
Overall Help-Seeking Behavior	.18**

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Gender Differences in the Relationship Between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior

When analyzed by gender, significant positive correlations were found among male students between low resistance toward seeking help and overall Realistic Optimism ($r = .41$; $p < .05$), between desire and attitude toward seeking help and overall Realistic Optimism ($r = .23$; $p < .05$), and between overall Help-Seeking Behavior and overall Realistic Optimism ($r = .33$; $p < .05$). In contrast, no significant correlations were found among female students.

Table 2
Help-Seeking Behavior and Realistic Optimism (by Gender)

Help-Seeking Behavior	Realistic Optimism	
	Male	Female
Desire and Attitude Toward Seeking Help	.23*	.03
Low Resistance toward Seeking Help	.41**	.15
Overall Help-Seeking Behavior	.33**	.05

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Discussion

Gender Differences in Help-Seeking Behavior

The findings of this study highlight significant differences in the relationship between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior based on gender. Among male students, higher levels of Realistic Optimism were associated with a greater willingness to seek help, lower resistance to help-seeking relationships, and more positive attitudes toward seeking assistance. This suggests that Realistic Optimism may play a crucial role in reducing the

stigma associated with help-seeking among male students, who traditionally may be less likely to seek support due to societal expectations of self-reliance. Realistic Optimism appears to provide a framework that allows them to acknowledge difficulties without perceiving help-seeking as a threat to their masculine identity.

In contrast, no significant relationship was found between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior among female students. This may be due to the fact that women are generally more inclined to seek help than men (Yamaguchi & Nishikawa, 1991) and possess stronger interpersonal and social support skills (Nagai, 2022; Nam et al., 2010), regardless of whether they have optimistic tendency or not. Additionally, women are more likely to resolve problems within the context of their social relationships (Mizuno et al., 2022), which may reduce the influence of Realistic Optimism on their Help-Seeking Behavior.

Realistic Optimism plays a crucial role in shaping students' attitudes toward mental health support. Students with higher levels of Realistic Optimism are more likely to view help-seeking as a proactive and strategic step toward personal growth (Bu et al., 2023). This mindset is particularly important in Japan, where stigma surrounding mental health often discourages students from seeking assistance.

Cultural norms in Japan create unique barriers to help-seeking. Men, in particular, face significant challenges due to societal expectations of masculinity, which discourage emotional vulnerability (Bu et al., 2023). On the other hand, women hold more favorable attitudes toward seeking psychological help and use more psychological services than men. The study by Komiya et al. (2000) found that women possess more open attitudes toward emotions, perceive less stigma associated with counseling, and report more severe psychological symptoms compared to men.

Implications for Educational Interventions

Effective educational interventions to enhance help seeking behavior must address both cultural and gender-specific barriers. Programs that promote Realistic Optimism through workshops, peer support groups, and educational campaigns can encourage students to seek help proactively (Nagai et al., 2023).

The results of current study suggest that interventions aimed at promoting Realistic Optimism could be particularly effective in enhancing Help-Seeking Behavior among male university students. Educational programs and counseling services that foster Realistic Optimism may help male students develop a more positive yet grounded outlook on their future, thereby reducing resistance to seeking help and encouraging more proactive Help-Seeking Behaviors.

For female students, these intervention should focus more on developing their interpersonal relationship so that it enhance their willingness to seek support.

Limitations and Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the sample was limited to students from a single university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Future research should include a more diverse sample from multiple institutions across Japan. Second, while this study provided valuable insights, future research could benefit from a more extensive qualitative component to explore the nuanced ways in which cultural norms and gender

expectations influence the relationship between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior. Third, cross-cultural comparisons would also be valuable in understanding how the relationship between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior varies across different cultural contexts. Finally, future research should investigate additional factors, such as social support networks, previous experiences with help-seeking, and specific mental health concerns, that may moderate the relationship between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior among Japanese university students.

Conclusion

This study provides valuable insights into the relationship between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior among Japanese university students, with a particular focus on gender differences. The findings suggest that Realistic Optimism positively influences Help-Seeking Behavior among male students but not among female students. These results have important implications for the development of gender-specific interventions aimed at promoting Help-Seeking Behavior and mental health among university students.

The interaction between Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior offers valuable insights into the mental health challenges faced by Japanese university students. Gender differences in the expression of Realistic Optimism and Help-Seeking Behavior highlight the need for tailored interventions that address cultural and societal norms. By promoting Realistic Optimism and normalizing Help-Seeking Behaviors, universities can create a supportive environment that enhances students' mental well-being and academic success.

In a society where mental health stigma remains prevalent, understanding the factors that facilitate or hinder Help-Seeking Behavior is crucial for developing effective support systems. By recognizing the role of Realistic Optimism in promoting Help-Seeking Behavior, particularly among male students, this research contributes to our understanding of how positive psychological constructs can be leveraged to improve mental health outcomes in culturally specific contexts.

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Mood as the Mediator of the Relationship Between Interoceptive Sensibility and Alexithymia

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Abstract

Alexithymia is a personality construct characterised by difficulties describing and identifying emotions. Alexithymia was evident to be associated with interoception, the ability to perceive and interpret internal bodily signals. There is a limited investigation on self-evaluated interoceptive sensibility aspect (IS) and its link with alexithymia and covariates. Therefore, the present cross-sectional design established the relationship between alexithymia and IS, assessed by the Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness (W. E. Mehling et al., 2012) and the Body Mindfulness Questionnaire (Burg et al., 2017) (N = 161). The effects of potential covariates were also examined. Our study reported the significant inverse correlation between various aspects of alexithymia and IS. Especially, based on regression models, we proposed and scrutinised "experiencing body awareness" and "trusting body awareness" as fundamental factors of IS in relation to alexithymia. Crucially, the present research claims the mediating effects of depression and anxiety on this relationship. These findings provided the new pathway to understand the interaction between IS, mood and alexithymia, thus shed light on the influence of mindful attention style and trusting attitude in IS as well as the alexithymia subtypes.

Keywords: interoception, alexithymia, body perception, mindfulness, emotion

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Introduction

To date, current researchers have focused on the concept of interoception, the ability to perceive and interpret internal bodily signals. Garfinkel et al. (2015) have defined three distinct types of interoception: interoceptive accuracy (IAcc, ability to perform accurately on objective behavioural measures), interoceptive sensibility (IS, self-evaluation of subjective interoception by using self-report questionnaires or interviews) and interoceptive awareness (metacognitive level of awareness of IAcc or our awareness of our objective performance). Among these concepts, IAcc has gained more attention to be explored with various objective assessment methods (Murphy, Catmur, & Bird, 2017). Besides that, IAcc and IS were known to be distinct, suggesting that these concepts have separate mechanisms and different effects on emotional experiences (Garfinkel et al., 2015). Therefore, it is of notice to examine other facets of interoception to reflect the concept of interoception more fully.

Early theories have linked body perception to emotion and emotional processes. James (1884) stated that the bodily change was a part of the emotional formation. Damasio (1994) proposed the "somatic marker hypothesis", arguing that visceral states are mapped in different brain areas, which produce images to evoke feeling states. These emotional processes then could guide or bias behavioural outcomes. Damasio (1994) claimed the crucial role of bodily signals for emotions through direct ways or mental representation in somatosensory structures of the brain. Recent empirical findings have confirmed that interoception was significantly correlated with individual's emotional experience (Critchley et al., 2004; Herbert et al., 2007; Pollatos et al., 2007; Seth, 2013). Subjective feelings rely on the active interpretation of physiological changes on our bodies (Seth et al., 2011).

Body perception was widely known as the significant antecedent of alexithymia. Alexithymia is a personality construct characterized by marked deficits in emotional skills, including three main difficulties in describing and identifying emotions (DDF and DIF, respectively) and externally oriented thinking style (EOT) (Bagby et al., 1994; Sifneos, 1973). Several investigations have reported the negatively predictive effect of interoception on alexithymia in all three facets (Herbert et al., 2011; Shah et al., 2016), emphasizing the role of alexithymia as the marker of poor interoception (Murphy, Brewer, et al., 2017). However, the ability to objectively perceive our bodily signals through the heartbeat perception task cannot solely affect our emotions and behaviours but our interpretation and appraisal of stimuli (Burg et al., 2017; Gross, 2015). Therefore, the role of positive interpretation and appreciating attitude in IS on emotional deficits should be examined.

Various studies have been conducted to conceptualise IS and its related links. Alexithymia was found to positively correlated with poor IS (Brewer et al., 2016; Longarzo et al., 2015; Zamariola et al., 2018). These results suggested that people with high alexithymia were less likely to focus on their body but oversensitive to pain and discomfort. They also lacked self-confident with their bodily cues when not feeling their body as safe and trustworthy. Additionally, as it was evident that alexithymia had strong links with different factors, these variables and their effects should be controlled and examined. These are gender (Herbert et al., 2011), depression (Honkalampi et al., 2000; Marchesi et al., 2000; Parker et al., 1991), anxiety (Karukivi et al., 2010; Marchesi et al., 2000), somatisation (Lipsanen et al., 2004), body dissatisfaction (De Berardis et al., 2007; Hamilton, 2008) but not autistic traits (Shah et al., 2016). Limited studies have attempted to control their effects on the relationship between alexithymia and interoception in regression models (Herbert et al., 2011; Shah et al., 2016). The current study continues to focus on IS and its link with alexithymia by using the

multidimensional scale to deepen the understanding of IS and reassure its predictive effect on alexithymia while taking moods as covariates into account.

Altogether robust evidence has established the strong links between alexithymia and interoception. However, these findings were controversial by the disproportionate use of IAcc tasks and ineffective control of related covariates. Thus, the present study aims to explore the link between IS and alexithymia under the influences of mediating factors. Based on the previous literature it is hypothesized that IS is negatively correlated with alexithymia. It is further hypothesised that the predictive power of IS on alexithymia remains unchanged when depression and anxiety are added.

Methods

Participants

Adult males and females who are eighteen and above were recruited to participate in the online questionnaire ($N = 161$). Data were collected through Qualtrics online system. However, only completed responses were further analysed ($N = 132$). The sample characteristics are presented in the Table 1 and Table 2.

Table 1
Mean and Standard Deviations of Demographic Information

Variable	N	*M*	*SD*
Age	132	27.07	10.47
BMI	130	24.22	5.73
TAS-20	132	51.03	13.90
Anxiety	132	16.74	13.04
Depression	130	11.43	11.06
Somatisation	132	22.73	7.62
BMQ	132	51.45	11.38
MAIA	132	21.64	5.16

Note. N = number of participants; M = mean; SD = standard deviation; BMI = Body Mass Index; TAS-20 = Toronto Alexithymia Scale - 20; BMQ = Body Mindfulness Questionnaire; MAIA = Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness

Table 2
Frequencies of Demographic Information

Variable	N	%
Gender		
Male	21	15.9
Female	111	84.1
Language		
English native speaker	81	61.4
Non-native speaker	51	38.6
Current medication usage		
Yes	28	21.2
No	104	78.8

Note. N = number of participants

Procedures

Participants were asked to read the information sheet and agree with the consent form before they proceeded with the survey through an online questionnaire. The questionnaire presented demographic questions first, then showing two body perception tests and one alexithymia battery before ending with three scales measuring possible confounds. All responses were anonymous and were assessed at one-time point.

Measures

Demographics

Data related to age, gender, height, weight, currently used medication and native language was collected at the beginning of the questionnaire.

Toronto Alexithymia Scale (TAS - 20)

Alexithymia was measured using the TAS-20 with three sub-scales, namely, "difficulty describing feelings" (DDF), "difficulty identifying feelings" (DIF) and "externally oriented thinking" (EOT) (Bagby et al., 1994). Each statement was rated from 1 to 5 when higher scores reflect more alexithymia. In this sample, the Cronbach's alphas for the total scale, DDF, DIF and EOT were 0.89, 0.87, 0.90, and 0.56 respectively. Due to the low reliability, EOT was excluded from further analysis of the present study.

Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness (MAIA)

The 32-item MAIA (W. E. Mehling et al., 2012) was used to assess eight domains of interoceptive body awareness: "noticing", "not distracting", "not worrying", "attention regulation", "emotional awareness", "self-regulation", "body listening" and "trusting". Higher scores in MAIA indicate better IS. The Cronbach's alphas for the total scale and all subscales were 0.91, 0.68, 0.65, 0.67, 0.89, 0.86, 0.81, 0.87 and 0.87, respectively. As

"noticing", "not distracting" and "not worrying" subscales got low reliability scores, they were not further analysed.

Body Mindfulness Questionnaire (BMQ)

BMQ (Burg et al., 2017) was used to measure the concept of body mindfulness, consisting of "experiencing body awareness" (EBA) and "appreciating body awareness" (ABA). BMQ used 6-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 to 6 when the higher scores indicate better body mindfulness. The reliability of the whole battery and two domains were $\alpha = 0.88$, 0.91 and 0.91, respectively.

Beck's Depression Inventory (BDI)

The level of depression was assessed by using BDI (Beck et al., 1961). Twenty-one items regarding main depressive symptoms were scored from 0 to 3. Higher scores indicate more intensive symptoms of depression. In the present study, the reliability for this scale was $\alpha = 0.94$.

Beck's Anxiety Inventory (BAI)

BAI (Beck et al., 1988) was used to measure the severity of anxiety in participants. Twenty-one common symptoms of anxiety were self-assessed from 1 to 4 when higher scores reflect more severe anxiety. The Cronbach's alpha for this battery was 0.93.

Symptom Checklist 90 - SLC-90 - Somatisation Subscale

Twelve items of somatisation were taken from SCL-90 (Derogatis, 1994) to measure distress arising from perceptions of bodily dysfunction. The severity of these somatic symptoms was evaluated from 0 = not at all to 4 = extremely disturbing during the past week. The reliability for SCL - 90 - Somatisation subscale was $\alpha = 0.83$.

Results

Sample Characteristics

Initially, as the data were not normally distributed, bootstrapping was performed with 1000 samples at the level of 95% of confidence intervals. In this study, independent analysis indicated that there were no significant differences between male and female groups in DDF (F (1,130) = 0.254, $p = 0.615$) and DIF (F (1,130) = 1.711, $p = 0.193$). Therefore, despite the disproportion of gender frequency, we could combine all responses of the two groups for further analysis. Age was negatively correlated with DDF ($r = -0.249$, 95% CI [-0.415, -0.085]) but not DIF ($r = -0.130$, 95% CI [-0.319, 0.060]). BMI did not have any association with both DDF and DIF ($r = 0.055$ and $r = 0.037$, 95% CIs [-0.107, 0.208] and [-0.142, 0.203], respectively).

In terms of variables related to body perception, there was a significant difference between native and non-native English speakers in "appreciating body awareness" (ABA) (F (1,130) = 12.551, $p < 0.01$), "self-regulation" (F (1,130) = 4.231, $p < 0.05$) and "body listening" (F (1,130) = 11.270, $p < 0.01$). Interestingly, BMI did not have any correlation with all interoceptive scales and subscales of BMQ and MAIA (see Table 3).

Independent Relations Between Components of Interoceptive Sensitivity, Confounds and Alexithymia

Pearson *r* correlational analysis was used to examine the correlation between variables. Confounding factors including depression, anxiety and somatisation had significant positive correlations with DDF and DIF. DIF subscale of TAS-20 was negatively associated with the EBA subscale of BMQ, "self-regulation", "body listening" and "trusting" of MAIA. In addition, inverse correlations were also observed between DIF and these interoceptive variables, which include EBA, "self-regulation" and "trusting". In general, although the above mentioned interoceptive variables were significantly associated with alexithymia scores, the effects were small.

Table 3

Independent Correlations Between DDF/ DIF and Related Variables

	TAS - DDF			TAS - DIF		
		95% CI			95% CI	
	r	LL	UL	*r*	LL	UL
Age	**-.249**	-.415	-.085	-.130	-.319	.060
BMI	.055	-.107	.208	.037	-.142	.203
BMQ - EBA	**-.301**	-.456	-.126	**-.347**	-.513	-.163
BMQ - ABA	-.137	-.339	.063	-.054	-.250	.127
MAIA - Attention Regulation	-.137	-.310	.061	-.119	-.326	.081
MAIA - Emotional Awareness	-.154	-.330	.012	.000	-.217	.200
MAIA - Self-Regulation	**-.273**	-.448	-.092	**-.256**	-.440	-.077
MAIA - Body Listening	**-.185**	-.346	-.013	-.040	-.223	.133
MAIA - Trusting	**-.344**	-.491	-.184	**-.312**	-.489	-.129
Depression	**.442**	.290	.593	**.553**	.410	.672
Anxiety	**.387**	.260	.518	**.540**	.420	.659
Somatisation	**.253**	.080	.406	**.427**	.253	.579

Note. CI = confidence interval; TAS = Toronto Alexithymia Scale; DDF = Difficulty Describing Feelings; DIF = Difficulty Identifying Feelings; BMI = Body Mass Index; BMQ = Body Mindfulness Questionnaire; EBA = Experiencing Body Awareness; ABA = Appreciating Body Awareness; MAIA - Multidimensional Assessment of Interoceptive Awareness; Bold = significant correlation

Relative Associations Between Components of Interoceptive Sensitivity and Alexithymia

As alexithymia was significantly correlated with various interoceptive and confounding variables, it is of importance to assess their unique predictive utility by using linear regression for multiple variables. In separate hierarchical models, DDF and DIF were dependent variables while interoceptive factors were entered in the first block of independent variables and significant confounds including depression, anxiety and somatisation were inputted in the second block.

With DDF, the results revealed that both steps of the model could significantly predict the outcomes. The first step was significant with $F (3, 126) = 8.932$, $p < 0.001$ and accounted for 17.5% of the variance in DDF. The second was also significant with $F (6, 123) = 7.394$, $p < 0.001$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.090$. At the first step, EBA and "trusting" predicted alexithymia with $B = -0.157$ and -1.079, 95% CIs [-0.286, -0.033] and [-2.038, -0.249], respectively. However, when depression, anxiety and somatisation were added at step two, neither of these predictors were longer significant. The only factor that predicted DDF was depression ($B = 0.110$, 95% CI [0.004, 0.256]). This suggested that the effects of EBA and "trusting" on DDF scores were reduced under the influence of depression.

Figure 1

Mediation Model of Experiencing, Trusting Body Awareness, Depression and Difficulty Describing Emotions

Indirect effect on Trusting and DDF: $b = -0.424$, 95% CI [-0.936; -0.084]

Indirect effect on Experiencing and DDF: $b = -0.044$, 95% CI [-0.102; 0.001]
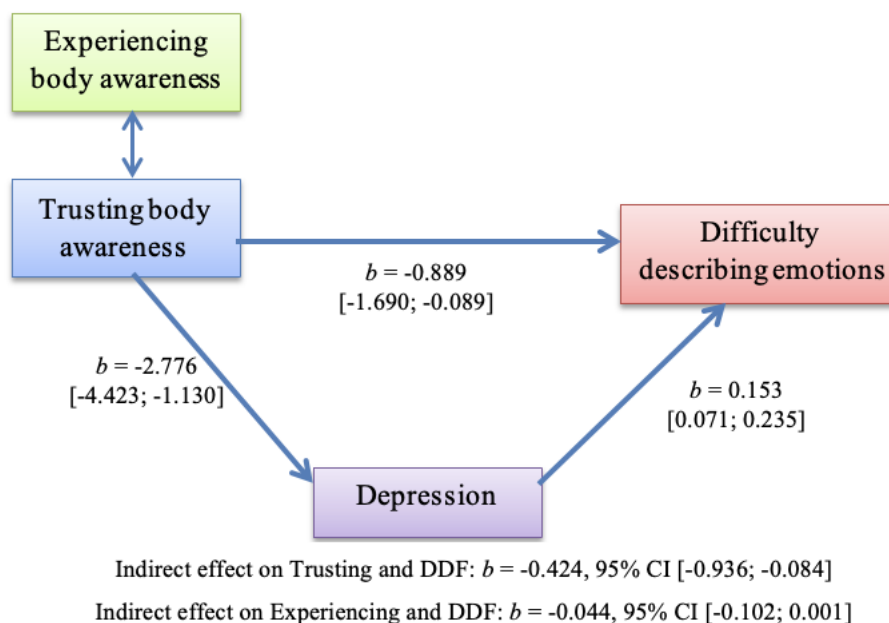
Regression models in which DIF was the dependent variable also shared lots of similarities. Both steps of the model were able to predict the difficulty in identifying emotions with $F (3,126) = 9.399$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.183$ for step one and $F (6,123) = 13.989$, $p < 0.001$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.223$ for step two. At the first step, EBA was the only negative predictor of alexithymia ($B = -0.266$, 95% CI [-0.439, -0.084]). Neither "self-regulation" nor "trusting" were significant. When confounding factors including depression, anxiety and somatisation were controlled in the second step, EBA still predicted alexithymia ($B = -0.180$, 95% CI [-0.335, -0.028]). Noticeably, both depression ($B = 0.165$, 95% CI [0.043, 0.287]) and anxiety ($B = 0.138$, 95% CI [0.031, 0.252]) were positive predictors of DIF.

Figure 2

Mediation Model of Experiencing Body Awareness, Depression, Anxiety and Difficulty Identifying Emotions

Total indirect effect: $b = -0.145$, 95% CI [-0.249; -0.053]

Indirect effect of depression: $b = -0.080$, 95% CI [-0.159; -0.020]

Indirect effect of anxiety: $b = -0.063$, 95% CI [-0.133; -0.015]
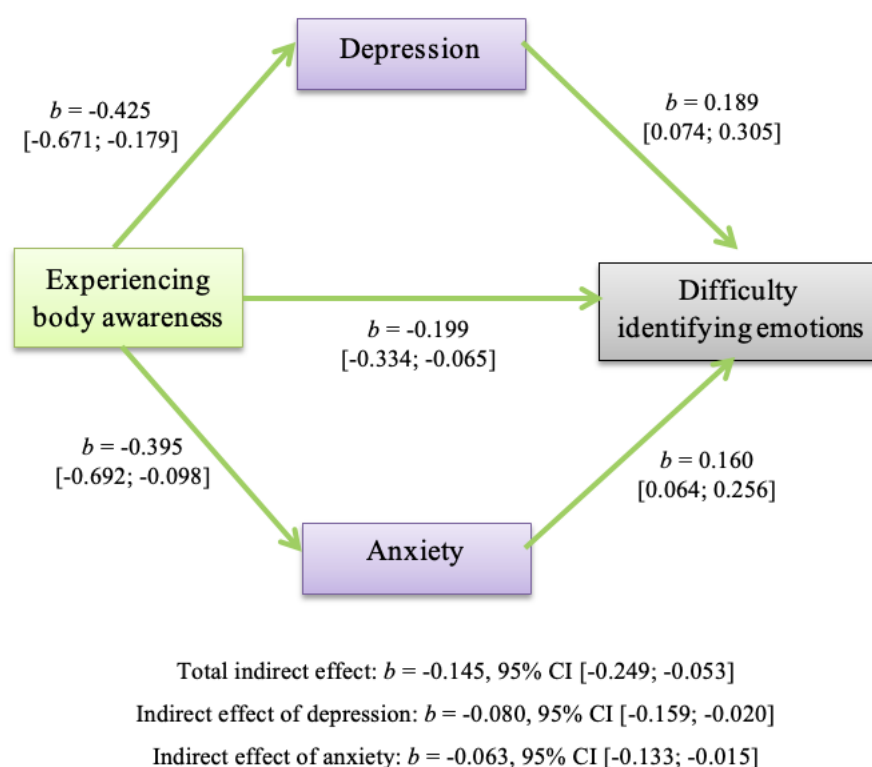
Discussion

The present study aimed to examine the link between alexithymia and IS and the effect of covariates on this relationship. Our findings confirmed that DDF and DIF were negatively correlated with different aspects of IS such as "experiencing body awareness", "self-regulation", "body listening" and "trusting". When mindfulness was considered to measure the observance, accompanying and appreciation aspect of body perception ("experiencing body awareness" (EBA) together with "trusting body awareness") was evident to be the most powerful factors in regression models of alexithymia, despite the effects of depression and anxiety.

Various IS aspects were evident to be inversely correlated with alexithymia in the present study. To be specific, alexithymia gets higher when individuals are not able to observe and accompany with their bodies, regulate their distress by body attention, listen to and feel their body as safe and trustworthy. This result was supported by previous findings (Herbert et al., 2011; Shah et al., 2016; Zamariola et al., 2018). Therefore, our finding also supported the argument considering alexithymia as a general deficit of interoception (Murphy, Catmur, et al., 2017; Brewer et al., 2016). However, it is also worth underlying that significant relationships were observed mostly in more developed factors of IS, comprising "self-regulation", "body listening" and "trusting". Those high-level interoceptive abilities require beneficial and mindful ways to focus on and self-regulate bodily symptoms (W. E. Mehling et al., 2012). In contrast, no significant relationship was found between alexithymia and more anxious and hypervigilance-driven styles of attention such as "distracting" and "worrying"

(Zamariola et al., 2018). Therefore, it could be suggested that only adaptive attention style of IS negatively linked with alexithymia.

Equally important, for the first time body mindfulness was examined and proved to strongly correlate with and predict alexithymia. In other words, the ability to observe and "be with" the body in general status without being distracted was less prevalent in those who suffered difficulties in describing and identifying their emotions. This finding was in line with previous studies about the links between general mindfulness and alexithymia (Cooper et al., 2018; Farb et al., 2013). Empirical findings were also in line with our result, reporting changes in interoceptive abilities through the "body scan" (Fische et al., 2017) and the "opening the door of the body" strategy in the Mindfulness-based Cognitive Training programme (Segal et al., 2002). Thus, the enhancement of body perception through mindfulness practice could serve to improve emotional problems in alexithymia.

Beyond the role of observing and accompanying body perception, the listening and trusting attitude towards body changes also has an intimate association with alexithymia. This result supported the role of interpretation and appreciation in defining how one reacts to physiological changes (Burg et al., 2017). This is in line with the study by Muehlenkamp et al. (2013), which reported the moderating effect of body regard on the relationship between emotional dysregulation and non-suicidal self-injury behaviors. On the contrary, high awareness without trusting can evoke anxiety and hypervigilance, thus leading to the excessive concern of body symptoms like in those with somatisation or hypochondriasis (W. Mehling, 2016). Thus active listening and seeing our body as trustworthy may help individuals to interpret, accept and respond positively towards bodily signals.

More interestingly, the association between IS and alexithymia could be explained by moods as confounding factors. Previously, several studies have reported the correlation between body awareness and mood (Hamilton, 2008; Li et al., 2015) and body appreciation and mood (Muehlenkamp et al., 2013; Winter et al., 2017). Besides, alexithymia, especially DDF and DIF subscales, was proved to be closely related to depression (Honkalampi et al., 2000; Marchesi et al., 2000; Parker et al., 1991) and anxiety (Karukivi et al., 2010; Marchesi et al., 2000). Depression was also found as a covariate between alexithymia and IAcc (Herbert et al., 2011; Shah et al., 2016). Our result was in line with this contention, suggesting that the impairment of various functions of IS and the development of alexithymia could be allocated to mood problems. It was also supported that moods could impact not only objective interoception but also IS.

That said the pathways connecting IS, moods and alexithymia request further exploration. Mood problems may lead to poor performance in emotion identification tasks due to negative thinking and schemas (Hintikka et al., 2004; Lackner & Fresco, 2016), attentional biases (Suciu et al., 2017), emotion-specific impairments and oversensitivity in negative expression (Berga et al., 2016) and low confidence in identifying emotions (Fieker et al., 2016). Thus, altered cognitive functions could play a key role in affecting this association. Besides, the role of self-criticism and judging of body image and negative self-reference should be considered. People who were more critical and judging about their body image got higher levels of depression (Davis & Katzman, 1997; Hamilton, 2008). Crucially, when high levels of negative self-reference (i.e., brooding rumination) coupled with low levels of interoceptive awareness, depression and anxiety-related distress reached their peaks and vice versa (Lackner & Fresco, 2016). Interoception ability could also ameliorate the effect of rumination on affect by deliberately switching the concern towards bodily signals (Lackner & Fresco,

2016; Teasdale, 1999). Therefore, the lack of various cognitive structures for interoceptive and emotional signals as well as negative appraisal of body image could explain the link between interoception, mood and alexithymia. Further research should investigate more on these processes as mechanisms underlying the association.

Several limitations to this study and further suggestions should be considered. Firstly, our information was gathered from a sample of young and well-educated healthy adults, which could limit the generalizability of our conclusions. Secondly, the present study focused on the IS only, which were not fully reflect all three aspects of interoception. Especially, when being examined together in the same sample, their effects on alexithymia could be modulated by each other (Zamariola et al., 2018). Finally, despite our effort to propose the predictive models, as with all cross-sectional studies, causality cannot be established. More longitudinal studies among healthy and clinical samples are being required to establish the temporal order of these relationships.

Conclusion

The present results indicated the close relationship between different aspects of interoceptive sensibility and alexithymia as well as the mediating effect of mood. Difficulties in describing and identifying emotions were inversely correlated with various subscales of MAIA and BMQ, suggesting that alexithymia could be a general deficit of interoception. Among these factors, those with the adaptive attention style showed stronger links with alexithymia, thus the emotional clarity improves when individuals develop beneficial and mindful interoceptive attention. Especially, for the first time body mindfulness, particularly awareness and accompaniment aspect, was proved to strongly predict alexithymia and to be one of the most fundamental components of interoceptive sensibility. Trusting our body awareness was also a significant factor, which illustrated the interaction of awareness and trusting while perceiving body signals. Interestingly, our finding of inverse correlation between subjective interoception and alexithymia raised a question about the correlational direction that varied in previous studies. Differences in types of alexithymia, classified by various deficits in cognition and affect, could influence the direction. Finally, depression and anxiety contributed to explain the association as significant mediators. This finding provides the new pathway to understand the interaction of body perception, mood and problems with emotional clarity. It also supports the state-dependent aspect of the secondary alexithymia and requires more exploration of underlying mechanisms. Previous studies suggested several explanations for this mediating effect such as cognitive impairments related to mood disorders and the role of negative self-criticism and self-reference.

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Exploring Access to Mental Health Support Services for Asian American Communities: An Exploratory Case Study

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Abstract

The background of the problem is that Asian Americans are not adequately accessing mental health services. The problem is that some members of the Asian American communities in the United States have limited access to mental health support services. There is limited research regarding community-based organizations providing direct mental health support to the Asian American community. The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore the perspectives of community-based leaders regarding access to mental health support in Asian American communities across the United States. Research questions included how community-based leaders viewed access to mental health support services for the Asian American community, what challenges leaders believed Asian Americans encountered when accessing mental health support, and what mental health supports were available in community-based organizations. Purposive samples consisted of leaders from community-based organizations throughout the United States who offered support and resources to the diverse Asian American community. Data were collected through personal interviews. Significant emerging themes were stigma and cultural taboos around mental health, community reliance on informal support systems, and lack of dedicated funding and resources for mental health programs. Findings illuminate the need to prioritize culturally competent mental health services, secure increased funding for mental health program expansion, including community outreach and education, and build strategic partnerships with "cultural brokers".

Keywords: Asian American, mental health, CBOs, servant leadership, challenge to access

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Introduction

Suicide was the leading cause of death for Asian American adolescents (Lee, 2019). Chen et al. (2020) reported that Asian Americans were less likely to seek mental health support than any other ethnic group because of discrimination and bias. The problem did not decrease, especially with a 72% increase in the Asian American population from 2000 to 2015 (Lee, 2019). With the increased need for mental health support, the question of support accessibility arose in the Asian American community. Previous research suggested that Asian Americans did not access mental health support (Chen et al., 2020; Lee, 2019). There was limited research on whether mental health services were provided in their community, were culturally competent, and accessible in their language.

The benefit of the study allowed for further exploration of the availability of mental health support services in Asian American communities, the Asian American community's view on mental health and support services, and challenges with utilizing mental health support in their community through the perspective of leaders of CBOs supporting the Asian American community. Asian Americans come from 43 different countries and have over 100 different languages and dialects (Park, 2020). Aggregated data did not account for the vast differences between Asian American subgroups, such as poverty, isolation, language barriers, and lack of community advocacy (Park, 2020).

Some of these factors played a significant role in Asian Americans accessing mental health support. One of the main challenges for accessing mental health services in the Asian American community was limited language access (Wang, 2019). Thirty-one percent of Asian Americans had limited English proficiency (The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center & Asian American Advancing Justice, 2020). Chinese Americans with advanced English proficiency were more likely to receive mental health support than Vietnamese Americans and Korean Americans (Lee et al., 2021). Lee (2019) suggested that the Asian American community lacked understanding and advocacy for mental health and wellness. Elder Asian Americans sought mental health support or reported somatic symptoms to their primary care physician (Kim et al., 2020).

The purpose of this qualitative exploratory case study was to explore the perspectives of community-based organizational leaders regarding access to mental health support in Asian American communities across the United States. The rationale for the research was to explore access to mental health support in Asian American communities. Yin (2018) recommended using qualitative methods and case studies to explore phenomena in their natural setting. Qualitative methods and a case study research design were used to explore community-based organizational leaders' perspectives on mental health support for Asian American communities. Participants had at least one year of experience as leaders of a community-based organization that supported an Asian American community. Leaders with less than one year of experience in their current positions were excluded from the study. A semi-structured interview protocol was utilized with 18 participants via Zoom, a virtual meeting platform, to record the interview digitally. This study aimed to understand mental health support services in the Asian American community across the United States.

Table 1

Asian American Community Served by Participant

Participant	Community Served
CL1	Korean
CL2	Chinese
CL3	Chinese
CL4	Vietnamese, Chinese, Laotian, Cambodian, Burmese, Indian, Nepalese, Middle Eastern
CL5	South Asian, Rohingya
CL6	Cambodian
CL7	Vietnamese, Cambodian, Filipino, Japanese, Chinese, Burmese, Indian
CL8	Chinese, Filipino, Vietnamese, Korean, Indian
CL9	Filipino
CL10	Chinese
CL11	Korean, Chinese, Vietnamese
CL12	Iu Mein
CL13	South Asian communities (Indian, Pakistani, Nepali, Afghan, Rohingya)
CL14	East and South Asian
CL15	West, Southeast, South, and North Asian, Arabic countries
CL16	Chinese-American, Filipino, Vietnamese
CL17	Laotian, Vietnamese
CL18	Lao, Hmong, Cambodian

Literature Review

A theoretical framework of servant leadership was used in this study. Servant leadership was first defined with ten principles, which included listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualization, foresight, stewardship, commitment to the growth of people, and building community (Greenleaf, 1970). Servant leadership theory was follower-centered, provided service to followers, and included an element of structured empowerment, which provided additional support to followers and stakeholders (Allen et al., 2018). The essence of CBOs was follower-centered or community-centered, providing services and empowerment. Servant leadership theory focused on helping to develop followers and meet their needs (McAuley, 2019).

Servant Leadership Theory

A new definition of servant leadership emerged, describing it as a leadership theory focused on others, providing individualized attention to followers' needs and interests, and shifting from self-interest to the interest of others (Eva et al., 2019). Leaders who exhibited four servant leadership tenets—an inclusive style of work, helping others, having a connection to the community, and demonstrating morality—had a substantial effect on communities (Ogochi et al., 2022). Followers' behavior of seeking feedback from superiors via moqi, an unspoken understanding of expectations, was positively correlated with servant leadership (Qin et al., 2021). Servant leaders also fostered positive outcomes in their employees. The author further noted, despite overwhelming research supporting the positive effects of servant leaders in relation to their followers or employees, some drawbacks were noted (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021).

Building a servant leadership culture requires time and the leader to develop strong interpersonal connections with their followers (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021). Leaders need to

make a considerable effort to be role models and establish a culture focused on sharing and helping others. The author further noted that creating such a culture required patience, deliberate effort, and constant practice (Eva et al., 2019). According to Canavesi and Minelli (2021), this approach was not feasible or optimal for every organization, particularly in fast-paced environments, and focusing on the growth and development of followers could also lead to the leader shifting focus from the organization to its followers. The author further noted, that when leaders spend too much time on healing and empathy, they risk becoming overprotective, which could disempower followers and make them overly dependent on the leader (Canavesi & Minelli, 2021).

Despite the drawbacks, overwhelming evidence supported the benefits of a servant leadership culture in the workplace. Eva et al., (2019), argued servant leadership continues to remain the best option for long-term growth in organizations and profit for all stakeholders. Servant leadership empowers followers to reach their maximum potential, make decisions, share, and serve others. Notably, the author further reported when customers were well cared for, servant leadership promoted loyalty to the company, which could increase revenue and yield stock market gains (Eva et al., 2019). CBOs were founded to meet the needs of community members (Lu et al., 2018). Leaders of CBOs were servant leaders capable of empathizing, meeting needs, and building up the communities they supported (Allen et al., 2018). Findings from this study helped empower servant leaders in CBOs to act by empathizing with their followers and stakeholders, meeting their needs, and assisting in building up the community.

Asian Americans

The population of Asian Americans exceeded 20.4 million and grew by 72% between 2000 and 2015 (Lee, 2019). Park (2020) stated that Asian Americans were projected to become the largest immigrant group by 2065, representing 38% of immigrants living in the United States. Asian American immigrants have originated from 43 different countries and spoke more than 100 languages and dialects, with the largest subgroups being Chinese, Indian, Filipino, Vietnamese, and Korean (Park, 2020). When referring to Asian Americans, all subgroups were combined; however, their sociodemographic characteristics and time of immigration made each subgroup unique (Office of Minority Health, 2021b).

The model minority myth painted a picture of Asian American families having middle-class incomes and advanced college degrees (Park, 2020). However, when the data were disaggregated, the findings differed from those lumped together haphazardly (Office of Minority Health, 2021b). In 2017, 10% of Asian Americans reported living in poverty, with Hmong at 16% (Park, 2020). Disadvantaged Asian American subgroups experienced poverty, social isolation, language barriers, and insufficient community advocacy (Park, 2020). Nonetheless, specific cultural characteristics were shared among subgroups, such as the level of psychological distress; Korean Americans displayed the highest distress, while living in a safe neighborhood was significant for Vietnamese Americans (Park et al., 2020). Therefore, having servant leaders in the Asian American community helped address the distinct needs of each community (Eva et al., 2019).

Asian Americans and Mental Health

The model minority myth has over-generalized the exceptionality of the Asian American group and has hidden any struggles within subgroups as well as the mental health needs of the whole group (Lee, 2019). Factors that could contribute to the mental health needs of the Asian American subgroups included how they immigrated to the United States (Lee, 2019). Although 13% of Asian Americans reported experiencing mental health needs, a staggering 4.9% utilize the services, the lowest utilization rate among all other races and ethnicities (Lee, 2019). In 2018, the Office of Minority Health (2021a) found Asian Americans were 60% less likely to receive mental health support compared to White. There also appeared to be a lack of understanding and advocacy for mental health and wellness services in Asian American communities (Lee, 2019). Similarly, Yang et al. (2020) found Asian Americans were less likely to have access to mental health treatment.

Kim et al. (2020) reported older Asian American adults (Chinese, Filipino, and Vietnamese) seek mental health support through their primary care physician, and Cambodian refugees often report somatic symptoms instead of psychological symptoms. Wagner et al. (2022) found reciprocal communication between primary care clinics and CBOs created greater acknowledgment of the medical and social-emotional needs of patients with depression later in life and the care for patients with depression was more synchronized and effective as the relationship between organizations was strengthened. Leung (2020) reported Asian were more likely to share health problems with their primary care physicians and friends. Understanding the need for collaboration between physicians' offices and local mental health or CBOs was essential to help facilitate Asian Americans' access to mental health services (Wagner et al., 2022). Servant leaders of CBOs could implement programs for the community to ensure the facilitation between mental health services and primary care clinics to meet the community's needs (Eva et al., 2019).

Family Factors and Values

Family factors played a role in mental health access for Asian Americans. Family cohesiveness in Asian American families was found to be associated with lower incidents of general anxiety disorder, while adverse family interaction was associated with higher disorders in major depression and substance abuse (Ai et al., 2022). Better parent-child relationships led to an improvement in mental health for Asian American youths (Warikoo et al., 2020). In addition to family factors, the level of enculturation and acculturation had a significant impact on seeking mental health beliefs (DeVitre & Pan, 2020). Enculturation was the attitudes consistent with Asian American values while acculturation was attitudes consistent with European values (DeVitre & Pan, 2020). Individuals who ascribed to enculturation had significantly negative feelings towards looking for mental health services, conversely, individuals who ascribed to acculturation had significant partial positive feelings towards searching for mental health services (DeVitre & Pan, 2020).

Depression and Suicide

Depression and suicide were an unprecedented concern for the Asian American community, particularly the adolescents and young adults ages 15-24, whose leading cause of death is suicide and Asian American males in grades 9-12 are 30% were more likely to think about attempting suicide compared to their white male counterpart (Lee, 2019; Office of Minority Health, 2021a). Choi et al. (2020) conducted a study between 2014 and 2018 with Filipino

and Korean-American youths and their family and found symptoms of depression and suicidal ideation significantly increased by twice the national average in 2017. The increase in distress in the area of mental health was significantly impacted by discrimination due to race and cultural conflicts within the family (Choi et al., 2020). Yang and Mutchler (2021) found Hmong immigrants from California's understanding of depression was defined by referencing their own experiences with behavioral, mental, and physical descriptors.

Another factor that increased the likelihood of concerns for suicide among Asian Americans was encountering health challenges (Leung, 2020). Park and Park (2020) found that Asian American youths who were born in the United States and spoke English at home had a higher likelihood of suicidal ideation and United States-born Asian American youths had a higher likelihood of suicidal ideation when compared to foreign-born Asian Americans. Depressive symptoms were more common among Asian Americans than non-white Hispanic and suicide ideation was only found during the period of adolescence (Park & Park, 2020). Furthermore, Lee (2019) supported Park and Park (2020) that found suicide is the leading cause of death among Asian American adolescents. Due to the high prevalence of suicide among Asian American youths, mental health access and support are vital to the future of Asian American youths.

Barriers and Interventions to Access Mental Health

Although mental health services were reported to be available for Asian Americans, it does not specify if the services were language accessible or culturally competent. Barriers to mental health access for Asian Americans included not knowing where services are provided and being less likely to have access to treatment (Yang et al., 2020). Similarly, difficulties with locating culturally competent mental health professionals were reported as a barrier to treatment (Lee et al., 2021). Lee et al. (2021) compared three Asian American groups, the Chinese, Vietnamese, and Korean, and found that Chinese Americans with advanced English proficiency were the highest recipients of mental health treatment. Cultural values within the Asian American family related to norms of secrecy to "save face" of the family and individual (Reyes et al., 2020). This study helped identify what supports are currently available for the Asian American communities.

Additional barriers for Asian Americans included stigma towards mental health, deficient access to culturally competent providers, and limited access to good-quality mental health services (Lee, 2019). Asian Americans have a higher stigma toward mental health and additional beliefs about depression, which include perceptions of antidepressant medication being addictive and depression showing personal defects (Jung et al., 2020). In addition to stigma and communication challenges, discrimination and mental health knowledge were reported barriers for Hmong Americans (Vang et al., 2021). Stigma, limited English language proficiency, and cultural competence service providers continued to be major barriers to accessing mental health services for Asian American (Wang, 2019). CBOs with community health workers allowed services to be culturally competent and provided language access to the community (Paloma et al., 2020).

Several suggestions and interventions have been offered to assist with helping Asian Americans access mental health support. Park et al. (2019) employed what the community used for entertainment as a way of introducing mental health, and participants appeared to respond positively to utilizing Korean Drama (K-drama) as a means of providing mental health education. Connecting mental health providers with Asian American communities was

essential in creating culturally competent interventions along with introducing a Western attitude toward mental health can assist with the recognition of when supports were needed as well as mental health providers working closely with community-based outreach interventions to know what services were available for the Asian American community (Yang et al., 2020).

Before barriers can be fully addressed, a comprehensive and evidence-based knowledge of Asian Americans and mental health is needed (Lee, 2019). For the Hmong community, interventions provided in a group or community-based format displayed hopeful outcomes (Vang et al., 2021). Another intervention to assist with therapist alliance between the family and therapy was utilizing culturally aware family therapy (Hynes, 2019). Additional suggestions to assist with accessing services included providing culturally relevant, trauma-informed care, and judgment-free practices, western views not forced, cultural differences valued, and readily accessible to interpreters (Smith et al., 2019). Another possible solution was drama therapy in refugee camps, it provided comprehensive care, took away the stigma, and was shown to assist with emotional control, movement and physical activity, a sense of inclusion, and changes within family dynamics (Sakhi et al., 2022).

Several initiatives, committees, and conferences have been put in place to help address the mental health needs of the Asian American communities which included *Health Minds Imitative (HMI), Asian Pacific American Officers Committee (APAOC), Asian Women's Health Imitative Project, National Institute of Mental Health, The Asian Women's Action for Resilience and Empowerment (AWARE), Let's Talk! Conference, National Asian American Pacific Islander Mental Health Association, National Asian Pacific American Families Against Substance Use, and A3PCON DACA Mental Health Project* (Lee, 2019). Additional solutions included providing psychoeducation to the community regarding the biological, neurological, and physical elements of mental health; conducting community-based education focusing on acknowledging and preserving privacy and culture; more advocates dedicated to spreading and executing evidence-based practices for the community and involved in civic engagement for Asian American mental health; and having Asian American representation in political offices help advocate for policy changes (Lee, 2019). When radical conversations about mental health in the Asian American community take place, factors such as stigma, language barriers, shame, and guilt can be analyzed and broken down (Lee, 2019).

Impact of CBOs

Rusch et al. (2020) found that CBOs create more reasonable and acceptable access in addressing the mental health needs of Latinx immigrant families. Women in South Africa reported the necessity and importance of CBOs in their community, with assistance in receiving food for their families, and how it created nutritional behavior change for them (Martin-Howard, 2019). CBOs were vital in delivery coordination and care in vulnerable populations to improve the health of the community due to their language capacity, cultural insights, and community norms (Wong et al., 2022). Paloma et al. (2020) found that community-based mentorship interventions have shown promise for newly arrived refugee groups. Refugees who have already settled into the community were trained as mentors to host culturally appropriate peer-support groups for new refugee arrivals, showing significant improvements in gratitude for life, individual strength, connecting with others, and new opportunities (Paloma et al., 2020). Therefore, CBOs with servant leaders could continue to provide the necessary services and interventions for the community they serve (Ogochi et al., 2022).

CBOs often utilize community health workers in working with the community (Lu et al., 2018). Community health workers were instrumental in helping Cambodians understand health, had strategies that assisted with health access to the community, and took action steps to improve health access for the Cambodian community (Lu et al., 2018). Micro-level of intervention included support navigation and peer-to-peer education, whereas the mezzo-level of interventions included building up the community and coalition effort (Lu et al., 2018). Community health workers were instrumental in conducting activities to assist with violence prevention in their community, including culturally appropriate mediation, socially appropriate support, and building community capacity (Barbero et al., 2022).

Methodology

An exploratory case study was considered and determined to be the most appropriate method of design. A benefit of an exploratory case study was the ability to form a foundation for future research (Yin, 2018). This exploratory case study was able to provide a baseline view of the perspectives of community-based organizational leaders on the topic of Asian American mental health support and access across the United States. Baxter and Jack (2008) suggested that exploratory case studies have the flexibility to capture experiences occurring in real-life settings and allow the ability to tailor questions to the participants. Semi-structured interviews were used for this exploratory case study which allowed the flexibility to tailor or clarify questions for participants. Bressanelli et al. (2018) found that exploratory case studies could describe real-world context thoroughly. Mental health support and access in the real-life setting was able to be explored in this exploratory case study through the perspectives of leaders. Menon (2019) stated that exploratory case studies allowed a better understanding of perspectives from a smaller sample of in-depth and content-rich data. Eighteen participants were selected for this study, and the small sample size will allow for in-depth data and content.

Results and Discussions

After coding and thematic analysis were complete, six overarching themes emerged. The six themes were: 1) Stigma and Cultural Taboos Around Mental Health, 2) Generational Differences in Attitudes Towards Mental Health, 3) Challenges in Accessing Mental Health Services, 4) Community Reliance on Informal Support Systems, 5) Efforts by Organizations to Address Mental Health Needs, and 6) Lack of Dedicated Funding and Resources for Mental Health Programs.

Table 2

Themes and Supporting Components to Research Questions

Research Question	Theme	Supporting Components
Research Question 1: How do community-based leaders view access to mental health and support services for the Asian American community?	Theme 1: Stigma and Cultural Taboos Around Mental Health	-Sensitive/Taboo Topic -Negative Connotation/ Stigmatized Language -Cultural & Linguistic Gap -Stigma/Reluctance
	Theme 2: Generational Differences in Attitudes Towards Mental Health	-Older generation may not prioritize -Younger generation open to discussion, impact, and acknowledge mental health -Improving Awareness & Acceptance
Research Question 2: What challenges do community-based leaders feel Asian Americans encounter when accessing mental health support? Research Question	Theme 3: Challenges in Accessing Mental Health Services	-Language Barrier/Bilingual Provider Availability -Cultural Competence & Sensitivity -Stigma & Mental Health Awareness -Financial & Insurance Barriers -Confidentiality Concerns -Organizational capacity and resource constraints -Transportation -Lack Awareness of Resource
	Theme 4: Community Reliance on Informal Support Systems	-Religious Institution -Primary Care Physician (PCP)/ Medical Professional -Family/Friends -CBOs (CBOs)
Research Question 3: What mental health supports are available in Asian American CBOs?	Theme 5: Efforts by Organizations to Address Mental Health Needs	-Indirect Mental Health Support -Referral Services -Direct Counseling &Support Groups -Culturally Competent Services -Create Safe/Affirming Space
	Theme 6: Lack of Dedicated Funding and Resources for Mental Health Programs	-Lack of Dedicated Mental Health Funding -Medicaid, Grants, Foundations -Volunteers, Pro Bono

Summary

The research findings confirmed not knowing where services are provided, difficulties locating culturally competent mental health professionals, stigma, and limited language proficiency were challenges in accessing mental health support services in the Asian American community consistent with previous literature (Lee, 2019; Lee et al., 2021; Wang, 2019; Yang et al., 2020). Similar to Lee (2019) found there is a lack of understanding and advocacy for mental health and wellness services in the Asian American community, this study's implication advocates for the need of community outreach and education around mental health services. Older Asian American adults, especially Chinese, Filipino, and Vietnamese, seek mental health support from their medical doctor (Kim et al., 2020). Similarly, this study's findings reported a community reliance on informal support systems,

including medical doctors and educators. Consistent with Wagner et al. (2022), reported collaborations between medical offices and CBOs were vital to help facilitate Asian American access to mental health services. This study's implication includes the building of a strategic partnership with "cultural brokers".

Recommendations

The study's findings provided practical recommendations for improving mental health support services for the Asian American community as well as highlighted areas for further research in the field of mental health support services. Recommendations for further research focused on exploring various Asian American subgroups, accessing multiple geographic locations, and looking at the perspectives of the community members directly. These recommendations will be addressed in the following section.

Asian American Subgroups

Further research can look at the mental health needs of each subgroup community. Asian Americans represent 43 countries with over 100 languages and dialects (Park, 2020). According to the Office of Minority Health (2021b), the group has a unique makeup depending on the time of immigration and subgroup sociodemographic. Six subgroups represent 85% of the Asian American population – Chinese (24%), Indian (21%), Filipino (19%), Vietnamese (10%), Korean (9%), and Japanese (7%) (Budiman & Ruiz, 2021 -b). Studying these diverse Asian American groups' specific mental health needs can show which community is receiving more mental health support and which groups are receiving less or not at all. Another subgroup to conduct further research on is the Southeast Asian Americans. The 1.1 million Southeast Asian Americans who resettlement in the United States were at risk of post-traumatic stress disorder as a result of their lived traumatic experiences in the United States (Office of Minority Health, 2021a). Southeast Asian Americans resettled in poor neighborhoods with gangs, underfunded schools, and racial problems that were overlooked (The Southeast Asia Resource Action Center & Asian American Advancing Justice, 2020).

Multiple Geographic Locations

Further research looking at individual geographic areas is recommended. This study attempted to look at the national perspective of the mental health needs of the Asian American community and was able to capture the perspective of the community-based leaders in the Midwest, East Coast, and West Coast. Studying the perspective of community-based leaders in the Midwest, East Coast, West Coast, South, and Southern States individually will allow researchers to see if mental health access varies within the states of the geographic area being studied. Then each geographic location can be compared to determine if certain geographic areas are receiving more or less mental health support than their counterpart.

Community's Perspective

Further research suggests getting the perspectives of the community directly from individuals representing the community. The perspective of the Asian American community was reported second-hand by the leaders of the CBOs. A few research participants did not share the same ethnic or cultural identity as the community they served and reported that information was

provided to them indirectly through their staff member's interaction with the community. As a result of confidentiality concerns, the community members may not share accurate information with the staff members at the community organization for fear of letting people know about business that should be kept in the family, and fear or shame of the staff member knowing about their family challenges. Conducting the research directly with the Asian American community could be more telling of the challenges they have about seeking mental health support.

Implications for Leadership

Leadership action will play a crucial role in expanding and improving access to mental health support services within the Asian American community across the United States. The findings from the study show there is a need to prioritize culturally competent mental health services, secure increased funding for program expansion, including community outreach and education, and build strategic partnerships with cultural brokers. These leadership actions will be discussed in detail in the following section.

It is crucial for leadership to acknowledge the importance of providing culturally competent mental health services to effectively meet the unique needs of the Asian American community (Paloma et al. 2020; Wang, 2019). The findings indicate that many individuals in this population face barriers to accessing mental health support, including language barriers, cultural stigmas around mental health, and accessing bilingual mental health providers. Resources must be allocated toward hiring and training bilingual, culturally aware mental health providers who can offer sensitive and relevant care. This would promote trust and engagement within the Asian American community, ensuring that mental health services are available, accessible, and meaningful.

A pressing importance for leadership is the need to secure additional funding to expand mental health programs for Asian Americans. The findings highlight that current programs are underfunded and unable to meet the demand for mental health support in the community. Governmental and nonprofit sector leaders must advocate for additional resources through policy initiatives, grants, and partnerships. Securing additional financial support will allow for the development and implementation of comprehensive mental health services, including outreach efforts, prevention programs, and long-term care, personalized to the specific challenges faced by the diverse Asian American community.

Leaders should also be diligent in improving community outreach and education around mental health within the Asian American community (Lee, 2019). The findings show that in the Asian American community, mental health issues are often misunderstood or stigmatized, preventing individuals from seeking help. Priority should be given to creating culturally sensitive education campaigns to raise awareness about mental health, reduce mental health stigma, and encourage individuals to seek professional mental health support. Collaborating and partnering with trusted community figures and organizations can further expand these efforts, making mental health resources more visible and acceptable to the Asian American community.

Building strategic partnerships between CBOs and "*cultural brokers*" – individuals the community member trusts with concerns and go to for help to navigate through the various structured systems, is essential for the success of mental health programs supporting the Asian American community (Kim et al., 2020; Wagner et al., 2022; Yang et al., 2020).

Coined by CL6 *"cultural brokers"* are faith leaders at churches, monks at temples, informal support networks, medical professionals, school personnel, family members, and friends. The findings reveal that these individuals have strong ties within the community and can serve as valuable partners in the delivery of mental health services. Leaders of CBOs should work closely with churches, temples, medical offices, and schools to design and implement programs that are responsive to the needs of the Asian American community. This collaboration can help extend the reach of mental health programs and create a more holistic approach to community well-being

Conclusion

This qualitative case study aimed to explore community-based leaders' perspective on mental health support services for the Asian American community in the United States. The study's finding revealed there is stigmas and cultural taboos around mental health, generational differences in attitudes exists towards mental health, there are challenges in accessing mental health services, the community relies on informal support systems, efforts have been made by organizations to address mental health needs, and there is a lack of dedicated funding and resources for mental health needs. These findings highlighted the need for additional funding to expand mental health programs for the Asian American community, increase investment in education and outreach for mental health, and expand recruitment efforts of culturally competent and bilingual mental health providers.

Recommendations for further research highlighted the need to explore the various Asian American subgroups individually including the subgroup of Southeast Asian Americans, look at individual geographic areas separately and then compare them, and get the perspectives of the community members directly instead of from the leaders. Several implications from the research findings were noted. There is a need to prioritize culturally competent mental health services. Additional funding is needed to expand community outreach and education. Lastly, building strategic partnerships with *"cultural brokers"*. Without leaders addressing these areas, the Asian American community will continue to have their mental health needs unmet resulting in a diminished quality of life or death by suicide.

Acknowledgment

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Karma or Altruism? Donor Motives and the Power of Recipient Identity in Charitable Giving

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Abstract

Discussions on the motives for making financial donations to charitable organizations sometimes arise regarding the contrasting notions of karma and altruism. While there are individuals who believe that donors are mainly motivated by altruistic motives, an alternative perspective suggests that people may also be influenced by the concept of karma, which believes that charitable acts lead to beneficial consequences for oneself. The objective of this research is to examine how contributors' intentions, which may be categorized as either karma or altruism, influence their distribution of money towards charities. Furthermore, the present research investigates the influence of identified victims on individuals' giving behavior. A laboratory study was conducted, including a total of 242 people who were randomly assigned to one of three conditions: a control group, an altruism framing group with a recipient who was identified, and a karma framing group. We presented persuasive messages to the participants, aiming to persuade them to contribute to underprivileged students. The results showed that donors who knew the organization's name and the recipient's identity donated more. Furthermore, the study found that karma framing would encourage participants to donate more when compared to those who received only the recipients' identities. In addition to karma framing, various motives behind karma, which involved people pursuing favorable outcomes for themselves, had an important effect on donation behavior. This study ultimately enhances our awareness of the details associated with donation behavior and identifies ways to persuade people to support charitable organizations.

Keywords: altruism, karma, donations behavior, identified victims, laboratory experiment

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Introduction

The failure of the government to fulfill public demands led to the emergence of non-profit organizations, which have no obligation to provide any kind of public service. Money contributions play a crucial role in addressing significant socioeconomic issues, particularly among children with limited resources. The significance of these provides cannot be overstated (Verhaert & Van Den Poel, 2011). That's why it was important for philanthropic organizations and policymakers who want to increase donations and have a big impact on social progress to understand the varied reasons people gave money. This includes examining intentions that motivate people to donate more, especially believing in karma (Kulow & Krämer, 2016) and moral altruism (Verhaert & Van Den Poel, 2011; Ye et al., 2015) that motivate people to donate their money in several previous studies. Thus, knowing the complex motivations driving philanthropy is both strategic. If we wish to better society and make change, it was important to understand how our vibes and intentions can affect positive energy.

The belief in karma is deeply rooted in many cultures and religions around the world. In popular usage, the term karma often refers to the idea that what goes around comes around and that good deeds will be rewarded while bad deeds will be punished. Furthermore, one's actions, whether good or bad, will have consequences in the future. So, this notion can influence individuals to consider the potential karmic outcomes of their actions. They may choose to act kindly or avoid harmful behavior that could lead to negative karma (Converse et al., 2012; White et al., 2018; White & Norenzayan, 2019). Over the past decade, there has been an increasing emphasis on promoting prosocial behavior such as assisting, sharing, cooperating, and financial donations. Kulow and Krämer (2016) conducted an online experiment to determine whether consumers who believe in karma would donate more to the Skin Cancer Foundation, although only voluntary their time would be given to other beneficiaries. Furthermore, numerous previous studies clearly demonstrated the existence of karma and its potential to influence individuals' long-term perspective (Chen et al., 2019). Additionally, individuals tend to place their trust in karma when confronted with uncertain situations, as they anticipate a favorable outcome that will be reacted (Converse et al., 2012).

However, the idea of altruism, which is rooted in the altruistic regard for the welfare of others, is evident in the intention to donate. Altruism contains a positive energy that serves as a motivating factor for individuals to allocate their resources towards others (Chen et al., 2021; Otto & Bolle, 2011). Altruism is a powerful force that drives positive change through voluntary donations, whether financial, material, or time. While it has been observed that altruism is mainly driven by a genuine concern for the well-being of others, some studies have revealed that individuals exhibit complex thinking when engaging in philanthropic activities, especially in terms of financial donations. This act of generosity can also be seen in medical research (such as blood donation; Otto & Bolle, 2011) or education.

Based on the existing studies, it is evident that the concepts of karma and altruism serve as motivators for individuals to engage in greater financial donation. However, the present study reveals that these two concepts have distinct intentions in individuals' thoughts. The notion of karma states that individuals will experience consequences of their actions, like the saying that what goes around comes around. This suggests that individuals should prioritize the outcomes of their activities over the individuals who will gain from them. On the other hand, altruism pertains to instances of kindness or generosity that are driven, to some extent, by self-interest. Although an altruistic deed might at first benefit others, the underlying mixed

reasons can influence their emotions at that moment. However, the concept of karma and altruism can be likened to the behavior of encouraging individuals to donate. In our perspective, individuals who prioritize karma seek to observe the enduring consequences of their actions, whether they occur in the present life or in the next incarnations. Conversely, individuals who prioritize altruism seek sole fulfillment upon completion of their acts. Hence, based on the concept that individuals have diverse intentions to contribute, the primary objective of this study is to fill the existing research void by examining the distinct impact of karma and altruism on individuals' financial contributions to philanthropic organizations.

To achieve the researcher's objective, a laboratory experiment was conducted to find out if the concept of karma and altruism may motivate individuals to engage in acts of kindness. Particularly, those who were exposed to a presentation of altruism along with a defined recipient to convince them to donate, compared to those who do receive nothing (Treatment 1). In addition, those who were exposed to a karma framing to encourage them to donate, rather than to those who get nothing (Treatment 2), demonstrate that the impact of belief and altruism on their attitude towards monetary contribution differs. This study seeks to offer significant insights for charities and nonprofit organizations aiming at enhancing their efforts to raise funds by examining the distinct influences of altruism and karma on contribution behavior. Moreover, a greater awareness of these motives might guide governmental policies designed to encourage charity and cultivate a culture of giving.

Theoretical Background

The Power of Identity Recipient on Monetary Donation

The act of donating has been affected by moral, ethical, or warm-hearted motivations. However, individuals often experience conflicting thoughts that limit their giving, particularly when it comes to financial contributions (Genevsky et al., 2013; Rubaltelli & Agnoli, 2012). Previous studies have demonstrated that to extend the limitations of their resources and enhance the level of donation, they exert pressure on the "identified victim" who is the beneficiary of their actions.

Research indicates that individuals are more inclined to allocate resources to identifiable beneficiaries rather than to unidentified ones. Studies have shown that people are more willing to donate when they can see specific recipients (Genevsky et al., 2013; Jenni & Loewenstein, 1997; Rubaltelli & Agnoli, 2012). For example, Rubaltelli and Agnoli (2012) found that donors were more likely to contribute to a single recognized woman than to a group of three women, highlighting a preference for individual recognition. Additionally, Genevsky et al. (2013) demonstrated that individuals are more generous towards beneficiaries presented with a photo and name compared to those identified only by a silhouette or name. This suggests that the visibility of recipients significantly impacts donation behavior. Consequently, this study incorporates identifiable victims to illustrate that individuals' altruism is heightened when they perceive a specific beneficiary rather than an unidentified one.

The Intentionality of Monetary Donation

Altruism and Charitable Appeals

Altruism, which means caring about the well-being of others without expecting anything in return, has been studied for a long time in psychology, economics, and society. For example, Otto and Bolle (2011) examined the effect of altruism in blood donation and found that important predictors of donation behavior were altruistic motives, such as a desire to serve others or for the greater good. Research indicates that feelings of self-worth and social honor can influence the sincerity and magnitude of these acts (Cappellari et al., 2011; Ottoni-Wilhelm et al., 2017). In the same way, Chen et al. (2021) investigated the impact of altruism on people's propensity to allocate resources to charitable causes and discovered that altruistic people were more likely to give money or their time to assist charitable causes.

Karmic Belief and Charitable Appeals

Many people around the world believe that a person's previous good and bad behaviors may be traced back to the causes of good and bad deeds (White et al., 2018; White & Norenzayan, 2019). Although karma was mentioned in Eastern philosophy, psychological researchers used the concept of karma in Western philosophy, as well as the phrases "you reap what you sow" or "what goes around comes around" (Kulow & Krämer, 2016). Moreover, most people in this world believe in religion, in which the prophets of each religion adopt the law of the universe to instruct their followers (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). Buddhists in Western cultures, for example, are taught by their prophet that "the volition as karma" means that good deeds cause good things to happen and bad deeds cause terrible things to happen, regardless of verbal, physical, or mental (thoughts) (Ghose, 2007; White et al., 2018).

Several previous studies, embracing both marketing and psychological studies, have observed the utilization of the concept of karma along with giving. In their study, Kulow and Krämer (2016) examined the impact of charitable appeals on donations for the Skin Cancer Foundation. The findings showed that individuals with strong karmic beliefs were more likely to donate their time to others compared to those with weak karmic beliefs. Additionally, within the context of financial contributions, individuals who conform to karma beliefs may view charitable giving as an opportunity to invest in their future welfare, particularly when confronted with uncertain situations, with the expectation of receiving positive outcomes in the form of karmic rewards if they do a good deed (Converse et al., 2012). Prior research indicates that belief in karma can shape individuals' attitudes and behaviors towards charitable contributions. This evaluation will explore the role of altruism in charitable organizations with specific goals, differentiating it from the notion of karma.

The study examines the effects of karma framing, which emphasizes the outcomes of one's actions, and altruism framing, which focuses on the enjoyment derived from helping others, on motivating charitable donations. Research indicates a significant overlap between these two concepts. It is important to note that the impact of contributions cannot be definitively attributed to a specific source, as it may be intentionally shaped. The aim is to determine whether karma and altruism influence people's perceptions of philanthropy differently. Furthermore, individuals who prioritize their own consequences over those of others tend to be more inclined to donate when the needs or outcomes are concrete.

Methodology

Testing the research questions listed below, I offer the experiments. According to the first research question, people are more likely to give when they fully understand the path of their action. I conducted a laboratory experiment to investigate this issue. The second research question is whether karma framing causes people to choose their personal gain from their deeds rather than doing good deeds for others. We tested this hypothesis using the experiment.

Procedure

The experiment was conducted in a controlled laboratory at Khon Kaen University, adhering to ethical standards for studies involving human subjects. A total of 242 undergraduate students were recruited via social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Participants were randomly divided into three groups: a control group with 80 participants, treatment group 1 with 80 participants, and treatment group 2 with 82 participants. Each participant received 100 Baht (2.9 USD) as compensation for their participation depends on allocation for donations or keep for themselves during the experiment.

The experiment was organized into sessions, each comprising 10-15 participants from the same group. It began with a welcome and a presentation of a video which informed participants about the organization's efforts to support underprivileged children without explicit donation prompts. After viewing the video, participants expressed their educational perspectives. They were then asked to contribute their funds to the organization, called individually by their group. Finally, participants completed a questionnaire that included demographic information and assessed their beliefs, happiness, and stress levels on a Likert scale from 1 to 5. Each group followed the same procedure but received different persuasive messages before deciding on their contributions.

For the control group, participants were asked to design how much they would like to donate based on that information developed form which developed from Ein-gar and Levontin (2013), and Sharma (2021) as presented by figure 1 below.

Figure 1
The Piece of Paper to Ask Them to Allocate Their Money to Our Project for Control Group
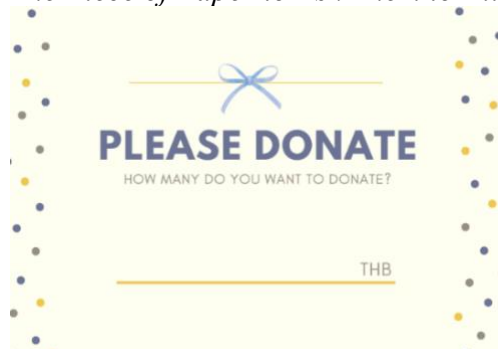
In treatment group 1, the impact of identifying receivers was tested by using a different message compared to the control group. The message contained information. The participants were given details on identifying their desired contribution amount. In addition, I have identified the recipients of the benefits, who are students funded by the UNICEF foundation, as shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2
The Piece of Paper to Ask Them to Allocate Their Money to Our Project for Treatment 1

To examine the impact of karma on their decision-making process. Participants assigned to treatment 2 will be presented with the karma text before seeing the UNICEF video to assess their level of belief in karma, based on by Chen et al. (2019).

These stories were about:

> A young man who donates blood every four months throughout the year. One day, he had an accident and was in a serious state. He needed blood to support his treatment, and it was delivered to him in a timely manner. When he comes to terms with the horrible incident, he believes that his ability to donate blood saved him from dying.

And the second story:

> One day, a young girl was waiting for a green traffic light to cross the street to another side of the street. In her limited time to cross the street, she saw the elder woman. She was trying to cross the street, but she carried both her stuff and her cane. A young girl will decide to help the elder cross. In the evening, a girl was crossing the crosswalk, and a motorcycle came to the field, and she survived, so she thought it was because she saved an old woman in the morning. She was safe from this accident.

To prove that karma exists. Following that, participants were asked to assign a 7-point scale weight to two items based on their belief in the story and its reasonableness. Subsequently, participants will be provided with the same information shown in figure 3. This information will point out that they are the individuals who will reap the advantages of their activities.

Figure 3
The Piece of Paper to Ask Them to Allocate Their Money to Our Project for Treatment 2

Participants were separated during the activities by a distance at each table to ensure privacy. Moreover, participants were asked about their individual demographics and their level of belief in karma, religions, and supernatural which inspired by Kopelle et al. (2010), Roy et al. (2019), and Chen et al. (2019). To evaluate the impact of an intervention on the value of donation for a philanthropic organization, we employ multiple regression analysis with final payment amounts as dependent variables.

Results

Descriptive

The experiment occurred and proceeded successfully according to the planned plan. The research design contains three distinct experimental groups, including Treatment 1 Altruism Framing, Treatment 2 Karma Framing, and a control group. All two hundred and forty-two individuals were assigned randomly to one of three groups. While its outcome is evident as a numerical value in Table 1.

Table 1
Balance Test: The Randomization Checks for Demographic and Level of Their Believing

	Experimental Group		
	Control (N = 80)	**Treatment 1 (N = 80)**	**Treatment 2 (N = 82)**
Gender	0.775	0.675	0.719
	(0.047)	(0.052)	(0.049)
Age	20.662^{A***}	19.525^{C***}	20.817
	(0.170)	(0.141)	(0.085)
Faculty	0.363^{A***}	0.687^{C***}	0.280
	(0.054)	(0.052)	(0.05)
Religious	0.925^{B***}	0.913^{C***}	0.731
	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.049)
Income	7,497.5	$6,635^{C***}$	8,126.829
	(477.374)	(313.903)	(448.672)
Believe in Karma	3.051	2.969	3.011
	(0.091)	(0.085)	(0.084)
Believe in Religious	2.500	2.434	2.530
	(0.109)	(0.089)	(0.101)
Believe in God	2.056	2.131	2.183
	(0.098)	(0.103)	(0.092)
Believe in Supernatural	3.004	3.001	2.984
	(0.123)	(0.111)	(0.103)
Happiness	3.500	3.550	3.573
	(0.083)	(0.081)	(0.085)
Stress	3.488^{B**}	3.562^{C**}	3.817
	(0.102)	(0.083)	(0.778)

Note: Note: Standard errors are in parentheses. ***, **, and * are significant level at 1%, 5% and 10%, respectively. The comparison among the two experimental conditions is "A" for Control and Treatment 1, "B" for Control and Treatment 2, "C" for Treatment 1 and Treatment 2.

Table 1 presents the demographic details for 242 individuals, categorized by the experimental group. The female in the samples is 72 percent, and there is no statistically significant

difference (P-value > 0.1) observed in the groups. The age limit for participation is limited to those who are studying undergraduate studies at Khon Kaen University. Ranging from 19 to 25 years. The table shows that there is a significant difference in the age of participants in the control group compared to treatment 1 (P-value < 0.01), as well as a significant difference in the age of participants in treatment 1 compared to treatment 2 (P-value < 0.01). The control group demonstrated a statistically significant difference compared to treatment 1 in terms of the majority of economics faculty members (P-value < 0.01). In the control group, there was a significant difference between the most religious belief and treatment 2 (P-value < 0.01). Furthermore, treatment 1 presented significant differences from treatment 2 (P-value < 0.01). However, there is a significant difference in the income of individuals in treatment 1 compared to treatment 2 (P-value < 0.01). Furthermore, this questionnaire includes the individual's level of belief. The control group's belief in karma does not show a show a statistically significant difference when compared to the other group (P-value > 0.1). There is an important difference in the stress levels of participants between the control group and treatment 2 (P-value < 0.05). Additionally, there is a significant difference between treatment 1 and treatment 2 between the groups (P-value < 0.05). As a result, we incorporated variable variations into a model to achieve optimal control.

Main Results

I evaluated the average amount of donations in each group, which provided different information. Figure 4 shows the average amount of donations for each treatment. The average amount of donations of subjects in control group in the control group who did not get anything was approximately 18.15 THB and lower than the average amount of donations received by others. The number of participants in treatment 1 is 24.44, which is smaller than the number of participants in treatment 2 (29.28).

Figure 4
The Average Donations From Each Group
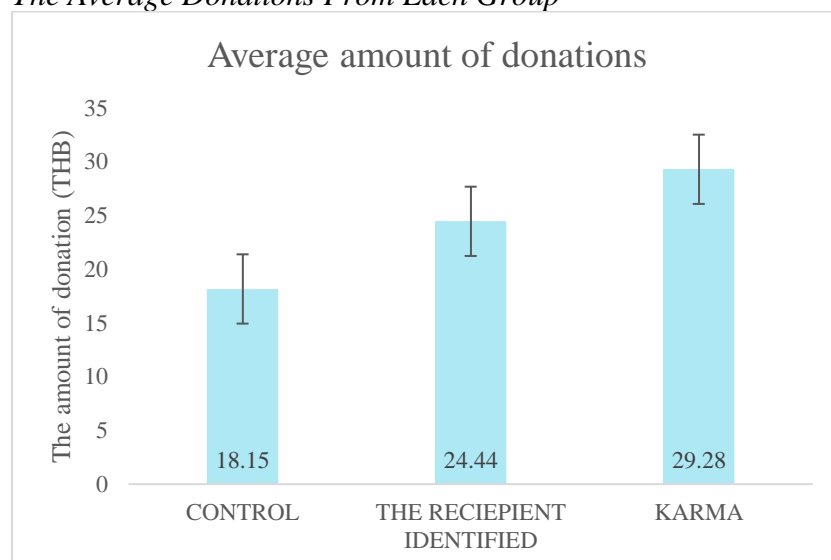
To test the two hypotheses, we show the estimation outcomes gathered from all participants, covering individuals at all educational levels. Table 2 provides the outcomes of all samples analyzed using two models: one that just shows the effects of the treatment and another that includes full models separated by each treatment group. Both models use the provided control group as a reference group.

To explain each model. Regarding the treatment effect model, our focus is just on the impact of each treatment on the amount of donation. This is followed by the framing of the message before participants make decisions. The control group (18.15 THB, P-value < 0.01) is considered a reference group, indicating that individuals have a baseline donation amount of approximately 18.15 THB. In addition, the significance of treatment 1 is based on the fact that the framing of altruism influences participants to donate approximately 6.28 THB (P-value < 0.05). It means that when individuals are exposed to an altruistic message, their donation amount increases by around 6.28 THB, which results in a total gift of 24.44 THB. The model shows a significant effect in treatment 2, where the use of karma framing persuades participants to donate around 11.13 THB. The P-value is less than 0.01, indicating that when individuals receive access to a karma message, their donation amount increases by around 11.13 THB, resulting in a total gift of 29.28 THB.

In the full model, our analysis of the balance test revealed that several variables have a significant impact on individuals' perceptions of financial donations; thus, we included more control variables to test the effect on donation. According to the full model in Table 2, treatments 1 (altruism framing) and 2 (karma framing) showed statistically significant impacts, as shown by their respective P-values of 0.05 and 0.01. Furthermore, the control variables, such as stress, have a favorable impact on people's decision-making (P-value < 0.01). Particularly when individuals experience just one level of stress, their contribution amount increases by 4.19 THB. Furthermore, to check the collinearity in every control variable, especially each level of belief, I conclude that there is no collinearity.

Discussion and Conclusion

Altruism is a pervasive concept. This is particularly evident when individuals are driven by the impending donation of resources (Chen et al., 2021; Otto & Bolle, 2011). Despite having outstanding intentions, this phenomenon may not always occur if individuals prioritize their own self-interest. They present an overwhelming feeling of hope and are motivated to improve their decision-making to gain back the positive outcomes.

In the initial phase of my research, I conducted how recipients perceive donations, which are often driven by kindness. Thus, to determine whether beneficiaries can be identified in messages to inspire donors. The control group that will get nothing compared to treatment 1. Participants, including the students in the UNICEF organization who received help from their resources, will receive a persuasive message. As the results, the identity recipients experiment demonstrated that individuals were more inclined to donate when they were aware of the recipient's identity. Specially, the control group, which consisted of unidentified beneficiaries, revealed that participants in the unidentified group exhibited lower donation levels compared who were aware of and understood the journey of their resource. Thus, our propositions confirm that individuals who have experienced clear victimization tend to be more kind towards others, suggesting that making the recipient feel special enhances emotional connections and encourages generosity.

In the second part, I'll be aware that participants prioritize altruism as a motive prior to engaging in contributions. To verify their ability for empathy. Or are they self-interest? Do contributions have varying effects? To assess participants' empathy (altruism) and self-interest (karma), I will use different messages to convince them. In treatment 1, participants will only get a message highlighting the beneficiaries of their acts, namely UNICEF. Conversely, in treatment 2, participants will receive a karma message emphasizing that they

themselves would experience positive consequences as the beneficiaries of their deeds. Therefore, it was found that karma framing had a significant impact on donations, beyond the results resulting from only altruistic framing. Because of these results, I can better understand the psychological reasons behind charitable giving. It seems that both selfless and selfish motivation can be used to get more people to donate to charities.

In the end, this study helps us understand how people donate more deeply and gives us useful tips for improving our fundraising efforts. However, this might not always happen if people thought about how, it would help them, which they do with good goals as well. They have something to look forward to, which makes them want to do better.

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Queer in the Classroom:
Revealing the Social Dynamics of LGBTQ+ Students at Thai Universities

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Abstract

In Thailand, a nation often lauded for its progressive stance on LGBTQ+ issues, university students who identify as LGBTQ+ still navigate a landscape marked by insufficient institutional support. This study explores their social experiences through a dual approach, combining narrative analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA) based on the framework established by Preston and Hoffman (2015), to uncover the underlying social-psychological, political, and cultural dynamics at play. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven LGBTQ+ students, recruited through snowball sampling, and 26 articles from Thai media and university publications were analyzed using CDA. The findings reveal that, despite Thailand's surface-level reputation for tolerance, deeper prejudices persist. These prejudices are often masked by cultural practices like เกรงใจ (kreng jai), which prioritize social harmony over confronting sensitive issues surrounding individual differences and are facilitated by adherence to the concept of เพศ (phet), which contributes to increasingly complicated understandings of gender and sexual identities. As a result, LGBTQ+ students often find themselves marginalized and misunderstood, with their needs overlooked in both academic and social contexts. This research not only sheds light on the complexities of LGBTQ+ student life in Thai universities but also calls for a reevaluation of what true inclusivity means in educational settings. By addressing these challenges, there is potential to transform Thai universities into environments where LGBTQ+ identities are fully supported and embraced.

Keywords: เพศ (*Phet*), เกรงใจ (*Kreng Jai*), critical discourse analysis (CDA), narrative analysis, traditionally heterogendered institution (THI)

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Introduction

Thai Universities and LGBTQ+ Resources

Western shifts towards acceptance and protections for LGBTQ+ people has led to the establishment of many localized organizations and centers that advocate for the rights of the LGBTQ+ community. Such resource centers and programs have gradually been incorporated into existing university programming aimed at bridging the achievement gaps for minoritized students (Preston & Hoffman, 2015). However, institutionalized programming centered around diversity is generally a rarity outside of the Western world, even in Thailand— a nation heralded as the beacon of LGBTQ+ inclusion in Southeast Asia. Few universities in Thailand have university-sponsored events surrounding queer identities, easy access to resources, and institutionalized educational opportunities (Khaikham, 2022). Contrary to public perception, LGBTQ+ rights is a relatively new concept in Thailand. Past investigations have found that LGBTQ+ individuals in Thailand often face pressure to conform to traditional gender roles and societal expectations, negatively impacting their mental health and well-being (Ojanen et al., 2016; Phalapong, 2022).

These past findings suggest that institutional reform and LGBTQ+ student support programs may be a necessity even where they might not be a normality. Some researchers have investigated the Thai LGBTQ+ university experience (Chintaradeja, 2021), and humanities scholars have noted the specific cultural context in which the Thai queer community as a whole has developed over time (Altman, 1996; Singhakowinta, 2016). But, previous scholars have not taken a close look at the potential relationship between Thai students' social experiences and broader discourse regarding the queer community. We seek to fill these gaps in the current study.

Conceptual Framework: Traditional Heterogendered Institutions

Recently, scholars have begun more-closely investigating how LGBTQ+ students navigate certain aspects of their identity within educational environments and any harms they might face. In one study, Chintaradeja (2021) conducted in-depth interviews with eight Thai university students who identify as LGBTQ+, focusing specifically on their experiences with the "coming out" process within the context of Southeast Asian higher education. The study found that, despite the presence of queer identities among students, discussions about queerness and non-heteronormative identities are notably absent in Thai university classrooms. The students reported that their teachers generally avoid addressing topics related to gender and sexual diversity, often discussing gender only in terms of the traditional male-female binary when these topics are mentioned at all. The observed reluctance to address the experiences of people with non-heteronormative identities warrant considering whether Thai universities might be considered Traditionally Heterogendered Institutions.

Traditionally Heterogendered Institution (THI), coined by Preston and Hoffman (2015) is defined as an institution that, while attempting to support LGBTQ people, inherently upholds a heterogendered discourse through its structures and foundations. The dynamic interaction between institutional messaging (or lack thereof) and the narrative identities of LGBTQ+ students might reinforce representations that somehow inhibit meaningful student engagement. The uncovered negative consequences of labeling LGBTQ+ as the marginalized "other" within THIs aligns with Talburt's (2004) findings, which highlight that framing LGBTQ+ youth as "out and proud" or "at risk" perpetuates limiting binary categories and

reinforces normative ideologies of success and health. In these particular cases, students' experience as the "other" is exhibited through a slightly different vein— an explicit distancing from conversation regarding the negative or uncomfortable aspects of the LGBTQ+ experience. Thai universities, despite Thailand's reputation for tolerance and overall positive public recognition of LGBTQ+ identities, may function as THIs in practice. We can demonstrate this relationship with a closer look at the discourse that shapes norms within these spaces.

Drawing inspiration from Preston and Hoffman (2015), this study employs discourse and qualitative interview analyses to address how institutional narratives and language within THIs reinforce traditional gender norms and influence LGBTQ+ student experiences. These methods, combined, provide an exploration of the interaction between institutional discourses and broader structural forces, allowing for a comprehensive examination of how these factors shape the development and sustainability of support systems for LGBTQ+ students at Thai universities.

Primary Research Questions

(1) What social experiences do LGBTQ+ students have in a Thai university environment?
(2) How do LGBTQ+ university students in Thailand describe their experiences with coming out and disclosure at the university?
(3) What resources would LGBTQ+ university students in Thailand like to see implemented at their institutions?

Methodology

Ethical Considerations

All recruitment materials adhere to ethical standards for research marketing and did not disclose any personal information of potential participants. All participants signed IRB-approved informed consent forms and granted permission to include their data in this investigation. Participants were given anonymous IDs, and the interview audio recordings were stored in a secure, password-protected Box drive. These recordings will not be publicized.

Procedure 1: Narrative Analysis

Participants: Seven Thai students who attend an international college at a prominent university in Thailand were selected for interview via a snowball method. Initial participants were recruited through electronic invitations to relevant student groups and organizations. Recruitment messaging described the procedure's purpose and scope, and they provided instructions on how to participate. Students were selected to participate based on a standardized process. Inclusion criteria included personal identification as a member of the LGBTQ+ community, Thai as their nationality and native tongue, and fluency in the English language. These interviews were semi-structured and recorded as MP3 files.

Analysis: Following the recordings, each interview was transcribed and coded using narrative analysis, a method used to evaluate and interpret stories, experiences, or accounts shared by a group of individuals as one central narrative. Using this approach, we aimed to uncover the

underlying meaning and significance of their stories, rather than just summarizing the events described by the participants.

Procedure 2: Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)

Sample: A total of 26 publications (13 English-language and 13 Thai-language) were selected for analysis, comprising a diverse array of sources, including (1) academic publications, (2) online blogs and news reports, and institutional reports and manuscripts. The selection criteria focused on the relevance of the articles to LGBTQ+ issues, alignment with source classification categories, and the representation of both local and global narratives on LGBTQ+ rights and identities. Only articles that were clearly authored by a Thai national and Thai-language native were included. All articles that violated these criteria were not considered for inclusion in this investigation.

Analysis: These publications were analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), an approach to analyzing the language and communication used in social practices and the power relations they reflect and reproduce. The implementation of the CDA was aided by the usage of ChatGPT 4o to cross-linguistically code the selected articles, facilitating the identification of key themes, discourses, and linguistic patterns across both Thai and English-language sources. The CDA was conducted in three stages:

a. *Identification of Key Themes and Discourses*
Each article was subjected to a line-by-line analysis to identify recurring themes and discourses related to LGBTQ+ identities. Particular attention was paid to the terms used to describe LGBTQ+ individuals, the tone of the articles, and the implicit messages conveyed through language.

b. *Examination of Language and Tone*
The language was analyzed to determine how it contributed to the construction of LGBTQ+ identities. The analysis considered the interplay between progress, tradition, cultural values, and social norms in shaping the discourse on LGBTQ+ rights, with specific attention to how these dynamics are articulated in Thai-language sources.

Findings & Interpretations

Narrative Analysis: How LGBTQ+ Students Conceptualize Their Own Experiences

a. *Experiences With Coming Out*
The process of coming out for LGBTQ+ students was marked by selective disclosure and cautiousness. Students often chose to share their identities only with trusted friends, reflecting a strategic approach to minimize potential negative repercussions and manage the risk of homophobia. For instance, one student explained their reluctance to discuss their identity with strangers:

> I don't talk to strangers. I would avoid this topic when I first met a stranger... I don't know who is homophobic. (Student E)

b. *Relationships With Other Students*
LGBTQ+ Thai students form close-knit friend groups, often separate from the broader university community. This self-segregation serves as a protective measure against potential discrimination and bias, allowing students to create a safe space for themselves. Despite this, students frequently encountered or heard about

discriminatory incidents, underscoring an undercurrent of exclusion and bias within the larger student body. Upon initial prompt, every student stated that they had neither experienced nor witnessed bias or discrimination from another student. However, upon follow-up, multiple students recalled, in-detail, circumstances under which they experienced or witnessed discrimination. Then, when asked about their actions following these instances when they occur, the students admitted that they neither respond to nor report negative behavior due to a variety of reasons that stem back to comfort and social cohesion. One student, who self-identified as a sapphic woman, shared their discomfort with certain interactions that reinforced gender stereotypes:

> Um, they just like, regard me as a man. Like, they say like I like women just means that I'm like their guy friend. They talk about those stuff like I don't really comfortable about learning about… Like the genitals and stuff, and I was like 'why would do like this stuff in front of me?' (Student D)

c. *Relationships With Professors*

Interactions with professors were generally professional and transactional, with most professors treating all students uniformly. When recounting instances of discrimination coming from faculty members, one student shared:

> Not quite, I wouldn't say it's discrimination but more like something that's slipped. To me it's not discrimination, to me it's more like they don't hate, they just genuinely think that and I don't hate them for that. (Student B)

d. *Relationships With Administrative Staff*

LGBTQ+ students described their interactions with administrative staff as predominantly professional and distant. Student affairs personnel were perceived as operating behind the scenes, with direct interactions occurring only when necessary. One student described the invisibility of administrative staff:

> I feel like they're more on running things behind the scene so I feel like people who are not directly involved with them wouldn't actually see them that much. So, I feel like you know how the government runs and then there's these two people, and it feels like this invisible cogs running behind the scene. (Student B)

e. *Experiences With University Resources*

Many participants were unaware of any university resources specifically designed to support LGBTQ+ students. Consequently, they often sought external resources, particularly for sexual health issues. One student expressed the need for better promotion of mental health services:

> For mental health, I would love for [redacted] to promote it better, because I just started to know that we have this. If my friend did not tell me, I would have never known [redacted] have mental service. Rather than focusing on publishing documentaries or announcing international rewards, they should promote more student services. (Student G)

Critical Discourse Analysis: Framing of LGBTQ+ Rights Within Thai Institutions

The CDA revealed ongoing discussions on stigma against the LGBTQ+ community across the sampled articles. Discrimination was most evident in discussions surrounding workplace exclusion, social ostracism, and the lack of legal protections for LGBTQ+ individuals. Although some articles highlighted efforts to combat these issues at the institutional level, the language often suggested that such efforts were insufficient or met with resistance. Multiple articles documented significant strides in LGBTQ+ activism and progress, particularly in urban centers and within educational institutions. Examples include the increased visibility of LGBTQ+ issues during Pride events, the implementation of inclusive policies within universities, and the growing support for legal reforms aimed at protecting LGBTQ+ rights. Many pieces explicitly framed the struggle for LGBTQ+ equality within the broader context of human rights, emphasizing the need for continued advocacy and legal reforms. However, this progress is frequently portrayed as being at odds with traditional Thai values, creating a narrative of tension between modernity and tradition. Activism is often framed within a context that emphasizes the need to respect cultural norms, suggesting that while progress is occurring, it is carefully negotiated within the boundaries of what is socially acceptable.

Discussion

Both the CDA and the narrative analysis support the notion that homophobia and transphobia are still prevalent in Thailand, both within and outside university settings, illustrating the continuous negotiation between visibility and safety. A potential explanation for this recurring trend in the Thai culture of tolerance. In Thailand, tolerance is often promoted within educational environments as a means of maintaining social harmony and avoiding confrontation (Potgieter, 2013; Jackson, 2016). This approach is heavily influenced by the Buddhist principle of non-confrontation and the cultural ideal of เกรงใจ (*kreng jai*), which emphasizes consideration for others to the extent of avoiding actions or words that could cause discomfort, conflict, or disagreement (Nuruzzaman et al., 2023). For these students, tolerance appears to have become a psychologically-conditioned response to uncomfortable social experiences. However, this practice can prevent the necessary discussions that would bring to light the challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students. The desire to appear accepting or to be accepted may lead many Thai individuals to subconsciously alter the narrative regarding the social experiences of LGBTQ+ people. This interpretation is supported by past research on the subject of discrimination and tolerance which found that while tolerance might prevent open conflict, it results in a superficial acceptance that masks deeper prejudices, meaning that the true issues affecting LGBTQ+ are not addressed or resolved (Adelman et al., 2023).

Another key finding from this study is the conflation among interview participants between the terms *gender* and *sexual orientation*, reflective of the history of language in Thailand, where modern terminology for queer identities originates from the West (Singhakowinta, 2016). The adoption of these terms within Thai society conflicts with traditional understandings of gender and sexuality (Altman, 1996). For example, the Thai word *phet* (เพศ) is used to describe a wide range of concepts, including biological sex, gender identity/expression, and sexual orientation. Thus, an attempt by a native Thai speaker to translate this term into English appears to result in conflation of these distinct ideas, seemingly leading to the use of the word *gender* as an all-inclusive term, rather than as its true English meaning. We theorize, based on the use of the English word *gender* to describe *sexual orientation* in both interviews and publications, that native Thai speakers might

internalize information from research and media in the same way they might if *phet* (เพศ) had been used. Interestingly, multiple cases of discrimination or offense described in the interviews were centered around confusion around the participants' sexual orientation given their gender expression, and vice-versa. Filling this understanding gap will require closer attention within educational spaces.

Conclusion

Through the voices of LGBTQ+ university students and the discourses embedded in Thai media, this study reveals a reality where tolerance often substitutes for true acceptance. Students navigate their identities with caution, crafting micro-communities to withstand the invisibility imposed by social norms and institutional neglect. Their narratives are not merely accounts of marginalization, but also calls on universities to facilitate support systems and environments that foster true belonging rather than simply allowing for quiet endurance. This study had several limitations. All interviews were conducted at an international school in the English language, which undoubtedly influenced the participants' expression. On one hand, the linguistic conflation may have gone unnoticed in a Thai-language interview. Still, this context may not fully capture the cultural nuances of their experiences or the impact of increased Western influence in such environments. Further comparisons between these very different contexts are necessary for additional validation of these findings.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work the author(s) used ChatGPT-4o for grammatical and textual structure support. Additionally, the author(s) used Perplexity AI in order to locate harder-to-find sources to include in literature review. After using these tools/services, the author(s) reviewed, synthesized, and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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The Relationship Between Students' Psychological Adaptability and Emotional Intelligence

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Abstract

A good ability to adapt to the school and community environment has a positive effect on the student's learning and makes them feel comfortable in the classroom. Entering a university requires a change in lifestyle for a student. It requires more independent activities such as attending classes, listening to lectures, writing, reading, completing assignments, and managing time and finances independently, etc. The process of adaptation takes place at all levels of the structure and components of the body, and its nature is related to the synthesis of nucleic acids and specific proteins and changes in structure and function. In our research, we have compared the adaptability of 1st and 2nd year students. 189 second-year medical students of Etugen University participated in the study, 30 (15.9%) were male, and 159 (84.9%) were female. Since 65.9% of the participants in the study have a moderate level of adaptability to learning activities, there is a need to organize activities aimed at increasing students' adaptability. Because 6.3% of all students who participated in the study have poor adaptability to the school environment, to increase the adaptability of these students, it is necessary to meet with these students individually, organize training, and give advice and support. The ability of second-year students to adapt to learning activities is better than that of first-year students, and the ability to adapt is good. The ability to adapt to learning activities has a weak positive correlation.

Keywords: emotional intelligence, adaptability, student

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Introduction

Entering university represents a major lifestyle change for students. It requires greater independence in managing activities such as attending classes, listening to lectures, writing, reading, completing assignments, and independently organizing their time and finances (Mattanah et al., 2004). University life should be an enriching life experience that brings genuine satisfaction to students. However, numerous studies (Chang et al., 2007; Mattanah et al., 2004; Tinto, 1993, 1996) show that many students struggle during their first year, often leading to dropout. According to Aurel (2012), in the United States, 40% of students who enroll in higher education institutions do not graduate, and of those, 57% drop out by their second year (Tinto, 1996). In a joint study by Elias and Abdullah, it was found that 57% of those who dropped out before graduating reported dissatisfaction with life after entering university (Abdullah et al., 2009). Factors contributing to this dissatisfaction include financial difficulties, academic challenges, physical health issues, lack of employment opportunities, and family problems. Many of these factors may be directly or indirectly related to the ability to adapt (Darmaa & Anakhnaran, 2021). Adapting to the social and educational environment of a university is an essential part of the transition from high school to university and from adolescence to adulthood. Research findings indicate that students generally show low levels of adaptation to changes in their external environment. Adaptability is considered a personal trait influenced by the surrounding environment. Since university is part of this environment, it plays a role in both professional and personal development. In our study, we explored the relationship between students' adaptability and emotional intelligence.

Research Methodology

The study was conducted from March 30 to April 5, 2023, using a cross-sectional research design. A total of 189 students participated after giving informed consent. The survey consisted of 72 questions and was completed within 40 minutes. We used the methodology developed by Dubovitskaya and Krylova (2010) to assess university students' adaptability to the educational environment. This method measures adaptation in two aspects: adaptation to the school (social) environment and adaptation to academic activities. The research paper was written using Microsoft Office 2019, statistical data were processed using STATA 15, and references and citations were formatted according to APA standards.

Result

The study included 189 second-year medical students at Etugen University, of whom 30 (15.9%) were male and 159 (84.9%) were female.

Table 1
Classification of Respondents by Primary Administration

	Ulaanbaatar	Locality
Percentage	71%(134)	29%(55)

71% or 134 students from rural areas and 29% or 55 students from Ulaanbaatar city are from the study area. The majority of the study participants are from rural areas.

Figure 1
Adaptability to Learning Activities
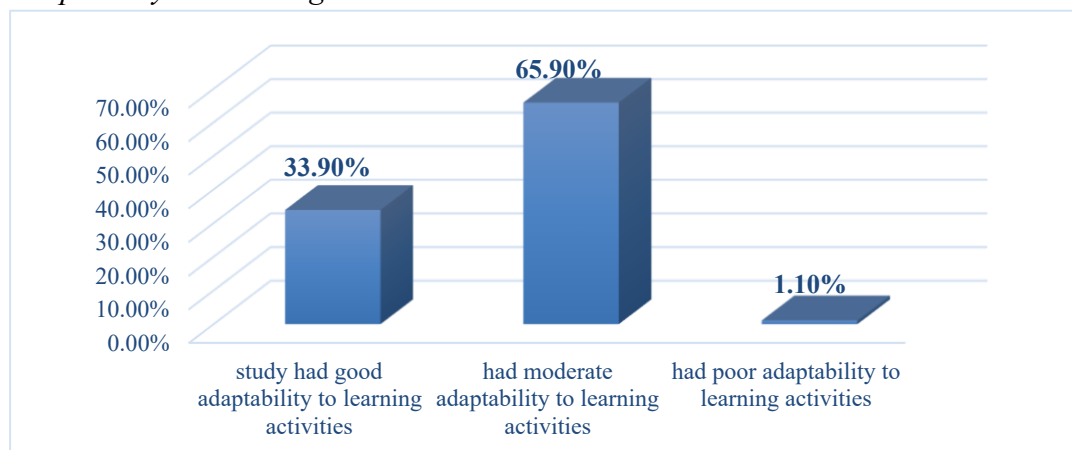
The results showed that 33.9% or 63 students of the total number of students participating in the study had good adaptability to learning activities, 65.9% or 124 students had moderate adaptability to learning activities, and 1.1% or 2 students had poor adaptability to learning activities. Since 65.9% of the total number of students participating in the study had moderate adaptability to learning activities, there is a need to organize activities aimed at increasing the adaptability of students.

Figure 2
Adaptability to the Social and Community School Environment
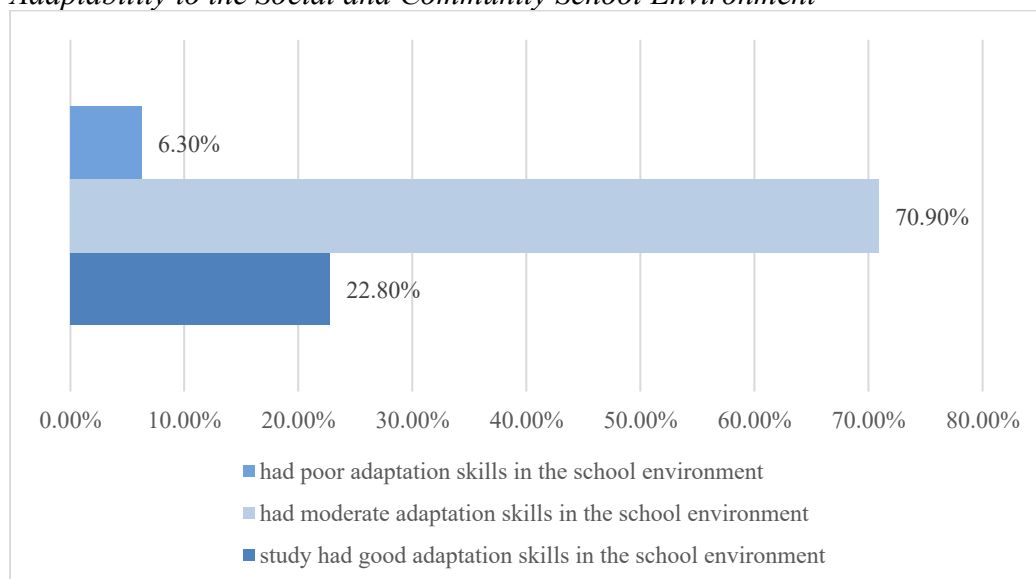
The results showed that 22.8% or 43 students of the total students participating in the study had good adaptation skills in the school environment, 70.9% or 134 students had moderate adaptation skills in the school environment, and 6.3% or 12 students had poor adaptation skills in the school environment. Since 6.3% of the total students participating in the study had poor adaptation skills in the school environment, it is necessary to meet with these students individually, organize training, and provide advice and support to increase their adaptation skills.

Figure 3

Social Adaptation Skills in the School Environment
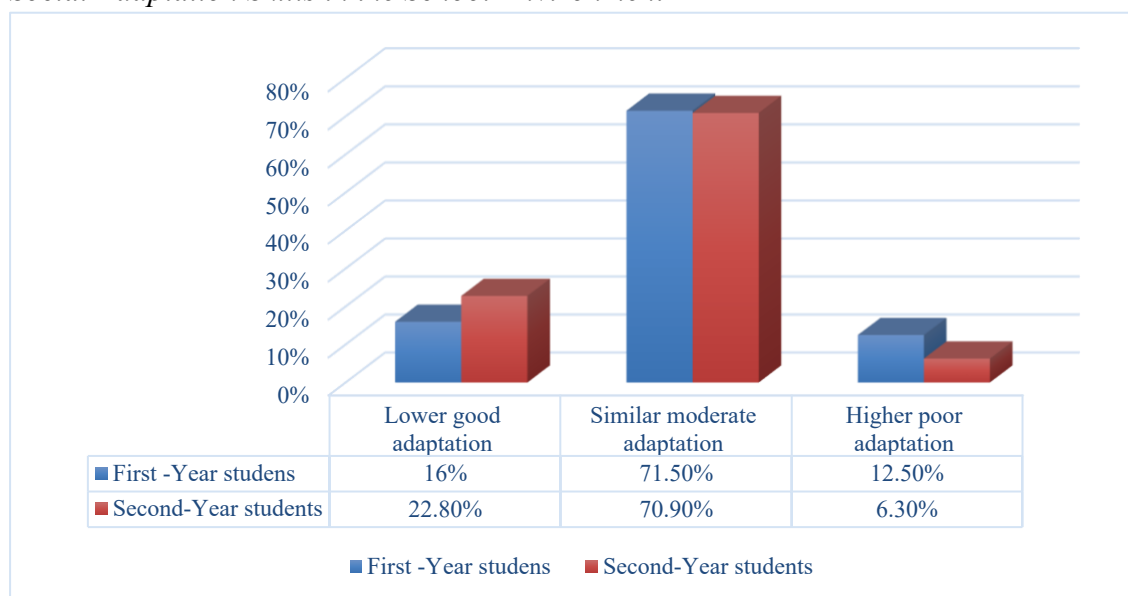
The results showed that 12.5% of first-year students and 6.3% of second-year students had poor social and community adaptation in the school environment, 71.5% of first-year students and 70.9% of second-year students had moderate social and community adaptation in the school environment, and 16% of first-year students and 22.8% of second-year students had good social and community adaptation in the school environment. The results show that second-year students have better social and community adaptation in the school environment than first-year students, and have good adaptability.

Table 2

Comparison of Adaptability to Learning Activities by Course

Comparison of Adaptability to Learning Activities Across Courses	Good	Medium	Bad
1st grade	34%	53%	13.5%
2nd course	33.9%	65%	1.1%

The results showed that 13.5% of first-year students and 1.1% of second-year students who participated in the study had poor adaptability to learning activities, 53% of first-year students and 65% of second-year students had moderate adaptability to learning activities, and 34% of first-year students and 33.9% of second-year students had good adaptability to learning activities. The results show that second-year students had better adaptability to learning activities than first-year students, or better adaptability.

Table 3

One-Factor Regression Analysis of Adaptation to the School Environment and Adaptation to Learning Activities

No.	Variable	Coffee.	Std. Err	P > t	95% Confidence interval	
1	Ability to adapt to the school environment and society	.315	0.6	0.000	.17	.45
2	Adaptability to learning activities	.316	.06.	0.000	.17	.45

When the score of adaptation to learning activities increases by one, the ability to adapt to the learning environment increases by 0.31 times, which is statistically significant. This shows that the ability to adapt to the school environment and the ability to adapt to learning activities are related to each other, and students who can adapt to the school environment have the opportunity to adapt to learning activities and learn successfully.

Table 4

Adaptability to Learning Activities, Basic Administration

No.	Basic Administration	Good Adaptability	Adaptability is Moderate	Poor Adaptability
1	Ulaanbaatar	19(34.5%)	36 (65.5%)	0(0%)
2	Region	44(32.8%)	88(65.8)	2(1.4%)

34.5% of students living in Ulaanbaatar have good adaptability to learning activities, 65.5% have moderate adaptability to learning activities, and there were no students with poor adaptability to learning activities. Of the students coming to Ulaanbaatar from rural areas, 32.8% have good adaptability to learning activities, 65.8% have moderate adaptability to learning activities, and 1.4% have poor adaptability to learning activities.

Table 5

Results of the Two-Factor t-Test Between Community Adaptability Scores and Primary Administration

Group	Note	Mean	Std.err	Std.dev	95% Confidence	Interval
1	53	11.13208	.4041132	2.941989	10.32116	11.94299
2	132	10.93182	.2574796	2.958216	10.42246	11.44117
Combined	185	10.98919	.216666	2.946976	10.56172	11.41666
Diff		.2002573	.4803023		-.7473849	1.1479

Diff = mean (1) – mean (2)	t = 0.41
No: diff = 0	Degrees of freedom = 183

Ha: diff < 0	Ha: diff = 0	Ha: diff > 0
P = 0.64	P = 0.67	P = 0.33

The ability to adapt to society and community differs by primary administration (p = 0.67), and the alternative hypothesis H1 is confirmed.

The above results show that there is no statistical evidence that any of the following factors influence the ability to adapt to the school environment: socially significant intrinsic motivation, personally significant intrinsic motivation, external negative motivation, or external positive motivation.

The above results show that there is no statistical evidence that any of the following factors influence the ability to adapt to learning activities: socially important intrinsic motivation, personally important intrinsic motivation, external negative motivation, or external positive motivation.

The results of the study show that the ability to adapt to the school environment is related to the ability to adapt to learning activities, the intrinsic motivation of personal importance for career choice is highly related to the ability to adapt to the school environment, the ability to adapt to learning activities, the social importance for career choice is highly related to the ability to adapt to the school environment, the ability to adapt to learning activities, and the intrinsic motivation of personal importance, and the positive external motivation is directly related to the intrinsic motivation of personal importance and the intrinsic motivation of social importance, which is statistically significant. Adaptability to learning activities is weakly positively correlated with motivation to acquire knowledge (r = 0.26), motivation to obtain a diploma is weakly positively correlated with motivation to acquire knowledge (r = 0.16), motivation to acquire a profession (r = 0.27), and motivation to acquire knowledge is weakly positively correlated with motivation to acquire a profession (r = 0.35).

Table 6
The Correlation Between Students' Adaptability and Emotional Intelligence

Indicators	Emotional intelligence	
Adaptability to Learning Activities	Pearson Correlation	0.007
	P value	0.946
Ability to Adapt to the School Environment and Society	Pearson Correlation	0.111
	P value	0.285

There is no significant correlation between students' adaptability to the school environment and academic activities, and their level of emotional intelligence

Conclusion

1. The majority of the students who participated in the study were students who were able to adapt to the social and school environment. A student's ability to adapt well to the social, school environment, and class is a factor that increases their motivation to go to school and be satisfied with their chosen profession.
2. The ability to adapt to society, community, and school environments and the academic environment is interrelated. It is also important for schools to pay attention to the students' adaptation to school and community, and it may be effective for universities to focus more on professional introduction and orientation courses for newly enrolled students.

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Exploring Mental Health Challenges and Counseling Needs Among Distance Learners: A Case Study of Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University

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Abstract

This investigation examines the determinants of mental health outcomes among students enrolled at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU) and evaluates their perceived necessity for psychological counseling services. Data collection involved 442 participants, comprising undergraduate and graduate students, using a detailed questionnaire aimed at evaluating psychological factors (for instance, stress levels and coping tactics), biological indicators (like the quality of sleep and physical health), and social conditions (such as support from family and financial stability). A stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted to evaluate significant predictors of mental health outcomes. The results indicated that psychological variables ($\beta = 0.319$, $p < 0.001$), biological variables ($\beta = 0.239$, $p < 0.001$), and social variables ($\beta = 0.283$, $p < 0.001$) served as critical predictors, in addition to age, gender, and academic discipline, collectively elucidating 47.3% of the variance in mental health outcomes. The results emphasize the significance of focusing on psychological stress management and strengthening social support systems to enhance mental health outcomes. In light of the distinctive challenges encountered by distance learners, the investigation accentuates the necessity for accessible, customized counseling services that specifically address these psychological, biological, and social variables.

Keywords: distance learning, mental health, counseling services

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Introduction

In current higher education, distance learning has become a pivotal component, offering flexibility and accessibility to a diverse student population (Lagier, 2003; Kliucharev, 2020). This educational framework not only enables learners to pursue their academic ambitions and goals but does so without imposing the conventional constraints associated with geographical limitations or inflexible scheduling structures, thereby effectively fostering the involvement of individuals who are simultaneously navigating a multitude of professional commitments, familial duties, or other personal obligations that might otherwise obstruct their educational endeavors (AL-Mukhtar & Murad, 2012; Farajollahi & Zarifsanaee, 2012). However, despite the numerous benefits that online education offers, it is essential to recognize that this educational approach does pose its own unique and complex challenges, particularly in relation to the mental health and overall well-being of students participating in this mode of learning (Lister et al., 2021).

The significant transition that scholars encounter when shifting from traditional classroom settings to virtual education platforms can profoundly impact their psychological condition and emotional well-being in manners that may not be readily discernible (Akpınar, 2021; Lister et al., 2021). Research grounded in practical examinations indicates that individuals participating in online learning frequently contend with elevated stress levels, feelings of isolation, and heightened anxiety when juxtaposed with their peers in conventional on-campus education (Aditya, 2021). The conspicuous deficit of direct, face-to-face interaction with fellow students and instructors can evoke an emotional vacuum and considerable loneliness, which could yield detrimental effects on academic performance and the overall quality of life experienced by these learners (Akpınar, 2021). Furthermore, the autonomous nature of online education necessitates that students possess robust skills in time management and a substantial degree of self-motivation, which may inadvertently exacerbate stress for those who find it challenging to acclimate to this independent educational environment (Beilina & Baranova, 2022; Zhytova & Butuzova, 2023).

At Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), a distinguished institution in Thailand specializing in the provision of distance education, it is crucial to comprehend and address the mental health requirements of the student population, as this understanding is essential to the success and well-being of these learners. Given the increasing acknowledgment of mental health challenges faced by distance learners, it is noteworthy that there exists a pronounced deficiency of research specifically targeting this demographic within the framework of the Thai educational system. Consequently, this study is intentionally crafted with the objective of bridging this critical gap in the literature by thoroughly examining the mental health challenges encountered by students at STOU while concurrently identifying their specific counseling needs and preferences regarding available support services.

This research intends to explore the psychological, biological, and social determinants affecting mental health outcomes in distance learners, aiming to uncover critical findings that might guide the formulation of tailored support services suited to the individual needs of this cohort (Gamage & Herath, 2021; Mohan, 2023). Furthermore, gaining an understanding of students' preferences regarding various counseling methodologies, whether they entail face-to-face engagements or digital support options, will enable STOU to modify its services to more effectively address the specific requirements of its student body. This initiative primarily focuses on boosting the wellness and educational achievements of learners engaged

in distance education by applying tailored support approaches and solutions to their problems.

Method

Study Design

This study employed a cross-sectional survey design to examine the mental health challenges and counseling needs of students enrolled in distance learning programs at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU). The research aimed to identify predictors of mental health outcomes and analyze students' preferences for counseling services.

Participants

The study included 442 students, comprising 79.2% undergraduate and 20.8% graduate students (19.2% master's and 1.6% doctoral). Participants were recruited using Taro Yamane's formula with a 95% confidence level, with an additional 20% to account for possible non-responses. Inclusion criteria required participants to be active students at STOU, aged 18 or older, and enrolled for at least two semesters.

Data Collection

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire distributed online through LINE, email, and QR codes. The questionnaire consisted of three main sections:
1. **Demographic Data**: Information on age, gender, marital status, education level, study duration, and income.
2. **Mental Health Factors**
    Psychological Factors: Stress levels were measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with coping mechanisms assessed by examining students' strategies for managing academic and personal challenges.
    Biological Factors: Sleep quality was evaluated through questions on sleep disturbances and restfulness, while physical health was assessed via self-reported general health and chronic conditions.
    Social Factors: Family support was measured by the quality and frequency of family interactions, and financial stability was evaluated through students' perceived ability to meet educational and living expenses.
3. **Counseling Needs and Preferences**: Items explored perceptions of counseling importance, demand levels, and preferences for service delivery modalities, timing, and formats.

Instrument Validation

The research instruments were adapted from validated sources, such as the Thai Mental Health Indicator (TMHI-55), and tailored for the context of STOU students. All items were reviewed by a panel of three experts in health sciences and psychology to ensure content validity. The experts assessed the instruments for clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research objectives. Necessary modifications, such as rephrasing ambiguous items and ensuring cultural appropriateness, were made based on their feedback.

To test reliability, the revised instruments were pilot tested with a diverse group of 30 STOU students. The pilot study confirmed internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values exceeding 0.85 for all subscales. Additional feedback from pilot participants informed further refinements to simplify complex questions and improve the overall clarity and usability of the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics, including means, standard deviations, frequencies, and percentages, were calculated for demographic characteristics and counseling preferences. Stepwise multiple regression analysis was conducted to identify significant predictors of mental health outcomes, with R^2, adjusted R^2, and standardized beta coefficients reported to evaluate the explanatory power of the model. All statistical analyses were performed using SPSS version 27, with significance levels set at $p < 0.05$.

Results

Participant Demographics

The study surveyed 442 distance learners at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), including undergraduate (65.4%) and graduate students (34.6%). Most participants were female (61.8%), with an average age of 36.12 years (SD = 9.358).

Table 1
Participant Demographics

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	149	33.7
Female	273	61.8
LGBTQ+/Prefer not to disclose	20	4.5
Age Group		
< 20 years	5	1.1
21-30 years	133	30.1
31-40 years	170	38.5
41-50 years	101	22.9
51-60 years	28	6.3
> 60 years	5	1.1
Min: 19, Max: 65, Mean: 36.12, SD: 9.358		
Marital Status		
Single	245	55.4
Married	168	38
Widowed/Divorced/Separated	29	6.6
Education Level		
Bachelor's	350	79.2
Master's	85	19.2
Doctoral	7	1.6

Study Duration		
< 1 year	57	12.9
1-2 years	184	41.6
3-4 years	141	31.9
> 5 years	60	13.6
Monthly Income (THB)		
< 5,000	25	5.7
5,000-10,000	49	11.1
10,001-15,000	87	19.7
15,001-20,000	67	15.2
20,001-25,000	49	11.1
25,001-30,000	42	9.5
> 30,000	123	27.8

Predictors of Mental Health Outcomes

Stepwise multiple regression analysis identified psychological, biological, and social factors as significant predictors of mental health outcomes, collectively explaining 47.3% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.473$, Adjusted $R^2 = 0.466$, SEE = 17.478, F = 65.080, $p < 0.001$).

Table 2
Regression Coefficients for Predictors of Mental Health Outcomes

Predictor Variable	Beta Coefficient (β)	p-value
Psychological Factors	0.319	< 0.001
Biological Indicators	0.239	< 0.001
Social Variables	0.283	< 0.001

Counseling Preferences and Needs

Perceived Importance of Psychological Counseling

The survey revealed that most participants recognized the importance of psychological counseling services at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU). Specifically, 55.0% rated the importance as "high," and 33.9% rated it as "very high." In contrast, 10.9% considered the importance "low," while only 0.2% saw no importance at all. These findings indicate that most distance learners acknowledge the necessity of counseling services to support their mental health and well-being.

Table 3
Importance of Psychological Counseling Services

Importance Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
None	1	0.2
Low	48	10.9
High	243	55.0
Very High	150	33.9
Total	442	100.0

Demand for Counseling Services

The demand for psychological counseling services was notably high among participants. Nearly half (48.9%) expressed a "high" need, and 36.4% rated their need as "very high." A smaller proportion (13.8%) indicated a "low" need, while only 0.9% reported no demand for such services. This data highlights a substantial unmet need for psychological support tailored to the challenges faced by distance learners.

Table 4
Demand for Psychological Counseling Services

Demand Level	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
None	4	0.9
Low	61	13.8
High	216	48.9
Very High	161	36.4
Total	442	100.0

Preferred Counseling Modalities

Participants expressed clear preferences for specific types of counseling. Individual counseling was the most favored, with 49.1% rating it "high," followed by face-to-face sessions (44.8%) and online counseling without video (42.5%). Chatbot-based counseling services were the least preferred, with 20.8% of respondents indicating no preference for this modality. These findings emphasize the importance of offering personalized and flexible counseling options that align with students' preferences.

Preferred Channels and Formats

The LINE application emerged as the most preferred communication channel for counseling services, selected by 28.9% of participants. This was followed by telephone (26.2%) and face-to-face meetings (19.6%). Additionally, 43.0% of respondents preferred scheduled appointments, while 16.5% indicated a preference for walk-in services. These results underline the importance of integrating technology and scheduling flexibility into counseling delivery systems.

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the mental health challenges and counseling needs of distance learners at Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University (STOU), focusing on predictors of mental health outcomes and students' preferences for counseling services. The findings highlight key factors influencing mental health, significant unmet needs for counseling services, and actionable insights into preferred modalities, channels, and formats for psychological support.

Predictors of Mental Health Outcomes

The stepwise multiple regression analysis identified psychological, biological, and social factors as significant predictors of mental health outcomes, collectively explaining 47.3% of

the variance. Among these, psychological factors, including stress and coping mechanisms, had the strongest influence (β = 0.319, p < 0.001). These findings align with existing literature emphasizing the centrality of psychological resilience in maintaining mental health among students, especially in distance learning contexts where self-directed coping skills are critical (Mayor-Silva et al., 2021; Vizniuk & Polishchuk, 2020). The moderate contributions of biological (β = 0.239, p < 0.001) and social factors (β = 0.283, p < 0.001) underscore the importance of holistic approaches that address sleep quality, physical health, and social support networks. These results support the integration of comprehensive support systems that combine mental, physical, and social interventions to enhance mental health outcomes (Peterson, 2013).

Counseling Needs and Preferences

The study revealed a widespread recognition of the importance of psychological counseling services, with 88.9% of participants rating the importance as "high" or "very high." Similarly, nearly 85.3% expressed a "high" or "very high" demand for such services, highlighting an urgent need to address psychological challenges faced by distance learners. These findings are consistent with the unique stressors reported by distance learners, such as isolation, academic pressure, and balancing personal responsibilities (Kampfe et al., 2006). Participants' preferences for counseling modalities provide valuable insights for service design. Individual counseling (49.1%) and face-to-face sessions (44.8%) were the most preferred, indicating a strong desire for personalized interactions. However, the popularity of online counseling without video (42.5%) and digital platforms like LINE (28.9%) reflects the importance of convenience and privacy, particularly in a distance-learning environment. These findings suggest that hybrid counseling models, which combine face-to-face and digital delivery formats, could address the diverse needs and preferences of students (Conn et al., 2009; Coll & Stewart, 2002).

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for the design and implementation of counseling services at STOU and other distance-learning institutions (Hallford, 2012). The high demand for psychological counseling services, coupled with preferences for flexible formats and evening availability, calls for a restructuring of existing support systems. Incorporating digital platforms such as LINE and expanding service hours to include evenings and weekends could increase accessibility and utilization of counseling services. Moreover, integrating tailored interventions targeting the identified predictors of mental health outcomes, such as stress management programs and peer support groups could further enhance students' mental well-being.

The low preference for chatbot-based services (20.8%) highlights the need for caution in relying solely on automated solutions (Marcondes et al., 2019). While technology can enhance access, human interaction remains a critical component of effective psychological support. Institutions should consider balancing technological innovation with traditional counseling approaches to maximize engagement and effectiveness.

Conclusion

This study underscores the critical importance of addressing mental health challenges among distance learners and highlights actionable strategies for designing accessible and effective

counseling services. By focusing on predictors of mental health outcomes and aligning services with students' preferences, institutions can foster a supportive environment that promotes the overall well-being of their learners.

Strengths, Limitations, and Future Research

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the mental health challenges and counseling needs of distance learners, offering practical recommendations for service improvement. However, it is not without limitations. The cross-sectional design limits the ability to establish causal relationships between predictors and mental health outcomes. Future research should consider longitudinal studies to explore how these predictors evolve over time. Additionally, while this study focused on distance learners, expanding the sample to include staff and faculty could provide a broader understanding of mental health needs within the university community.

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Family and Community Factors on Social Inclusion of Children With Intellectual Disability: A Study in South Jakarta

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Abstract

Social inclusion is an important principle that means all human beings are entitled to participate in every aspect of human life. However, social inclusion of individuals with intellectual disabilities (ID) remains a significant concern in contemporary society, influenced by many factors and circumstances. This research explores the multifaceted role of family members and the wider community in shaping the social inclusion of individuals with ID. By employing a qualitative approach, the study examines the processes of perception development within families, as well as the barriers and enablers within community structures that impact social inclusion efforts. The case studies were conducted for one year in South Jakarta Indonesia, exploring 3 families with ID children. The method of data collection includes family observation, in-depth interviews of parents and community members and participant observation in community events. Key findings reveal that family resilience is critical in promoting social inclusion of its member with ID, the person with ID constrained by stigmas and limited community acceptance. The community's role, though essential for social inclusion, is frequently hindered by misconceptions about intellectual disabilities, lack of inclusive policies, and inadequate social support systems. This study underscores the need for enhanced collaboration between families, policymakers, and community organizations to create more inclusiveness.

Keywords: intellectual disability, family resilience, social inclusion, support systems

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Introduction

Intellectual disability (ID) was defined as a neurodevelopmental disorder characterized by significant limitations in intellectual functioning and adaptive behavior, affecting cognitive, social, and practical skills (American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities [AAIDD], 2010). ID is typically diagnosed before the age of 18 and influences an individual's ability to live independently and participate fully in society. This limitation is marked by a low intellectual function and some skills to live in a society, especially adaptability. Before, intellectual disability or to some extent will likely be called Intellectual Developmental Disorder (IDD) was categorized as a mental retardation, but the changes led us to dismiss the terminology, mental retardation bore a stigma and at the end impacting the individuals without reliable supports. Schalock et al., (2021) revealed 5 assumptions essential to the application of ID definition:

1. Limitations in cognitive functioning should be considered within the context of social and cultural setting and age, gender and peers.
2. Valid assessments consider cultural and linguistic diversity.
3. Within an individual, limitations often coexist with strengths.
4. An important purpose of elaborating limitations is to develop the support needed.
5. With the appropriate personalized support, we can expect the life functioning of the person with ID will improve.

It may be concluded that to comprehend individuals with intellectual disabilities, it is essential to evaluate their social and cultural context as well as familial background, while recognizing that each kid or individual possesses distinct limitations and capabilities.

This study will focus on the social aspect of the life of children with ID. ID as one of the important variants of neurodevelopmental disorders is still not researched a lot, generally the clinical assessment of the functioning of ID within life has been favorite topics. ID has tremendous consequences, from nearly normal functioning to total dependency. Despite that, the public is barely aware of what can be conducted to help ID people to be fully functioning individuals within a society.

In Indonesia, children with intellectual disabilities are recognized under the category of *penyandang disabilitas intelektual* as outlined in Law No. 8 of 2016 on Persons with Disabilities, which affirms their rights to education, healthcare, employment, and social participation (Undang-Undang (UU) No. 8 Tahun 2016 Tentang Penyandang Disabilitas, 2016). However, despite legal protections, individuals with ID continue to face significant barriers to social inclusion due to stigma, lack of access to inclusive education, and inadequate support systems (Suharto, 2020). It could be said that the infrastructures and superstructures of living in the cities in Indonesia lacks supporting facilities for ID individuals. Children with intellectual disabilities in Indonesia encounter multiple challenges, both at home and in broader society. Limited awareness about ID often results in negative societal attitudes, where children with disabilities are marginalized or seen as a burden (Kustanti et al., 2021). Additionally, access to specialized education remains uneven, with many children in rural areas having limited opportunities to attend inclusive schools (Hartanto et al., 2022). Even when educational institutions provide special education (Sekolah Luar Biasa), these schools sometimes reinforce segregation rather than promoting integration into mainstream society (Adioetomo et al., 2014).

The role of families is crucial in addressing these challenges and ensuring the well-being of children with ID. In many Indonesian households, caregiving responsibilities fall primarily on mothers, who play a significant role in their child's development and advocacy (Setiawati et al., 2021). Families with greater awareness and economic resources are more likely to access therapy, inclusive education, and community support programs. However, families with lower socioeconomic status often struggle due to financial constraints, social stigma, and a lack of government support services (Suharto, 2020). The extent of family involvement in seeking social inclusion for their child depends not only on economic factors but also on cultural beliefs. In certain communities, traditional views on disability may lead to isolation rather than empowerment (Kustanti et al., 2021).

Social inclusion refers to the process of ensuring equal participation and opportunities for all individuals, particularly those who face marginalization (United Nations, 2016). For children with intellectual disabilities, social inclusion is essential for their psychological well-being, development of life skills, and long-term independence (Simões & Santos, 2021). In the Indonesian context, efforts to promote inclusion are gradually increasing, with programs such as the Inclusive Education Policy (Kementerian Pendidikan, Kebudayaan, Riset, dan Teknologi, 2009) and community-based rehabilitation initiatives (Hartanto et al., 2022). However, challenges remain in implementation, as inclusive schools often lack adequately trained teachers and resources.

This research aims to explore the role of families as a key factor in facilitating the social inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities in Indonesia, using a case study approach. Social inclusion has been proven to be significant, basic need and important intervention for people with ID. Social inclusion contributes to the most part of mental health for children and people with ID. This condition of mental health facilitates the process of learning and cognitive development, although experts say that it is not a guarantee for the increase of IQ in their life. Within the context of social inclusion, an individual with ID will get a precious moment for exploring his or her world and learning to become part of their environment. By examining real-life experiences and strategies adopted by families, this study seeks to comprehend the process of social inclusion and factors affecting social inclusion in the Indonesian context.

Research Question

How do the factors of family affect social inclusion of Intellectual Disability children?

Literature Review

Literature review was done first for the research of Owuor et al. (2018) about assistive technology for social inclusion of ID people, Bruun et al. (2024) on resources and approaches of end-of-life care planning for people with ID, Carnemolla et al. (2021) about improving inclusion for ID people and McMaughan et al. (2024) on meaningful social inclusion and mental well-being for autistic adolescents and emerging adults. The studies reflected the lack of consistency in defining social inclusion. All articles define social inclusion as a robust construct about the efforts which have been conducted by individuals and communities to promote and encourage the inclusion of those situated on the margins, including people with disabilities. Social inclusion cannot be limited into the efforts to make the marginalized people become included in the community, social inclusion is something intertwined from interpersonal relationships, community participation and the care by community to create an

atmosphere where all community members can bring respect and well-being to the marginalized people. Moreover, people with ID value cleanliness, safety, accessible information and respect (Carnemolla et al., 2021).

In this study, family resilience was constructed as the main framework of thinking, which guided the formulation of problems, data collection and analysis. Family resilience reflects the ability of family systems to cushion stress, recover from crises, reduce dysfunction and adapt to new circumstances (Lenz, 2016). This study by Lenz (2016) leads our understanding that family resilience is more than just a "crisis bouncing back ability", but above all, the family regains its power to build a stronger tie and care for each other, as a love-oriented structure of relationships. Troy et al. (2023) came up with the refreshed views about psychological resilience, that can be applied in many contexts including family. Troy et al. (2023) integrates stress and coping with emotion regulation to explain resilience., and psychological resilience heavily relates to the affect regulation framework. This point of view is reflecting affect regulation that impacts affective experience, social processes, behaviour, physiology, cognitive effort, and engagement. Family as an important context can use psychological resilience strategies to assist the members strive for a better mental health.

Conducting an additional literature review on the studies of Hannon et al. (2023), Noroozi et al. (2024), Gao et al. (2023), and Zhang et al. (2024), it provided me with a new perspective on the research subject, particularly in comprehending the broader context of my research. Zhang et al. (2024) found that family resilience significantly mediates the impact of patient coping on caregiver burden and family resilience as a buffer in the stress process model. Noroozi et al. (2024) found that within a family with down syndrome child, the families actively seek support and information, emphasizing building social interaction skills for the child. Parents give endless support to children with down syndrome to be able to make friends and play with other children. Meanwhile, Gao et al. (2023) discussed family resilience among Chinese families who has ID children. Gao et al. (2023) found that family resilience was originated from value-based system on a sense of responsibility and the application internal and external family resources and of course the influence of China's long-standing collectivists culture. Hannon et al. (2023) found that resilience – including family resilience – is influenced by multilevel and multisystemic processes. And women as participants of Hannon's research prefers the words "empowering" than "coping" to describe resilience, the participants also endorsed the process of resilience to be an enhancement of mental health.

Synthesizing the literatures review, all studies used family resilience as a central concept. Family resilience within this study refers to the dimensions of emotional and psychosocial adjustment, coping and support strategies, cultural and structural context, and information and resource gap. First, be it down syndrome or ASD, we must look deeper into emotional challenges of the individuals and how the caregivers respond and accepting these everyday problems. Second, families have their own belief systems, flexibility and how do they search for community supports. Third, cultural values and social system where people live affecting how the families can encourage their member with limitations to go on with social inclusion. And last, when the support system from is not reliable, the families will become experts by being self-taught.

This research employed a qualitative case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the social inclusion experiences of children with intellectual disabilities within the specific context of selected schools in Jakarta. A case study approach is particularly well-suited for exploring complex social phenomena within their real-world settings (Yin, 2018), allowing

for a rich and nuanced exploration of the perspectives and experiences of the parents involved. Each case functions as a lens for comprehending how a family with ID child navigates their life with a special member, meanwhile motivating this ID child to be able to adapt to social situations. Unlike quantitative approaches that focus on generalizability across a large population, the strength of a case study lies in its capacity to provide detailed and contextualized insights into a particular phenomenon (Stake, 1995). In this study, each participating family and their child's school environment constituted a "case," allowing for an examination of the unique factors and interactions that shape social inclusion within these specific contexts. The bounded nature of these cases – the specific families and their respective school communities in Jakarta – enabled a focused and intensive investigation of the research questions.

The participants in this study were 3 parents of children with intellectual disabilities attending *Tunagrahita* or Type C Special School for ID children in Jakarta. Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, a strategy commonly used in qualitative research to select information-rich cases relevant to the research question (Patton, 2015). Initial contact was made with the principals and relevant staff of several schools in Jakarta that were known to have programs supporting the inclusion of children with intellectual disabilities. Following school approval, information about the study was disseminated to potentially eligible parents through letters and/or informational meetings organized by the school. Interested parents were invited to contact the researcher directly to express their willingness to participate. Prior to their involvement, each participant was provided with a detailed information sheet outlining the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks and benefits, and their rights as participants (including the right to withdraw at any time). Written informed consent was obtained from each parent before the commencement of any data collection activities.

Data for this study were collected primarily through in-depth semi-structured interviews and non-participant observations. These methods were chosen to provide rich, qualitative data on parents' perspectives and experiences of their children's social inclusion. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with each participating parent. An interview guide was developed based on a review of relevant literature and the study's research questions. The guide included open-ended questions designed to explore parents' understanding of social inclusion, their experiences with their child's social interactions at school and in the community, perceived facilitators and barriers to inclusion, the role of support systems, and their hopes and concerns for their child's social future. In addition to the interviews, non-participant observations were conducted in the family's home. The purpose of these observations was to gain a first-hand understanding of the social interactions and environments experienced by the children, as perceived by the researcher. During observations, the researcher adopted a non-intrusive role, observing and documenting interactions, social dynamics, and the overall atmosphere related to inclusion.

The data collected through in-depth interviews and field notes from observations and were analysed using thematic analysis. This method is a widely used in qualitative approach for identifying, organizing, and reporting patterns (themes) within a dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The goal of thematic analysis in this study was to systematically identify the key themes that emerged from the parents' accounts and the observational data regarding the social inclusion of their children with intellectual disabilities. I started from familiarization of data, generating codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, naming and refining themes. Within the processes I organized once a member-check event and expert judgement, to get a more reliable data and information about the cases.

Results

The study cases in this research comprise three families with children who have intellectual disabilities; these families have been engaged in advocating for social inclusion for these children. Below is the table of family data of cases who have been interviewed and observed:

Table 1
The Family Data

Name and location family's home	ID children's data	Additional data
1. Family A lives in South Jakarta – Indonesia. The distance of home and school around 2 KM 2. Mother is 42 years old and Father 45 years old; both are bachelor's degree graduated 3. The family has 3 children and the ID one is the youngest 4. The Father works at a business company and the mother is a fully housewife 5. At home lives the grandmother from Father's side	1. The ID child (A) is a female, 13 years old and an active student at a special school around the family's home 2. She cannot read, write and calculate and barely speak 3. The parents send her to "Taman Pendidikan Al Quran" or school for Quran recital	1. From the school I had information that this ID child is very eager to go to school and looks enjoying every activity 2. The teacher informed me that this student is highly obedient and endeavours to complete tasks calmly. 3. She loves to play within the tent in the class and playing with dolls or books
1. Family B lives in South Jakarta – Indonesia. The distance of home and school around 5 KM 2. Mother is 41 years old and Father 41 years old; both are bachelor's degree graduated 3. The family has 2 children and the ID one is the youngest 4. The Father is the teacher, and the mother is a fully housewife 5. Only this nuclear family lives I the house	1. The ID child (B) is a female, 13 years old and an active student at a special school around the family's home 2. The mother motivates and facilitates this ID kid to experience many activities	1. B is a shy kid and very calm, she becomes calmer around her teacher 2. She cannot stare directly to the eyes and tend to avoid any contact with individuals that she never closes in contact 3. Her brother is the one who helps her a lot for understanding the world around her, besides the mother, her father looks in full effort to be a friend for B

1. Family C lives in a lavish neighbourhood in southern Jakarta. This family is an upper middle class, the father works in a multinational company and the mother stays at home as a full housewife 2. The mother takes her ID kid seriously, she even learnt in Singapore for learning about ID 3. The family has 3 kids and the ID one is the eldest 4. They live a big house with 2 maids	1. The ID child C, a 15-year-old female, is unable to read, write, or perform calculations; nonetheless, she can speak, however her speech is unclear and difficult to comprehend. 2. She can draw good, but it is depending on her mood and health 3. The parents pay therapist very well and help C to get back from backwardness, every time the situation happens	1. In the last 5 years ago, the parents did not send her to schools based on some reasons 2. C plays and stays at home with her siblings after they come from school

Case A

Social inclusion has been based primarily on the awareness of parents that their ID child deserves a chance to understand human interaction. Although it is always felt as something frightening, A is always motivated to play with her community kids. Yes, it was not always smooth and the community kids welcome A, but the parents let their kid to be able to survive the pressure of interaction.

"I know it was unpleasant sometimes, but the interaction basically impacted good on my kid. ID child does not mean a burden and always stay in the dark." (Mother of A, at home)

"Sometimes this neighbourhood kids playfully treat my daughter as something to laugh at, I cried and A run with fear, I am the one who is mad them." (Mother of A, at school)

"I still hope there will good change with my daughter, I always have this optimistic view." (Father of A, at home)

Case B

For the parents, social inclusion should be referred to a process of learning from the family, the community and school. It will never be easy, the kids with ID according to mother of B, needs a very supportive community. Like she said:

"How do I have to say this, it is a process to understand that B is a special child, the processes are long, and the neighbour or extended family can see by themselves, this kid needs to be treated differently." (Mother of B, at home)

"I always ask her sibling to involve in the process of learning, for example B wants to hold a pencil for drawing, her brother will help and patiently show the way. Moreover, with inclusion, let all the families learn together, it is good for B." (Mother of B, at school)

The processes of social inclusion as taught family some values, aligned with the families' values, that ID child is a precious member of the community. The Father said:

"I am looking for some ways of getting to know ID well, so I can help her optimally, especially, to be able to make a human contact." (Father of B, at home)

Case C

Social inclusion has been applied by the parents ever since C was a toddler. C was sent for a kindergarten, the school that accepted all types of kids' intelligence. At first, C was diagnosed with speech delay, but as the times continues with many progresses in Indonesia about intellectual disability, the parents found some medical doctor who can help treating C as an ID kid. But when the family moved to other city in Indonesia, C was having problems.

"I don't know what happened, when we move to other city, C went back to the situation when she didn't have the ability to identify numbers and letters. At that time we met a doctor that gave us for the first time of this term ID" (Mother of C, at home)

"We slowly know that C is an ID kid, she cannot communicate and adapt to any situation, except home and her closest family." (Mother of C, at home)

"What we, as the parents, dream about is C able to communicate properly and interact with other kids." (Mother of C, at home)

"We aspire for our child to exhibit greater composure in social situations and to independently manage her hygiene and other responsibilities." (Mother of C, at home)

Discussion

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of families raising children with intellectual disabilities (ID) in Jakarta, with a focus on how social inclusion is perceived and facilitated in the school and community contexts. Using a qualitative case study approach, the study revealed both shared and unique challenges across three families, highlighting the central role of family resilience in navigating social inclusion. The findings align with existing literature while also offering nuanced insights into the Indonesian context.

Reconceptualizing Social Inclusion: Beyond Participation

The present study affirms the assertion by Carnemolla et al. (2021) and McMaughan et al. (2024) that social inclusion is not merely about physical presence or access to shared spaces but involves deeper dimensions of belonging, interpersonal respect, and emotional safety. Parents in this study emphasized the emotional costs and triumphs embedded in their children's inclusion, echoing the multidimensional nature of inclusion as described in the literature. For instance, Family A's efforts to motivate their daughter to interact with neighbourhood children—even when such interactions were met with rejection—demonstrates that inclusion is a dynamic and emotionally charged process, not a static outcome. The study indicates that social inclusion at the basic platform requires family resilience, as the source of energy, because social inclusion involves the awareness of ID kids' surroundings, to accept them with their limitations.

Family Resilience as a Mediating Mechanism

A central finding is the way family resilience mediates the experience of social inclusion, consistent with the frameworks presented by Lenz (2016), Troy et al. (2023), and Zhang et al. (2024). Families in this study exhibited various resilience strategies including emotional regulation, active caregiving, community engagement, and adaptive learning. For example, Family B's approach—mobilizing both the sibling and parents in scaffolding the child's daily activities—demonstrates how resilience manifests through collective problem-solving and shared caregiving. As Zhang et al. (2024) suggested, such resilience helps buffer the stress of caregiving and fosters a more hopeful trajectory for both child and family. The concept of family resilience as the buffering factor for families with ID children should be explored and make a deep exploration more on the role of family resilience to enhance the position of the family in the society.

The Cultural Specificity of Resilience and Inclusion

The findings also underscore the importance of understanding resilience and inclusion within the sociocultural context. Like the work of Gao et al. (2023) who emphasized value-based family systems within a Chinese cultural framework, the Indonesian families in this study drew heavily from values of familial responsibility, religious belief, and community orientation.

Conclusion

This study explored the experiences of families in Jakarta who are raising children with intellectual disabilities, focusing particularly on their efforts to foster social inclusion within school and community settings. Through a qualitative design with case study type, the research provided rich, contextualized insights into how family resilience plays a pivotal role in navigating the challenges and complexities of social inclusion for children with ID.

The findings highlight that social inclusion is not merely about placing children with ID in mainstream environments but about cultivating meaningful interactions, emotional safety, and acceptance and how the community cope with ID children in general. Parents in all three cases demonstrated a strong sense of advocacy, patience, and resourcefulness in supporting their children's social participation. These families consistently mobilized internal strengths—such as emotional bonds and caregiving commitment—as well as external strategies, including community engagement and professional support, to enhance their children's inclusion experiences. Although the families are aware that they face crisis and pressures in everyday life, with the understanding of family resilience as a primary factor in family dynamics, social inclusion becomes a path to bind the family. Moreover, the study confirms that **family resilience**—encompassing emotional adjustment, belief systems, support-seeking behaviours, and adaptive strategies—acts as a vital buffer against the stresses associated with caregiving. Cultural values and structural factors were also found to influence how inclusion is perceived and enacted in everyday family life.

These findings offer important implications for practice and policy. I recommend schools, community organizations, and policymakers to recognize and support the central role of families in promoting inclusion. Initiatives should go beyond educational placement to ensure that community members—including educators, neighbours, and peers—are equipped to support meaningful engagement with children with intellectual disabilities.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the growing body of literature that frames social inclusion not only as a societal obligation but as a deeply relational and contextual process. It underscores the significance of family resilience as both a theoretical lens and a practical resource in efforts to support the well-being and social development of children with intellectual disabilities. Although the study has a limitation, which is it was based only on qualitative approaches, in the future I hope many researchers will come up with more research about the implication of family resilience to social inclusion of children with ID, with different research approaches and recommendations.

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Beyond Borders: Analyzing the Motivations and Life Planning of Chinese Students Studying Abroad

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Abstract

This study explores the complex motivations that drive Chinese students to pursue education abroad, focusing on the interplay between subjective experiences and broader socio-cultural, political, and economic dynamics. It examines how students seek to escape various pressures in their home environment, including familial rejection of sexual orientation, resistance to parental career expectations, strained social relationships, and other forms of social suffering. Drawing on clinical ethnography and ethnopsychiatry developed within the PASSI@Unito and PASSI@Polito projects—interdisciplinary initiatives at the University of Turin and the Polytechnic of Turin—this research situates students' migration experiences within the broader context of China–Europe relations. By analyzing the multiple dimensions of educational migration, the research reveals how studying abroad becomes a strategy for negotiating subjective crises and envisioning alternative life trajectories. Ultimately, the findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how micro-level struggles are shaped by macro-level forces, offering insights into how universities can better support international students in building self-confidence, fostering meaningful social connections, and clarifying their future aspirations.

Keywords: student migration, ethnopsychiatry, Chinese students, Italy

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Introduction

Chinese student migration for higher education has significantly increased over the past two decades. In Italy, their numbers grew from 1,136 in 2008 to nearly 8,000 by 2019/2020 (Huang, 2022). This reflects China's role as a major source of international students and Italy's growing appeal as a destination, prompting deeper exploration of students' motivations and how study abroad shapes their futures.

Research in international education and youth studies highlights how these decisions stem from both personal and structural factors—ranging from identity struggles and family expectations to China's educational pressures and the appeal of freedom abroad. Studying overseas is often more than academic; it is a symbolic and existential step, tied to aspirations of self-realization, cultural exploration, and better career prospects (Huang, 2022; Jiao, 2025). It may also mark a transformative phase where new identities and life plans emerge, especially from anthropological and clinical perspectives.

This article explores why Chinese students choose to study abroad, focusing on Italy, and how they plan their lives during and after. Drawing on qualitative data from the PASSI@UniTo and PASSI@PoliTo projects, we present five case narratives based on interviews and clinical ethnography. These stories highlight diverse motivations, from personal issues like sexuality or anxiety to broader socio-political constraints in China and the desire for freedom in Europe. We also examine how study abroad reshapes students' goals, identities, and choices about the future.

Our analysis combines ethnopsychiatry (Beneduce, 2007; Zempléni, 1985) and clinical ethnography (Kleinman, 1995; Taliani, 2011) to contextualize students' psychological experiences, along with an intersectionality lens (Collins & Bilge, 2016) to explore how gender, sexuality, class, and nationality intersect in shaping their paths. For instance, being an LGBTQIA+ student or a young Chinese woman abroad adds unique dimensions to the study experience and adaptation process.

This study is guided by several key research questions: What personal motivations and structural conditions drive Chinese students to pursue education abroad? In what ways does the experience of studying abroad function as a means for reimagining alternative life trajectories? How do students construct symbolic meaning around their mobility, and how do they envision their futures in light of these experiences? Additionally, we draw on insights from the PASSI intercultural mediation team to examine the role of cultural mediation in student support. We critically reflect on the risks of institutional misrecognition and conclude with recommendations aimed at enhancing university support structures for international students.

Literature Review

Chinese Student Mobility: Macro-Level Dynamics

Chinese students lead global outbound mobility, driven by macro-level forces like globalization, neoliberalism, and media exposure to cosmopolitan ideals (Brooks & Waters, 2011; Li & Bray, 2007). The world beyond China is often imagined as more open and liberating—fueling students' aspirations for self-realization abroad (Cheng & Berman, 2012).

Domestically, China's economic growth and supportive policies (e.g., one-child policy, scholarships) have expanded access to overseas study (Austin & Shen, 2016). Simultaneously, the pressure-filled Gaokao system (the "National College Entrance Examination") and stigma tied to academic failure push students to seek alternatives. Foreign education offers a socially acceptable "second chance" and a break from rigid pedagogy and exam-focused learning, criticized for stifling creativity and self-expression (Bodycott, 2009).

Western institutions, by contrast, promise academic freedom and cultural diversity. Italy, in particular, is seen as a space for autonomy and exploration. Still, macro conditions intersect with family expectations shaped by Confucian norms. Parents often influence study decisions, viewing overseas education as a route to family honor and upward mobility (Bodycott, 2009). Gender norms also shape choices—women, for instance, may face pressure to balance study abroad with marriage expectations (Martin, 2022).

Micro-Level Motivations and Subjective Factors

On a subjective level, students seek academic and career advancement, improved language skills, and cultural exposure (Huang, 2022). Many desires growth through global experience, describing study abroad as a path to "become stronger" or live more freely.

Beyond education, sensitive motivations often play a role. The exploration of identity representations is a key factor, particularly for LGBTQIA+ students who may feel unsafe or repressed in China. Study abroad can offer a safer space to live authentically (Cui & Song, 2024), though some still face challenges related to race or intersectional discrimination.

Mental health concerns also emerge. Students burdened by academic pressure or social anxiety may view overseas study as an escape and a chance for reinvention. Interviewees described feeling "invisible" at home but hopeful that life abroad would allow them to flourish socially.

Social background and identity representations intersect with motivation. Students from rural or modest backgrounds may be driven by economic need, while urban elites pursue cosmopolitan goals. Gender adds another layer—women may use the opportunity to gain independence, while men may feel pressured to attain credentials for social status.

Life Planning and the Study-Abroad Experience

Studying abroad frequently marks a pivotal turning point in the lives of Chinese students, shaping their life trajectories in ways that extend well beyond academic achievement. The transition to international study often accelerates personal growth by fostering early independence in managing finances, housing, and self-care responsibilities, which in turn cultivates resilience and maturity (Wang & Collins, 2020). For many, this period serves as a temporary departure from socially prescribed timelines in China—such as early career entry or marriage—offering a space for self-discovery, reflection, and future-oriented planning (Zhang et al., 2024).

However, this liminal phase may also delay traditional markers of adulthood, particularly for female students who view studying abroad as a means of resisting gendered expectations around marriage and caregiving (Martin, 2022). These students often find themselves negotiating new freedoms and constraints simultaneously, navigating between evolving global norms and enduring Confucian values of filial piety, gender roles, and family loyalty.

Upon returning home, some students experience reverse culture shock and alienation, as reintegration into familiar structures can feel constraining after the relative autonomy of life abroad (Zhang & Goodson, 2011). Others, influenced by their transformative experiences, revise their original aspirations entirely—choosing to pursue employment, postgraduate studies, or permanent residence abroad.

Ultimately, the decision to study abroad reflects a dynamic interplay of constraint and aspiration, situated within complex intersections of gender, class, national identity, and global belonging. The present study contributes to this growing body of literature by offering person-centered, narrative accounts of Chinese students in Italy, analyzed through ethnopsychiatric and intersectional lenses. This approach underscores how the experience of migration shapes not only educational outcomes but also broader imaginaries of who students can become and how they define success.

Methodology

Research Context and Approach

This research draws from the PASSI@UniTo and PASSI@PoliTo projects. **Passi@Unito** was launched at the University of Turin in the 2018, as an initiative of the Internationalization Office and Professor Simona Taliani. It is currently coordinated by Professor Beneduce within CRETAM, the Research Center for Ethnopsychiatry and Anthropology of Migration, part of the Department of Cultures, Politics and Society at the University of Turin. In May 2022, the project was extended to the Polytechnic University of Turin, within the Interuniversity Department of Regional and Urban Studies and Planning (DIST), under the scientific direction of Dr. Silvia Aru and as part of the **Life@Polito** initiatives, coordinated by Professor Claudia De Giorgi. The projects aim to support international students through counseling and cultural mediation by addressing emotional, psychological, and academic challenges. The interdisciplinary team used an ethnopsychiatric and clinical ethnographic approach, combining therapeutic care with qualitative inquiry.

In this contribution we employed a narrative, person-centered methodology, focusing on five in-depth case studies of Chinese students who engaged with PASSI services between 2020–2024. These students were in undergraduate or graduate programs and were selected through maximum variation sampling (Patton, 2002) to capture a range of motivations and experiences. Each participant gave informed consent for the use of anonymized data.

Data Collection

Data were gathered via semi-structured interviews lasting one to two hours, often in Mandarin with bilingual researchers or interpreters. Conversations focused on students' backgrounds, motivations, adaptation challenges, identity changes, and future goals. Guided by clinical ethnography principles, we paid attention to narrative content and emotional tone, often entering intimate territory such as family conflict or mental health. COVID-19 emerged as a contextual factor in many narratives, especially around isolation and disrupted plans, though it was not the study's main focus.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and translated verbatim. We used ethnographic methods, and Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis that developed codes for recurring themes (e.g., family pressure, identity exploration, mental health). Themes were then organized around our main research questions: personal motivations, structural influences, future planning, and symbolic meanings of mobility.

We also applied intersectionality to examine how gender, class, and geography influenced each story—for instance, how a gay student from a rural area experienced mobility differently than an urban female peer. Cultural idioms and expressions were interpreted within their sociocultural context.

To ensure analytical rigor, all the authors (one trained in anthropology, one in clinical psychology and one in cross-culture studies) reviewed and discussed the data, with additional input from the PASSI team. This collaborative approach ensured cultural and psychological depth while maintaining ethical sensitivity.

Theoretical Framework Integration

This study adopts a methodological framework grounded in clinical ethnography (Kleinman, 2020), which facilitates an understanding of how personal experiences acquire meaning within specific cultural and social contexts. In parallel, we draw on the principles of ethnopsychiatry to examine how experiences of migration, identity conflict, and socio-cultural dislocation intersect with students' emotional well-being (Beneduce & Martelli, 2005). To further deepen our analysis, we employ an intersectional lens (Collins & Bilge, 2016), which enables us to explore how overlapping dimensions of power—such as gender, nationality, class, and sexuality—shape students' lived experiences both in Italy and in their country of origin.

To ensure ethical rigor and participant agency, all names and identifying information were anonymized. Participants were invited to review their narrative summaries and provided informed consent for the inclusion of their stories. Revisions were made where necessary to ensure both factual accuracy and participants' emotional comfort.

Brief Findings

Micro-Level Motivations: Personal Narratives

Yu – "To Live My Dream and Prove Myself"

Yu, from a northern Chinese city, faced academic disappointment after missing admission to a top Chinese university. Studying in Italy allowed him to redeem himself in the eyes of his ambitious family and pursue his passion for car design. His story illustrates study abroad as a second chance for self-actualization and regaining self-worth.

Shaoran – "Searching for Acceptance and Freedom"

A closeted gay man from Hunan, Shaoran saw studying abroad as a way to escape societal and familial rejection. Italy symbolized a freer environment to explore his identity. While he gained

new freedoms, he also encountered racism and isolation, reflecting the complex realities of intersectional identity abroad.

Zhang – "Emerging From the Shell"

Zhang, a shy only child from Beijing, sought personal growth and independence. Motivated by a desire to overcome social anxiety, she embraced the challenges of studying in Italy. Despite initial struggles and lockdown isolation, she found confidence and plans to continue her education and career abroad.

Zhao – "Opportunity and Return"

Zhao, a computer engineering student, was pushed by his family to seek a prestigious foreign degree. Though initially motivated by ambition and academic freedom, his priorities remain family and pandemic.

Wang – "Opportunity and Escape"

Wang, by contrast, used study abroad to delay traditional expectations of marriage and conformity. Italy provided her with independence and space to redefine her path.

Thematic Synthesis

Personal Growth and Freedom: All students linked study abroad to self-development. Whether to heal, escape, or challenge themselves, each saw the experience as a catalyst for transformation. This echoes broader trends of individualization in China and how global education markets "becoming a better self."

Escape from Constraints: Students like Shaoran and Wang viewed Italy as an escape from societal or familial restrictions. Their motivations were shaped by China's cultural pressures, and Europe represented a temporary or long-term reprieve from these expectations.

Family Pressure and Support: Family was a major influence across cases. Yu and Zhao were driven by a desire to meet family expectations; Wang and Shaoran used the opportunity to subtly resist them. The interplay of filial piety and independence shaped their decisions and future planning.

Challenges and Resources: All students encountered challenges—pandemic disruptions, racism, loneliness, academic adjustment—which produced forms of suffering and pushed them asking for psychological counselling. Through it, they gave new meanings to their experiences and shaped in a new way their goals: good interactions within the social context often led to extended mobility, while persistent struggle prompted a return home.

Transforming Life Planning: Study abroad shaped future plans significantly. Students reimagined their paths—some planning to stay abroad for further study or work, others choosing to return with new insights. Their narratives show study abroad as a turning point in defining adulthood and autonomy.

Discussion

Educational Migration as a Hybrid Process

Chinese student migration is more than a study choice—it blends subjective, psychological, and socio-political dimensions. From a subjective point of view, it offers a path to idenegotiate their identity representations and their mental well-being. Socio-politically, students participate in global flows and act as possible bridges to connect different socio-cultural contexts. We adopt an ethnopsychiatric approach in clinical practice, which involves situating students' discomfort, symptoms and experiences within broader contexts; tracing their history, relationships, and the multiple reasons behind their mobility; finding out the roots of their difficulties and avoiding cultural reductionism (simplification, stereotyping, generalization). It also means to question the symbolic reference systems through which students give meanings to their experiences as well as to understand their relationship to both their socio-cultural system of origin and the new socio-cultural environment. The goal is to conceive of care not only as support for the individual, but also care for the social context.

Shaoran and Zhang used mobility to address the subjective conflicts, but their challenges didn't disappear abroad. Migration doesn't erase distress but may create space to face it or seek help, especially when supported by culturally sensitive services like PASSI counseling.

Intersectionality shows how student experiences differ based on class, gender, discipline, or sexuality. Universities must avoid treating "Chinese students" as a single group. Specific attentions to these topics are essential in order to build safe spaces, such as LGBTQIA+ or female networks.

These journeys also mirror global trends. Dissatisfaction with China's academic rigidity and a desire for freedom motivate students, while Europe's open education policies attract them. Italy, through English-language programs, is boosting its global appeal, and projects like PASSI are therefore more necessary. Positive student experiences, like Yu's or Zhang's, enhance institutional reputation abroad.

The Role of Cultural Mediation in Student Support

The multilingual team at PASSI played a critical role in helping Chinese students navigate the complexities of Italian academic and cultural systems, highlighting the essential function of cultural mediation. In its absence, institutional support structures risk misrecognizing students' actual needs—interpreting silence as disengagement, or overlooking less visible stressors such as homesickness, racial discrimination, or anxiety related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Such misrecognition often arises when institutions adopt a monolithic view of Chinese students or misinterpret culturally embedded behaviors. For instance, a student's reluctance to attend office hours may stem from unfamiliarity with academic norms rather than a lack of interest or motivation. Cultural mediators served as crucial intermediaries, bridging these interpretive gaps and fostering communication between students and university staff. Their presence not only enabled more accurate assessments of student well-being but also ensured that students felt acknowledged, understood, and supported within the host environment.

Implications and Recommendations

Tailored Orientation and Ongoing Support: Universities should implement structured orientation programs that extend beyond the initial arrival period. These programs should provide clear guidance on academic expectations and offer continued support tailored to evolving student needs, such as stress management, intercultural adjustment, and career development.

Culturally Competent Counseling Services: Counseling services must be staffed by professionals who are either multilingual or have undergone training in cultural competence. Mental health support should be framed in culturally sensitive and accessible terms to reduce stigma and encourage utilization among students from diverse backgrounds.

Intercultural Training for Faculty and Staff: Faculty and administrative staff should receive training in socio-cultural diversity, including differences in communication styles, classroom behavior, and cultural norms. Such training should also address the political and economic realities affecting students' home countries, enabling educators to respond with greater awareness, empathy, and pedagogical flexibility.

Enhancing Belonging and Peer Engagement: Institutions should actively support Chinese student associations and organize intercultural events that foster inclusive participation. Encouraging peer-to-peer interaction—both within and beyond the classroom—can significantly reduce feelings of isolation and enhance students' academic and social engagement.

Recognizing and Valuing International Student Contributions: The linguistic, academic, and cultural contributions of Chinese students should be acknowledged and integrated into university life. Opportunities for involvement in research projects, peer mentoring, and academic seminars can enhance their sense of belonging and agency. Engaging alumni networks can also facilitate mentorship and support recruitment efforts.

Adopting an Intersectional and Differentiated Approach: Universities must move beyond one-size-fits-all programming and adopt an intersectional lens that recognizes the specific needs of sub-groups, such as women, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and non-native English speakers. Even modest structural changes—such as flexible curricula, tailored visa support, or alternative assessment methods—can significantly improve student outcomes and well-being.

Reflections on Student Migration and Life Trajectories

Student migration is more than an academic event—it's a transformative life phase marked by growth, exploration of different identity representations, and knowledge of new socio-cultural contexts. For many Chinese students, it represents a time of accelerated learning beyond textbooks: building life skills, understanding cross-cultural dynamics, and developing self-awareness.

Sociologically, the experience of studying abroad reflects what Farrugia (2016) identifies as the "mobility imperative"—a growing expectation for young people to pursue transnational mobility as a marker of personal development and social distinction. For many Chinese students, this imperative aligns with aspirations for global exposure, self-actualization, and future competitiveness. However, these ambitions often collide with deeply rooted Confucian

values emphasizing academic achievement, filial duty, and social conformity. As students attempt to reconcile these competing logics, they may encounter both a sense of empowerment and profound ambivalence, navigating complex tensions between global ideals of autonomy and culturally embedded expectations at home.

The concept of liminality offers a valuable lens for understanding the transitional experiences of international students. In this in-between phase, they are temporarily released from the normative timelines and roles prescribed by their home cultures, which allows space for experimentation with identity, lifestyle, and relationships. However, this sense of freedom is frequently accompanied by emotional dislocation and uncertainty. As Korwin-Kowalewska (2020) observes, the liminal space can foster both intercultural learning and psychological vulnerability. For Chinese students studying abroad, this ambiguity can produce divergent outcomes—some embrace the opportunity to reinvent themselves, while others, like Zhao, feel destabilized and retreat toward familiar cultural frameworks. As Gu et al. (2010) explain, "the intercultural experience is not only cognitive but deeply emotional and existential" (p. 13). The capacity to navigate this liminal phase is therefore shaped not only by individual coping strategies but also by the availability of institutional support and meaningful social connections.

Importantly, the effects of studying abroad endure long after graduation. Life planning changes —students may return home, stay abroad, or migrate again. Regardless of trajectory, they may gain lasting skills: assertiveness, adaptability, global outlook. Some of these students become cultural brokers who move fluidly between worlds, influencing not just their careers but broader transnational networks.

Studying abroad also carries symbolic weight—it embodies hope. Students invest in the belief that life abroad will offer freedom, success, or transformation. Many found what they sought, even if in surprising ways: Yu gained confidence, Shaoran found love, Zhang found her voice, Wang found independence, and Zhao found clarity.

Existentially, going abroad raises deep questions: "Who am I?" "Who can I become?" Students learn to embrace multiple, intersecting identity representations—Chinese, global citizen, expat, LGBTQIA+—developing what might be called intersectional resilience. Navigating overlapping cultural, social, and subjective spheres, they become more aware of themselves and the world, embodying the core themes of anthropology and psychology.

Conclusion

Chinese students studying abroad engage in journeys that blend personal subjective aspiration, cultural identity, and structural forces. This study, through five case narratives in Italy, revealed how micro-level motivations—like escaping constraints or pursuing self-growth—are deeply shaped by macro-level factors such as China's education system, social expectations, and global opportunities. These students' decisions carry symbolic meaning, serving as acts of subjectivation and hope.

Using an interdisciplinary lens—combining anthropology and clinical psychology, we highlighted the importance of viewing students not as data points, but as individuals navigating emotional, socio-cultural, and institutional complexities. Concepts like ethnopsychiatry and intersectionality illuminated silent struggles and transformative experiences. For example, Shaoran's case showed how cultural stigma can become psychological distress and how migration, while a coping strategy, requires support in the host context to truly be healing.

Our findings emphasize the need for culturally responsive support. Chinese students must be seen in their dual reality—straddling home culture and host society. When institutions offer tailored counseling, academic assistance, and inclusive community-building, students thrive. But failure to recognize their lived complexity risks alienation. Conversely, genuine recognition leads to personal and institutional enrichment.

Projects like PASSI show how cultural mediation and interdisciplinary expertise can bridge communication gaps and prevent or help managing crises. Investing in international student well-being is also an investment in future global relationships. Today's student is tomorrow's cross-cultural professional whose experience shapes long-term engagement with the host country.

This study contributes to broader understandings of youth transitions and educational mobility. It supports the idea that studying abroad is both a rite of passage and a zone of suspension—offering growth through disruption, and a temporary space to reimagine adulthood. These dual functions make the experience both profound and at times disorienting.

The phrase "Beyond Borders" encapsulates more than geography. Students transcended socio-cultural norms, personal limitations, and institutional frameworks. Their journeys ripple outward—impacting families, universities, and global networks. Migration for education is not just about learning in another country—it is about becoming in another country.

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AI Nudges in E-Commerce: How Conversational Interfaces Shape Consumer Behavior Through Emotionally Intelligent Design

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Abstract

This study investigates how AI-powered chatbots, calibrated to deliver behaviorally informed nudges, influence online shopping behavior in a realistic digital commerce setting. Using a randomized controlled trial (N = 220), participants were exposed to six conditions—five with chatbot variants (scarcity, social proof, personalization, dynamic pricing, neutral) and one control with no chatbot. The chatbot responses were designed using principles from behavioral economics, affective computing, and natural language processing (NLP). Behavioral outcomes were tracked, including impulsive purchases, cart value, product exploration, and satisfaction. Findings reveal that scarcity-based nudges drive the highest impulsivity, but personalization offers the most balanced outcome in terms of engagement and satisfaction. Even neutral chatbots improved over the control group, suggesting interface presence alone influences behavior. These findings raise ethical questions about transparency, consent, and persuasive design. The study contributes to emerging research on AI-mediated decision environments and offers concrete insights for responsible AI product development.

Keywords: AI nudges, behavioral economics, chatbots, e-commerce, affective computing, personalisation, ethical design

Introduction

Online retail platforms increasingly leverage artificial intelligence (AI) to shape consumer behavior through real-time personalization and nudging mechanisms. Nudging, defined as a subtle modification of the choice architecture to steer behavior without eliminating freedom of choice (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008), has evolved from static UI elements to dynamic, algorithmically optimized interfaces. While past research has validated the effectiveness of nudges like default settings or framing (Cialdini, 2001), the growing deployment of AI chatbots capable of adaptive dialogue introduces new vectors for behavioral influence. Recent literature in affective computing and trust in AI suggests that emotionally intelligent machines are often perceived as authoritative and credible (Picard, 1997; Sundar, 2020). In parallel, concerns have arisen over the ethical boundaries of such nudging—especially when embedded into black-box algorithms (Susser et al., 2019). Despite rapid commercial adoption of chat-based commerce, few empirical studies have isolated how specific AI-driven nudges affect consumer decision-making and experience in a real-time shopping scenario. This study addresses that gap by combining behavioral science theory, chatbot UX design, and a controlled experiment to examine the effect of five common nudge types—scarcity, social proof, personalization, dynamic pricing, and neutrality—on consumer outcomes such as impulsive purchase rate, product exploration, and satisfaction. We also evaluate individual differences in response based on impulsivity, decision confidence, and familiarity with AI technologies.

Literature Review

Nudging refers to subtle design interventions that guide decision-making without restricting choice (Thaler & Sunstein, 2008). Classic behavioral economics has identified mechanisms like scarcity, social proof, and personalization as powerful levers of influence (Cialdini, 2001; Tversky & Kahneman, 1974). In digital contexts, these nudges are embedded into interfaces through urgency prompts, peer behavior cues, and dynamic pricing, often producing measurable effects on engagement and conversion (Mertens et al., 2022). With the rise of conversational AI, nudges are now delivered via real-time dialogue. Chatbots can simulate personalization, express emotional tone, and mirror human interaction—enhancing trust and persuasive power (Sundar, 2020; Tam & Ho, 2006). Affective computing enables emotionally calibrated phrasing (Picard, 1997), and NLP tools detect sentiment for adaptive messaging (Mohammad & Turney, 2013). Yet, these capabilities raise ethical concerns around autonomy, manipulation, and opacity (Yeung, 2017). While previous research has addressed static UI nudges, the behavioral effects of emotionally intelligent chatbot nudges remain underexplored. Few studies compare nudge types within chatbot contexts, or evaluate outcomes like impulsive buying and user satisfaction in real-time shopping environments. Additionally, the role of individual traits—such as impulsivity or AI familiarity—in moderating these effects is rarely investigated. This study addresses that gap by empirically testing how five AI-delivered nudge types influence behavior, experience, and ethical perception in a simulated e-commerce platform—advancing both design practice and behavioral theory in human-AI interaction.

Methodology

We designed a randomized controlled trial to evaluate the behavioral effects of AI-powered chatbots delivering context-sensitive nudges during online shopping. We recruited 220 participants through Prolific Academic, balanced by age and gender, all with prior online shopping experience. Before assignment, we collected baseline measures on participants' trait

impulsivity (using the BIS-15 scale), confidence in decision-making, online purchase frequency, and familiarity with AI systems, including chatbots and large language models.

Participants were randomly assigned to one of six experimental conditions: five chatbot variants or a control group with no chatbot. Each chatbot reflected a distinct nudge condition—scarcity, social proof, personalization, or dynamic pricing—rooted in behavioral economics theory. A neutral chatbot provided assistance without persuasive cues. All chatbot dialogues were powered by a customized GPT-3.5 model and designed to simulate realistic conversational interactions, including emotionally adaptive language and affective phrasing. Each chatbot was pre-instructed with behavioral framing logic and responded dynamically to user hesitation, repeat product views, or direct queries. We hosted the experiment in a custom-built Shopify sandbox store replicating the structure and inventory range of modern e-commerce platforms. Participants were instructed to browse the site and choose a birthday gift within a $50 budget. We encouraged interaction with the chatbot and provided example prompts to initiate suggestions (e.g., "What's a popular gift right now?"). The system tracked all user actions client-side via JavaScript, including page visits, product exploration, and chatbot engagement. We measured several behavioral outcomes: impulsive purchase rate (defined as an item added to cart within 60 seconds), average cart value, session time, number of products viewed, category breadth, frequency of self-initiated searches, click-through rate on chatbot recommendations, and post-task satisfaction on a 5-point Likert scale. These metrics allowed us to compare conversion behavior, engagement, and user perception across all variants.

We conducted one-way ANOVA tests on all dependent variables, Tukey HSD for post-hoc comparisons and used Bonferroni correction where appropriate. We ran linear regression models to examine moderation effects of impulsivity and AI familiarity on nudge responsiveness, and tested correlation between chatbot trust and prior LLM exposure. All statistical analyses were performed using Python and STATA. After completing the task, participants responded to a post-experiment survey measuring satisfaction, perceived helpfulness of the chatbot, perceived pressure or persuasion, and intent to use similar tools in future shopping experiences. We also reviewed open-ended feedback on the chatbot's tone and influence to support the interpretation of behavioral results.

Table 1
Chatbot Variants and Elicited Behavioral Response

Condition	Delivery Mode	Nudge Type	Behavioral Mechanism	Example Chatbot Phrase
0. UI Control	No chatbot	No nudge	Baseline	None
1. Neutral Chatbot	Chatbot	No nudge	Assistant only, no persuasion	"Let me know if you'd like gift ideas or filters by price or category."
2. Scarcity Nudge	Chatbot	Scarcity / urgency	Loss aversion, FOMO (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974)	"Only 2 left in stock—this one's going fast!"
3. Social Proof Nudge	Chatbot	Popularity / peer signaling	Herding, normative influence (Cialdini, 1984)	"This item's been flying off the shelves—lots of people are grabbing it today!"
4. Personalized Recommendations	Chatbot	Trait-based personalization	Cognitive ease, identity congruence (Tam & Ho, 2006)	"Since you mentioned liking eco-friendly gifts, this would be a great fit for your friend."
5. Dynamic Pricing	Chatbot	Time-sensitive discounts	Temporal discounting, urgency (Grewal et al., 1996)	"I just unlocked 10% off this item—but it's only available for 10 minutes!"

Findings and Discussion

Table 2
Outcome Metrics Dynamics

Outcome Metric	Control	Scarcity	Social Proof	Personalized	Dynamic Pricing	Neutral Bot
Impulsive Purchase Rate (%)	10	**33**	18	**28**	21	14
Average Cart Value ($)	17.5	24.1	20.5	22.8	23.4	18.7
Session Time (min)	3.5	4.2	4.7	**6.3**	5.1	4.6
GV Pages Viewed	6.8	9.1	9.5	**12.7**	10.2	9.3
GV Categories Explored	2	2.3	2.7	**3.6**	2.8	2.5
Self-Searched Items	3.4	1.8	2.5	**4.2**	2.3	3.2
CTR on Bot Recs (%)	N/A	23	19	27	20	9
Satisfaction (1–5)	4	**3.8**	4.1	**4.3**	4	4.1
Bounce Rate / Early Exit (%)	9.1	5.3	7.8	3.2	6.4	5.9

Table 3
Variance Tests Results

Outcome Metric	F-test (ANOVA)	Significant Post-hoc (Tukey)	Notes	
Impulsive Purchase Rate (%)	$F_{(5,214)}=12.92$, p < .001	Scarcity, Personalized > Control (p < .01)	✔	Strong effect
Average Cart Value ($)	**F = 4.87**, p = .0013	Scarcity, Personalized > Control (p < .05)	✔	Significant
Session Time (min)	**F = 6.01**, p < .001	Personalized > All others (p < .01)	✔	Large effect
GV Pages Viewed	**F = 5.34**, p = .0004	Personalized > Control (p < .01)	✔	Significant
GV Categories Explored	F = 2.91, p = .014	Personalized > Control (p < .05)	✔	Small but meaningful
Self-Searched Items	F = 2.74, p = .021	Personalized > Scarcity (p < .05)	✔	Small but meaningful
CTR on Bot Recs (%)	Insufficient power	Trend only, no significance	✘	Too few recs clicked
Satisfaction (1–5)	F = 2.11, p = .067	Personalized > Scarcity (p = .06)	⬚	Marginal significance
Bounce Rate / Early Exit (%)	Not significant (p = .11)	None	✘	No clear difference

We found strong evidence that chatbot-delivered nudges significantly influence consumer behavior in online shopping. One-way ANOVA tests revealed significant group differences in impulsive purchase rates, average cart value, and session time. Scarcity and personalization nudges outperformed the control condition in multiple metrics (p < .01). Post-hoc Tukey tests confirmed that both conditions led to higher impulsive purchase rates and greater engagement compared to the control. Scarcity nudges produced the highest impulsive buying rate (33%, p < .001), but users in this group also reported the lowest satisfaction scores (3.8/5). These results support prior findings on the short-term effectiveness and emotional cost of urgency cues (Rose et al., 2012). The dynamic pricing group showed similar patterns, with elevated conversion but moderate satisfaction, reinforcing the idea that time-sensitive discounts encourage transactional rather than fulfilling behavior (Garbarino & Lee, 2003).

Personalization delivered the most balanced performance. Participants in this condition spent significantly more time browsing (6.3 minutes, p < .001), explored more products and categories, and reported the highest satisfaction (4.3/5, p = .01). This suggests that personalized AI suggestions create cognitive ease and alignment with user preferences (Klaus & Maklan, 2013), reinforcing prior research on identity-based engagement (Tam & Ho, 2006). Social proof produced moderate effects. Impulsive purchase rates rose to 18%, with satisfaction at 4.1. These effects, while statistically weaker, point to a subtle but effective form of persuasion that boosts confidence without applying pressure (Fogg, 2003; Salganik et al., 2006).

Interestingly, even the neutral chatbot, which offered no persuasive framing, outperformed the control. Participants in this group reported higher satisfaction (4.2 vs. 4.0; p = .048) and greater

product exploration. This result confirms that the presence of a conversational agent alone can enhance the user experience, consistent with human-computer interaction literature on social presence and trust (Sundar, 2020). Click-through rates on chatbot recommendations were highest in the personalized group (27%) but did not reach statistical significance ($p = .067$), possibly due to limited sample power or variance in prompt phrasing. We also found that participants with higher trait impulsivity were more responsive to scarcity and social proof nudges, while AI familiarity correlated negatively with acceptance of time-based pricing, suggesting a moderating effect of prior technological exposure. Overall, the results demonstrate that AI-driven nudges can shift user behavior in predictable and distinct ways depending on framing, tone, and delivery mode.

The most effective strategy—personalized recommendations—achieved strong engagement without reducing satisfaction, while scarcity and dynamic pricing traded emotional cost for conversion. Even minimal interaction through neutral chatbots improved the shopping experience, highlighting the importance of delivery context and conversational tone. These findings emphasize that chatbot design should go beyond utility and consider psychological alignment. Nudges embedded in emotionally intelligent dialogue can drive action, but the framing must match the user's goals and expectations. Future research should explore adaptive mechanisms that personalize nudge strategies based on real-time feedback and user profiles, while addressing ethical concerns related to transparency and perceived manipulation.

Table 4
Comparative Impact of AI Nudge Strategies on Consumer Behavior Dimensions

Nudge Type	Quick Conversion	Exploration	Satisfaction	Trust / Alignment	Repeat Intent Potential
Scarcity	✓✓✓	✗	✗	!	!
Personalization	✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓	✓✓✓
Social Proof	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓✓
Dynamic Pricing	✓	✗	!	!	!
Neutral Chatbot	!	✓	✓	✓	✓
No Chatbot	✗	✓	!	—	!

✓	Reinforced Outcome
!	Conflicting Outcome
✗	Negative Outcome

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that AI-powered chatbots can meaningfully influence consumer behavior through strategically framed nudges embedded in natural language. Scarcity and personalization emerged as the most effective conditions, with personalization balancing persuasion, exploration, and satisfaction. Even neutral chatbots improved the user experience relative to traditional interfaces, suggesting that conversational presence alone contributes to perceived value. These findings highlight the importance of tone, delivery, and behavioral framing in the design of AI-driven decision aids.

However, several limitations temper the scope of these insights. The study operated in a short-term, non-longitudinal setting, which restricts conclusions about sustained behavioral or emotional effects. Each chatbot variant delivered a single, static nudge strategy, preventing the evaluation of more complex or adaptive systems. While we accounted for impulsivity and AI familiarity, other psychological or contextual factors—such as user intent, emotional state, or trust disposition—remained unobserved. The sample, while balanced demographically, was

drawn from an online participant pool and may not reflect broader populations or real-world contexts.

Future work should investigate longitudinal effects, including user habituation, trust dynamics, and delayed satisfaction or regret. Researchers should also develop adaptive chatbots capable of tailoring nudges in response to real-time behavioral and affective cues. Incorporating robust frameworks for informed consent and transparency will be essential as these systems scale. Cross-disciplinary research spanning behavioral science, HCI, NLP, and ethics will be critical to ensure that AI nudging systems optimize both effectiveness and user autonomy.

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The Double-Edged Sword:
ADHD in the Lived Experiences of Filipino Women Diagnosed in Adulthood

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Abstract

Attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) in women often goes undiagnosed until adulthood, particularly due to the different ways it can manifest compared to men. This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of Filipino women with ADHD diagnosed in adulthood. Ethical standards of trustworthiness and rigor were followed. The data gathering was accomplished through unstructured one-on-one interviews with seven (7) participants, who were purposively chosen using purposive and snowball sampling. Narratives were transcribed and analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis. The study constructed four (4) major themes: (1) Accepting the Answers: Finding Clarity in an Adult ADHD Diagnosis; (2) Diverse Impacts: Navigating Through Life with ADHD; (3) Holistic Perspective: Intersectionality of being a Woman and Culture in Adult ADHD in the Philippines; and (4) Defying Limitations: Strategies for Thriving with adult ADHD. Participants described challenges related to societal expectations, internalized stigma, and access to care, while also demonstrating resilience and developing unique coping mechanisms. This research highlights the need for culturally sensitive support systems, improved access to diagnosis and treatment, and increased awareness of ADHD in the Filipino context. By amplifying the voices of these women, this study aims to inform the development of culturally relevant interventions and contribute to a more inclusive society that values neurodiversity.

Keywords: attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, adult ADHD in women, qualitative study, neurodevelopmental disorder, Philippines

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Introduction

Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) is a neurodevelopmental disorder affecting both children and adults (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). While research traditionally focused on childhood and adolescence, recent studies highlight its persistence into adulthood, with a global prevalence estimated at 2.58% for persistent adult ADHD and 6.76% for symptomatic adult ADHD (Babinski et al., 2020; Ginapp et al., 2022; Lewczuk et al., 2024; Li et al., 2019; London & Landes, 2019; Song et al., 2021). Despite this, adult ADHD is often undiagnosed or misdiagnosed due to overlapping symptoms and a historical focus on childhood diagnosis (Kathju, 2021; Lewczuk et al., 2024; Song et al., 2021).

Women with ADHD experience unique challenges, including varied symptom presentation, diminished self-esteem, and difficulties in social, academic, and psychological functioning (Aoki et al., 2020; Attoe & Climie, 2023; Ginapp et al., 2022; Morley & Tyrrell, 2023). Gender norms and societal expectations further complicate their experiences (Young et al., 2020). Inattentive symptoms, more common in females, often lead to underdiagnosis and delayed identification (da Silva et al., 2020; Vildalen et al., 2016).

Research on ADHD in the Philippines is limited, particularly regarding the lived experiences of adult women (Lasco et al., 2020; Lauengco, 2023). While estimates suggest a 3% to 5% prevalence, culturally sensitive research is lacking. This study aims to address this gap by exploring the lived experiences of Filipino women diagnosed with adult ADHD. This research seeks to understand their lived experiences, how they describe them, the essence of these experiences, and derive recommendations from their perspectives. By amplifying their voices, this study hopes to provide insights for improving support and interventions tailored to their needs, contributing to a more inclusive and culturally relevant understanding of ADHD this topic.

Literature Review

Adult ADHD in Women

ADHD presents differently in women than in men, often marked by inattentiveness rather than hyperactivity. This difference leads to underdiagnosis and late diagnosis in women, as their symptoms are less disruptive and more likely to be masked by coping strategies and societal expectations (Aoki et al., 2020; da Silva et al., 2020). Women with ADHD frequently report lower self-esteem and experience greater challenges in social, academic, and psychological functioning. They are also more vulnerable to anxiety, mood disorders, and strained relationships (Ginapp et al., 2022; Morley & Tyrrell, 2023).

Unlike men, many women receive a diagnosis only after seeking help for related mental health concerns or during a child's ADHD assessment. Self-diagnosis is common, often resulting from a lack of early recognition and the need to advocate for their symptoms to be taken seriously by healthcare professionals (Stenner et al., 2019). Cultural and gender norms intensify these challenges, as women are often held to higher behavioral expectations, exacerbating feelings of failure and inadequacy (Young et al., 2020). Furthermore, women with ADHD face increased risks, including impulsive behavior and vulnerability to coercion.

Receiving a diagnosis in adulthood can be life-changing, offering women a framework to understand their experiences and rebuild self-identity. It provides a sense of validation and

the potential for a more hopeful future (Brzezińska et al., 2021). The diagnosis thus becomes not only a medical label but a means of personal transformation and improved well-being.

Adult ADHD in the Philippines

In the Philippines, research and data on ADHD, particularly among adults, remain scarce. Underreporting, misdiagnosis, and limited diagnostic infrastructure contribute to this gap (Lauengco, 2023). While ADHD is estimated to affect 3% to 5% of the population (The Mindanao Journal, 2022), the focus of local studies has largely been on children and adolescents (Lasco et al., 2020). Despite the global rise in adult ADHD research, the lived experiences of Filipino women with ADHD are notably underrepresented in academic literature.

Nevertheless, awareness initiatives have emerged. "National ADHD Week" is observed annually, and in 2022, the first National Conference on Adult ADHD was held through the collaboration of the ADHD Society of the Philippines, NCDA, and other stakeholders (The Mindanao Journal, 2022). These efforts highlight a growing recognition of ADHD in adults and the value of support groups and advocacy communities in bridging knowledge gaps.

Cultural context significantly influences ADHD presentation and diagnosis. Lewczuk et al. (2024) emphasize that symptom expression and severity may vary across cultures, necessitating localized research. Most existing studies are Western-centric, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive exploration within Filipino society. Informal sources like media, vlogs, and community narratives provide insight into adult ADHD in the absence of formal research.

This study seeks to address the gap by exploring the lived experiences of Filipino women diagnosed with adult ADHD, aiming to provide a culturally grounded understanding and to amplify their voices in the broader ADHD discourse.

Conceptual Framework

Figure 1

The Double-Edged Sword: Schema of Lived Experiences of Filipino Women Diagnosed in Adulthood
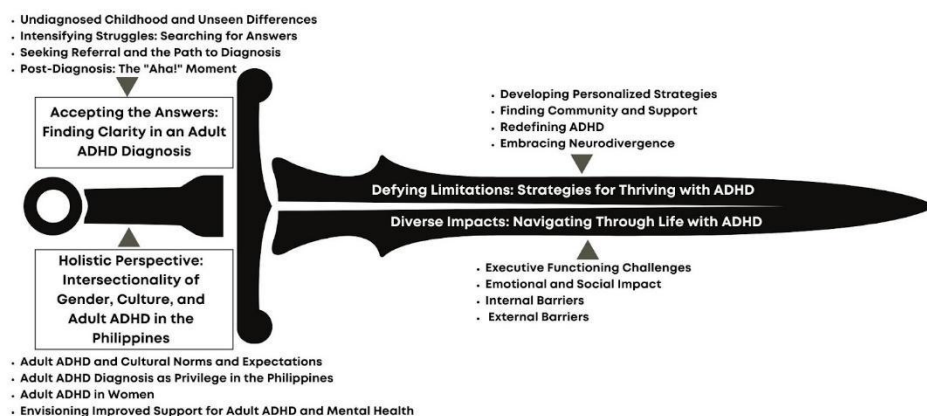
This study presents a conceptual framework symbolized by the *kalis*, a double-edged sword in Filipino culture, representing the lived experiences of women with adult ADHD in the Philippines. The *kalis* captures the duality of their journey—marked by struggle and strength, stigma and self-advocacy, invisibility, and empowerment.

The first theme, "Accepting the Answers: Finding Clarity in an Adult ADHD Diagnosis," reflects the difficult yet affirming path toward self-understanding. Subthemes include unrecognized childhood traits, deepening struggles into adulthood, the pursuit of diagnosis, and the bittersweet "aha!" moment of recognition.

Secondly, "Diverse Impacts: Navigating Through Life with ADHD," explores the ongoing challenges these women face—executive dysfunction, emotional dysregulation, social difficulties, and healthcare barriers—all intensified by societal expectations and internalized stigma.

The third theme, "Holistic Perspective: Intersectionality of Being a Woman and Adult ADHD in the Philippines," highlights how gender norms, cultural pressures, and socioeconomic constraints shape their experiences. These findings underscore the need for culturally and gender-sensitive approaches to ADHD care.

Finally, "Defying Limitations: Strategies for Thriving with ADHD," showcases resilience. These women actively develop coping strategies, find strength in community, and embrace their neurodivergence. They challenge stigma, redefine ADHD on their own terms, and advocate for wider acceptance.

The *kalis* metaphor encapsulates their dual role—knowing when to protect and when to fight. These women are not just surviving with ADHD—they are mastering it, envisioning a society that embraces neurodiversity with care, dignity, and justice.

Methodology

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of adult Filipino women diagnosed with ADHD. As Creswell and Creswell (2022) note, qualitative research emphasizes understanding how individuals make meaning of human experiences. Phenomenology, rooted in psychology and philosophy, focuses on capturing the shared essence of a particular phenomenon through participants' accounts (Giorgi, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

A reflexive phenomenological approach was employed, treating participants as co-researchers (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Purposive and snowball sampling recruited women aged 19 and above with a formal ADHD diagnosis and the ability to articulate their experiences. Recruitment occurred via online ADHD communities. Seven co-researchers participated in 40-minute unstructured Zoom interviews, beginning with an open-ended question about their ADHD experiences. Interviews were audio-recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) reflexive thematic analysis.

Data analysis involved familiarization with the transcripts, systematic coding, theme development, and iterative review to ensure coherence and depth. Themes were descriptively named and supported by direct participant quotes.

Ethical approval was obtained from the institution's review board. Co-researchers gave informed consent, and confidentiality was strictly maintained. Identifying information was removed, and secure data storage and destruction protocols were followed.

To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria: bracketing, member-checking, peer debriefing, triangulation, and an audit trail for credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. All ethical procedures adhered to the Psychological Association of the Philippines (2022) guidelines, ensuring rigor and integrity in data collection and analysis.

Findings and Discussion

Themes

Following an in-depth analysis of the interview transcripts, four (4) major themes were constructed from the data. The themes were formulated from the co-researchers narratives, validated by the research adviser, and counter-validated by the co-researchers themselves.

Theme 1: Accepting the Answers: Finding Clarity in an Adult ADHD Diagnosis

After a precise analysis and reflection of the narratives, *Accepting the Answers: Finding Clarity in an Adult ADHD Diagnosis* was the first theme to be constructed. This theme highlights the co-researchers course of uncovering explanations and making sense of their past experiences when not diagnosed yet.

Undiagnosed Childhood and Unseen Differences. Co-researchers recounted childhood experiences marked by academic challenges, social difficulties, and a persistent sense of being different. These experiences often went unrecognized as potential signs of ADHD, leading to feelings of inadequacy and confusion that extended into adulthood.

Deshna shared:

> ...I remember I always had a hard time as a kid with focusing on things I didn't see, didn't seem interesting enough for me. I would never focus. I could never focus on that. [ ] Unless it's like my hyperfocus at the time. If it's my fixation, that's the only thing I can focus on for a long time. I was very hyperactive. It was a weird time, my childhood.

The Intensifying Struggles: Searching for Answers. Co-researchers transitioned into adulthood and professional life, their previously unrecognized or under-acknowledged ADHD symptoms intensified, creating significant challenges in their careers and daily lives.

Pirena questioned her struggles with tasks that seemed effortless for others:

> I'm really pushing the extra effort to catch up and manage myself. So very masking, very tiring for the brain. I wanted to find out what was really going on. For most of my life, I've been struggling with depression, anxiety, mood dysregulation. But I knew because it wasn't just that—like why couldn't I just send an email quickly when that's all I needed to do? Why couldn't I wake up properly? Why did I have trouble with simple tasks?

Seeking Referral and the Path to Diagnosis. This subtheme focused on the co-researchers way of finding answers and validation for their lifelong differences and struggles. It explores their experiences navigating the healthcare system in the Philippines, seeking out qualified professionals, and undergoing the assessment process.

Lira elaborated:

> First, I was diagnosed with depression. They gave me antidepressants. I said, 'Okay, but it doesn't feel quite right.' So, we tried different medications and tests. Then, eventually, she said, 'Okay, you probably have bipolar II.' And then, over time, the anxiety started to increase until finally, we settled on the diagnosis of ADHD. It was because of the mood swings, attention deficiency, no hyperactivity but a lot of forgetfulness, a lot of fidgeting, and being unable to focus on one task. So, that's how we ended up with this diagnosis. Now, I'm able to study and my mood swings are gone because apparently, it's a side effect of ADHD, the mood regulation.

Post-Diagnosis: The "Aha!" Moment. Receiving the ADHD diagnosis during adulthood was a pivotal moment for the co-researchers. The "aha!" moment of diagnosis was not just about understanding the past; it was also about embracing the present and looking toward the future with a renewed sense of self-awareness and possibility. Mira shared how she reflected on her past experiences:

> I've had so many realizations, especially about my childhood. It's like, way back when I was very young, I would think to myself, 'Oh, that's why I'm like this.' That's what I usually say when I reflect on the past, especially my childhood and how it relates to who I am today. It all makes sense now. I have a clearer understanding of myself, and I'm no longer wondering why I acted a certain way. Why did I dislike that person? Why did I feel hurt so much? Questions like that. So, I'm more enlightened and my mind is more open to my quirks.

The diagnosis was not only a source of validation but also the start of developing coping mechanisms. Realizing that her struggles were not solely her fault but rooted in a diagnosable condition, Cassiopeia shared:

> ...So when I was diagnosed with ADHD, it was like a super huge relief Because, in a way, oh, it's like I wasn't the only problem. In other words, it rooted in something that I could, that I could find a way to improve. [] The help from my diagnosis was very significant because I became very sure of what coping mechanisms I needed and what problem-solving would work for me...

Theme 2: Diverse Impacts: Navigating Through Life With ADHD

This second theme explores the co-researchers facing challenges despite having and knowing their diagnosis.

Executive Function Challenges. Co-researchers expressed how hard it is still to manage their symptoms and get by even after their diagnosis. Amihan described her attention span as *"shorter than the attention span of a goldfish"* Cassiopeia expressed that:

> It's like there are so many voices telling you what to do, and you don't know which one to listen to first. It's like you want to do so many things at once, but you're paralyzed because you don't know where to start.

Often co-researchers find it challenging to complete one task at a time, describing it as a state of "task paralysis". Even with a conscious awareness of their ADHD-related challenges, co-researchers still struggle for balance and management in their lives.

Emotional and Social Impact. Co-researcher described experiencing overwhelming emotions that were difficult to control leading to misunderstandings and conflict in their relationships. Danaya stated:

> Because with ADHD, our emotions are often intensified. So it's hard to explain where you're coming from to other people. It's like you don't know why your emotions are so intense... why you reacted the way you did... it's just something that happens. It's like... you'd rather not explain it at all. Because most likely, other people won't understand. And then they might take it and use it against you.

It is also common among co-researchers to have a heightened sensitivity to perceived rejection, contributing to a significant issue of feeling hurt and anxious in social interactions leading to self-doubt and anxiety. Deshna expressed:

> When it comes to relationships, like friendships or romantic relationships, I find it difficult to navigate them because I've heard people say, not in a nice way, but they've said, 'You're too much. You're overwhelming me.' So now, I've gotten to the point where I always ask or apologize every few minutes. I'm constantly saying, 'Sorry, am I being too much?'

Internal Barriers. Despite the clarity and validation that can accompany an ADHD diagnosis, participants continued to grapple with internal struggles that significantly impacted their well-being. Negative self-perceptions were evident in their narratives. Lira said:

> ...The hyperactivity, it's a very draining experience that it's a hindrance. I feel like if I didn't have ADHD, I would have achieved a lot more than I have now...

External Barriers. This subtheme explores the significant external barriers hindering access to adequate adult ADHD care and support. The recurring themes among co-researchers are their challenges in seeking limited access to specialized care and resources, financial constraints, and a complex healthcare system.

Mira pointed out the connotation that adult ADHD diagnosis is *"rich person's disease"*. She shared that:

> ...You have to spend more so you can get diagnosed or you can get the care that you need. For someone who's been diagnosed, I guess the efforts of those who should be doing something; lack, and we don't get what we deserve in terms of accessibility of medicine or facility…

Theme 3: Holistic Perspective: Intersectionality of Being a Woman and Culture in Adult ADHD in the Philippines

Another theme comes from the understanding of ADHD in the context of Filipino culture, societal expectations, and economic realities.

Adult ADHD and Cultural Norms and Expectations. This subtheme explores the complexities of navigating a society that put heavy emphasis on Filipinos family values. Co-researchers shared their experiences on how Filipino families view mental health and how it affected their emotional and social perspectives. Mira shared what her family had to say when she opened up about her mental health:

> Philippine families would easily say things like, 'Oh, you just need to pray more,' or 'You're just making it up.'

She further elaborated that:

> ...they won't consider it as real if they don't see the physical manifestations or as morbid as it would sound if you've taken your life. That's the time that they would come out of that hallucination where they take off their most tinted glasses and say it was really a sickness…

Adult ADHD Diagnosis as Privilege in the Philippines. This subtheme confronts critical issues that create barriers among individuals seeking mental healthcare attention. Co-researchers explain how different mental health is perceived in the Philippines compared to Western countries and how an individual should have privilege before receiving proper treatment.

Pirene talked about finding an unbiased specialist as she encountered another psychiatrist in the Philippines who would rather not diagnose her because she was able to adjust and merely cope with her situation. She expressed frustration, adding:

> ...The mindset is very old-fashioned. At the same time, many doctors believe that ADHD is just a childhood disorder that you outgrow, which isn't true. They would rather avoid diagnosing you, because they feel like you might not really have it. They think you can just adjust to it, you know? They don't want to label you. And if you're not diagnosed, you can't access the medication you need...

Adult ADHD in Women. This subtheme explores the intersection of gender and neurodiversity, particularly the challenges faced by Filipino women with ADHD. It was common among co-researchers to experience the stereotypical misconception that ADHD is only for hyperactive young boys; this causes them to have late diagnoses and further face challenges of societal expectations for women. Cassiopea elaborates:

> ...Especially when it comes to being a woman, people often assume, 'Oh, you're just being too emotional,' or 'Of course you struggle with that because you're a woman.' They don't always believe you. Because women are taught to be timid and quiet, to be prim and proper. So, of course, women with ADHD, like myself, are going to act accordingly...

Envisioning Improved Support for Adult ADHD and Mental Health. This subtheme emphasizes co-researchers' suggestions and recommendations about expanding access to affordable and specialized care, ensuring that individuals can obtain proper diagnosis, medications, and therapy without financial burden. Deshna mentioned:

> ...I really wish that we had more awareness, that we had more accommodations for our students and also for adults. Like, I wish we had more accessible healthcare, like for medication. I am an advocate for spaces for wellness. Not just retreat centers and psych wards. A legitimate space where people can be safe.

Furthermore, Lira accounted that:

> ...I actually did a study on disability laws, I compared disability laws in the Philippines and the United States and they have this Americans with Disabilities Act the ADA and one of the things that they mandated is accommodations for students with ADHD and I feel like that's something we could replicate so for example over there if you have ADHD they give you extra time to work on your test like time and a half and some people might think it's unfair but as someone with ADHD especially the attention deficit type it's really hard for me to focus on exams because I get overwhelmed I need time to organize my thoughts and extra 30 minutes would really help me so maybe something like that. [] I just wish it was more accessible for everyone else…

Theme 4: Defying Limitations: Strategies for Thriving With ADHD

This theme revolves around the co-researchers personal journey toward embracing life with ADHD, focusing on the creation of personalized coping strategies and forming a community that offers support and understanding.

Developing Personalized Strategies. This subtheme explores the importance of identifying individualized solutions pertaining to co-researchers customize coping mechanisms, accommodations, and management tools to align with their unique needs. Mira shared that she rewards herself by having short breaks compared to before when she usually had no other way of handling her tasks or her time:

> ...after post-diagnosis and still in therapy, I have managed to adopt some ways. I set up alarms, and I trust my visual timer. So, like, when I see it's ticking [] I set myself 50 minutes to do this thing and then rest that way; it also helps me train my mind [] I do allow, like, 10 minutes break time. So, it would allow me to recharge…

Same with Amihan, who mentioned:

> ...I actually, I got to doing lists. Which is something I don't usually do. So, I have to list down everything I have to do to for the day. [] I do this little trick in my head that I do the easiest thing first. Also, Calendars are super helpful because I am not good with remembering dates, so I need like a constant reminder…

Pirena supported this by:

...So, super helpful for me if I maximize my Google Calendar a lot. Because I am very forgetful. So, it's either I write everything on a notebook or I use my calendar, like, even for menial tasks. Like, call this person, you're gonna meet this person. You have to go somewhere. You have to get ready to leave your house. Like, everything on Google Calendar. Because, I might forget and stuff like that...

Finding Community and Support. Co-researchers emphasize the role of discovering a sense of understanding and validation from various supports such as peers, family, friends, therapists, and online communities. Mira shared that it is quite easy being around her friends who are also diagnosed with ADHD because they easily understand each other, and she does not need to explain herself all the time:

> ...I'm actually happy that within my circle of friends [] it's kind of comforting especially if you know this person. Like, oh, we're on the same tribe...

Similar to Deshna, who mentioned:

> ...I only met her a few weeks ago and she was so nice and understanding. And I was like, I don't have to try so hard. So, it was really good. It's true that you need more ND people in your life if you're ND...

Amihan further supported this:

> ...we all have this quality [] like most neurodivergent people usually gravitate towards other neurodivergent people...

Redefining ADHD. This subtheme pertains to co-researchers moving beyond labels and reflecting on what terms personally resonate with their day-to-day experiences. Mira explained:

> ...ADHD can be your superpower if you have fully embraced or managed your symptoms [] on the other hand, ADHD can be a kryptonite if you fail to somehow overcome or if you just do nothing you just let it become a weakness and you don't improve yourself with knowing that you have ADHD...

While Danaya shared that:

> ...ADHD for me is a double-edged sword. Because you can succeed because of it. Maybe the symptoms help, but it's more dangerous because sometimes the qualities of being ADHD or the symptoms, those are what pull you down. So, that's it. Others say it's a superpower, but for me it's more of a double-edged sword because what I experienced is different...

Embracing Neurodivergence. This subtheme tackles the process of accepting ADHD as part of one's identity. Co-researchers recognize and appreciate the strengths and challenges of the condition. Danaya shared that:

> ...I've become more understanding of myself. It's like I'm getting to know myself again after 25 years..."

While Deshna mentioned that:

> ...If you feel it, you feel it. That's it for me. If you feel it, you don't have to explain yourself. You don't have to question yourself. You can just ride the wave. You're feeling it. And also advocate for it. You talk to people about it…

Pirena expressed how she wants to open up opportunities for people like her and help them become more self-capable in the future. She further elaborates:

> ...that's why I make the efforts of building communities or joining talks or having open discussions about different neurotypes, neurodiversity. [] I found out that I shouldn't feel so bad about having a different neurotype because there are ways and tools and methods that can help you manage and adjust to this world that's not really tailored for us. [] It's either you go the route of masking and trying to be as neurotypical as you can, or you go against that and, you know, be proud of the type of person you are [] Like, I just have a different brain. Like, it doesn't mean I'm dumber than you…

Reflective Resonance

Theme 1: Accepting the Answers—Finding Clarity in an Adult ADHD Diagnosis

This theme captures the co-researchers' journeys toward understanding and embracing their ADHD diagnoses in adulthood. Many recalled childhood difficulties—academic, behavioral, and social—that were dismissed or mislabeled, often interpreted as laziness or defiance rather than symptoms of ADHD (Lynn, 2019; Song et al., 2021). These early experiences led to self-doubt and low self-esteem (Stenner et al., 2019). In adulthood, intensified symptoms affected careers and relationships, pushing many to mask their struggles in order to meet expectations. Though masking offered short-term relief, it often led to burnout and emotional exhaustion (Attoe & Climie, 2023; Oscarsson et al., 2022).

The path to diagnosis involved self-reflection, research, and persistence, especially in navigating misdiagnoses and limited awareness among professionals (Aoki et al., 2020). Receiving a formal diagnosis brought a transformative "aha!" moment—providing validation, relief, and a new lens through which to view past struggles (Ginapp et al., 2022). This newfound clarity fostered self-compassion and the motivation to adopt tailored coping strategies, though many also expressed grief over missed opportunities and the late timing of their diagnosis (Aoki et al., 2020).

Theme 2: Diverse Impacts—Navigating Life With ADHD

A diagnosis was not the end, but the beginning of a complex journey of symptom management. Co-researchers struggled with executive dysfunction, emotional regulation, and social challenges—consistent with adult ADHD literature (Guo et al., 2021; Schiavone et al., 2019). Difficulties in time management, forgetfulness, and disorganization disrupted daily routines and home life (Silverstein et al., 2020).

Emotional dysregulation, including rejection sensitivity, deeply affected their relationships and self-worth. Internalized stigma and masking contributed to feelings of inadequacy

(Morley & Tyrrell, 2023). The burden of trying to appear "normal" in a neurotypical world left many feeling isolated and misunderstood.

Barriers in accessing diagnosis and care—especially high costs, misdiagnoses, and a lack of ADHD-specialized services—added further difficulty, particularly within the Philippine context (Adler et al., 2019; Weiss & Stein, 2022). These challenges emphasized the need for accessible, gender-informed support systems that address the multifaceted impact of ADHD on women's lives (Morgan, 2024).

Theme 3: Holistic Perspective—Intersectionality of Being a Woman and Filipino With ADHD

This theme explores how Filipino cultural norms and gender roles uniquely shape ADHD experiences. Cultural values like *hiya* (shame), respect for authority, and a strong work ethic often discourage mental health discussions, framing ADHD symptoms as moral or spiritual failings (Slobodin & Crunelle, 2019). Co-researchers shared how family responses rooted in stigma delayed their diagnosis and support.

Economic limitations, lack of insurance, and misconceptions—such as the belief that ADHD only affects children—further restricted access to care (Schoeman & Voges, 2022). Gender expectations added another layer: ADHD symptoms in women were often misinterpreted as hormonal or emotional issues (Hinshaw et al., 2022). Many co-researchers masked their symptoms to meet societal expectations of being composed and nurturing, contributing to misdiagnosis and emotional distress (Vildalen et al., 2016).

These insights underscore the need for culturally and gender-sensitive mental health care, especially for marginalized groups in non-Western contexts (Bergey et al., 2022; Chronis-Tuscano, 2022).

Theme 4: Defying Limitations—Strategies for Thriving With ADHD

Despite systemic and personal challenges, co-researchers developed personalized strategies for managing ADHD. Tools like planners, alarms, and visual aids helped with organization, while practices such as mindfulness, task prioritization, and self-compassion supported emotional regulation and reduced shame (Beaton et al., 2022; Lewczuk et al., 2024).

Community and relational support played a key role. Online groups, therapy, and understanding partners helped reduce isolation and enhance resilience (Canu & Carlson, 2007; DuPaul et al., 2020). These women reframed ADHD as both a challenge and a strength—what some described as both "kryptonite" and "superpower" (Sedgwick et al., 2019).

Ultimately, co-researchers shifted from stigma to self-acceptance, actively redefining ADHD through self-advocacy and the celebration of neurodiversity (Mueller et al., 2012).

Conclusion

The study contributed to the deep understanding of the lived experiences of adult women with ADHD diagnosed in adulthood in the Philippines. Their experiences tell a powerful story of discovery, resilience, and empowerment. Accepting their condition post-diagnosis

allows for a new understanding and reframing of past experiences, often colored by years of unnoticed or misinterpreted symptoms. Living with ADHD involves a struggle with executive function, emotional and social challenges, as well as internal and external barriers. Yet, it also highlights the adaptive capacities and strength of these women.

Cultural factors significantly shape the experiences of Filipino women with ADHD, with societal norms and stigma creating additional layers of complexity in accessing care and finding acceptance. This highlights the need for culturally informed mental health services and broader societal education.

Women with ADHD utilize innovative strategies to thrive amid neurodiverse challenges. Creating supportive communities and redefining ADHD as both a unique strength and a vulnerability demonstrate the dynamic process of embracing neurodiversity. Through their tenacity and advocacy, these women are changing the conversation from limitation to celebration, shaping a future where neurodiversity is not just accepted but valued for the richness it brings to the human experience.

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Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author used OpenAI's ChatGPT to assist in paraphrasing sections of this manuscript and aligning them with publication guidelines. All outputs were reviewed and edited to ensure accuracy and originality.

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What Kind of Learner Am I:
A Scoping Review of Adolescents' Learner Identity and School Engagement

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Abstract

Adolescents' learner identity is an emerging concept that warrants more research. How this process is understood and what role does the school play are two questions that need to be addressed in order to provide more clarity about its possible relevance to adolescents' current developmental stage. Through a scoping review, the current study synthesized the main concepts and findings of 13 out of the 43 scoped articles that provide information about learner identity development and school engagement of adolescents. Key themes regarding the conceptualization of learner identity development include adolescents' learner narrative, personal growth, values, positional identity, motivation, autonomy, contextual continuities and discontinuities, classroom practices, educational situations, and interesting lectures. While themes that answer how school engagement fosters learner identity include school practices and structures, meaningful learning activities, teachers' approach, and peer group dynamics. Together, the results on adolescent learner identity and their school engagement are in accordance with the psychosocial and sociocultural perspectives used to understand identity-formation as well as the factors that contribute to school engagement. With these consistencies, future researchers may strengthen the foundation of learner identity development and educators may integrate this concept in the curricula and career development programs.

Keywords: learner identity, school engagement, adolescents

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Introduction

Regular school engagement is essential to the formation of adolescents' identities. The school, along with the teachers and peers, contributes to how adolescents may see themselves and what their aspirations are. Previous research has even shown that opportunities to engage shaped students' engagement in the classroom as an indication of their identities (Rubin, 2007; Verhoeven et al., 2019).

Following this premise, the *learner identity* of students, which refers to how one feels and describes oneself as a learner in accordance to their experiences (Lawson, 2014) is a concept that needs further exploration. Given that it is also viewed as a construct that involves how one's experience with their gender, generation, social class, place, ethnicity and religion would influence their experience as a learner (Centre for Learner Identity Studies, 2014, as cited in Parkinson et al., 2021), the different encounters of adolescents in school may also facilitate this process. Due to the limited studies on adolescent learner identity, it is still unclear if the same understanding of identity development and the role of school engagement applies to learner identity.

While there is no in-depth understanding yet on how learner identity development takes place as opposed to identity development itself, looking into the different frameworks and perspectives in identity formation may help in making assumptions about how adolescents build their learner identities. Thus, it is essential to first examine the main premises of two lenses used in identity development and to contextualize them in situations where an adolescent student builds their learner identity.

Psychosocial Perspective

Using a psychosocial lens, learner identity may be understood as an internal psychological process (Verhoeven et al., 2019) wherein the individual is an active agent in building who they are and would like to be. The inclusion of their own "selves" becomes a significant aspect in sharing their identities as they interact with their social environment. The process of *identity negotiation*, which allows them to make "adjustments" with the identities they wish to build through their social interactions (Swann, 1987), therefore becomes a way of adolescents to match who they would like to become and who they currently are. In this case, the developing adolescent takes part in their own identity development.

Given this notion, adolescents may then work on their identities by envisioning who they wish to be. Building on their *possible selves*, adolescents have a general idea based on their aspirations and fears (Markus & Nurius, 1987). The *possible selves* framework then allows adolescents to become motivated in navigating their identity, which may also be a key factor in shaping who they become as learners. For instance, an adolescent who sees themself as an artistic learner may imagine themself becoming theater director and would attempt to fulfill that aspiration by taking part in activities that would allow them to explore their creativity and artistic repertoire. The adolescent may then decide to join the drama club, take free online courses in basic theater, and subscribe to online content about theater in order to work on their aspiration.

As adolescents actively navigate their experiences in building their learner identity, negative experiences may also contribute in the process. They eventually become *wounded learners* with *educational wounds* that influence the direction of their learner identity (Lange et al.,

2015; Wojecki, 2007). The unpleasant encounters in the classroom and unfulfilled learning goals may impact the way they see themselves and how they wish to address those issues. An adolescent student who is interested in becoming a pharmacist but did not have a meaningful learning experience in their science classes may be able to reflect on this experience and assess how they would proceed. Whether they would use this as an opportunity to re-learn the competencies needed to build their identity as a "science-learner" or to re-structure the learner they wish to be would then depend on how they process these experiences.

With the various experiences that adolescents partake in as they work on their learner identity, adolescent students also contribute to the learning structures that facilitate their identity-development. Their *learner voice*, otherwise known as their capacity to become "commentators" of their own learning experience (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007) enables them to provide insights on how teaching strategies, activities, and school experiences should be modified or sustained. An adolescent student who sees themselves as someone liberal and a future diplomat may take initiative to ask their social studies teacher to create more group discussions. With the belief that these types of discussions can help them accomplish their learning goals, the adolescent student creates a narrative through their own voice, which in turn may strengthen their learner identity.

Altogether, these concepts following the psychosocial perspective show that adolescent students have the capability to somehow be the "captain of their own ships" when building their learner identities. However, it is still important to take note that the learning environment, along with its different domains warrants the same kind of attention. Adolescents still need meaningful and structured learning systems and opportunities that enhance and complement their autonomy to navigate their own learning identity. Hence, the sociocultural lens is another area that would have to be explored.

Sociocultural View

When understanding learner identity through a sociocultural perspective, factors and contributors in the social environment need to be identified. Identity-development in this case is said to be a multi-dimensional phenomenon, and not merely a single outline (Verhoeven et al., 2019). The way learning is facilitated by the school, the type of teaching strategies conducted, the quality and quantity of interactions with peers, and the general characteristics of the domains involved in the learning environment may all impact the learner identity of adolescents. To a certain extent, they may influence and can even dictate the flow of the process as adolescents continue to be exposed to them.

Looking at the learning context where adolescents are, there are certain *learning notions* present. Primarily, these are valued ideas about the goals for learning, the type of content that should be used, and how learning should be (Verhoeven et al., 2021). Consequently, learning notions may reinforce the learning values, outlook, and competencies of the learners, since these are what they have been experiencing at school. One school may give priority in seeing successful learners as those who are able to pass board exams for their career, which would give a signal to the adolescent students that they need to be competent enough to become achievers this way. On the other hand, another school may place more value on using one's talents to help less-fortunate communities. As a result, adolescent students will have the idea that they need to hone their skillset in order to help others.

In addition to how these priorities in learning can potentially shape the identities of adolescents, these contexts may also have underlying social dynamics. Learning structures have *figured worlds,* or how learning could be culturally and socially constructed and interpreted (Holland et al., 1998). At the same time, they also contain *positional identities*, which involve matters on power, deference, entitlement, and social affiliation (Holland et al., 1998). The manner in which specific learning activities and even professions are given more importance may alter the perspective of the students, which in turn affects their learner identity. To illustrate, a school that promotes traditional paper-and-pencil examinations and another one that pushes for authentic learning assessments may have different influences over how adolescents perceive what kind of learner they are. Similarly, a school that treats with higher regard faculty members from a particular field and another institution that sees them equally may also condition learners to base their learner identity on that information.

Given the potential of sociocultural factors to influence the process of building one's learner identity, taking into account the practices and characteristics of educational institutions, along with their facets and members, would be integral to understanding the process of learner identity. How adolescent students engage in school and how the same engagement allows them to learn what kind of learner they are and wish to be therefore becomes another set important queries that need to be examined.

Understanding School Engagement

When students are engaged in school, they are able to develop new skills and knowledge that are valuable to themselves as learners (Verhoeven et al., 2021). School engagement has also been seen to be linked to higher educational aspiration (Wang & Peck, 2013) as well as adult educational and employment outcomes (Symonds et al., 2022), which indicates its benefit even in the long-run. To maximize these advantages, there is a need to first look into what helps make adolescent students become more engaged in school.

The School's Role in School Engagement

The school itself plays an important role in fostering adolescents' school engagement. Schools need to achieve this because students who place a higher trust in their institutions (Amemiya et al., 2020) and have a more positive perception of them (Van Ryzin, 2011) are more engaged. But before students would be able to trust their institutions, positive experiences that are beneficial to their learning and well-being should be made available. To achieve this, schools would have to ensure that students would feel safe and are supported.

Research has shown that students are more engaged when they are less exposed to community violence (Borofsky et al., 2013), and receive adequate social support (De Guzman & Macapagal, 2020). On the other hand, if students have early exposure to community violence, they become less engaged in school (Borofsky et al., 2013). A possible explanation for this is that when adolescent students are free from any kind of harm and feel taken care of, they get to comfortably engage in school (Rudd, 2012). Additionally, this also enhances the opportunity of adolescents to partake in various activities. Adolescent students' participation in these available learning outlets may even allow them to connect with fellow students, which may be another reason for them to engage in school.

Relatedly, another underlying reason why students may choose to be active in these activities is due to the connection they feel from other members of the institution. Participation in these

so-called "domains" of school which has led to higher engagement has been even found to be mediated by their sense of belongingness (Knifsend & Graham, 2012). When adolescent students feel that they are truly a part of the institution, they are more likely to actively seek out these activities that make them more engaged in school.

On top of the feeling of connection that adolescent students have in school, the type of learning and the engagement experience itself also fosters the engagement also matter. Problem-based learning activities that engage students have been seen to be positively associated with positive feedback (Amerstorfer & Freiin von Münster-Kistner, 2021). Students who are able to learn through activities may be more enticed and become more willing to participate as a result. The more students engage in these learning activities, the more they feel invested cognitively and emotionally to their school. Behavioral engagement in school has even been found to have a positive bidirectional effect with emotional engagement in school, and a positive correlation with cognitive engagement (Li & Lerner, 2013).

The Teachers' Role in School Engagement

As adolescents continue to engage in school, these strategies need to be upheld and promoted, especially by those who have the capacity to shape the learning environment. In this case, the teachers as facilitators of learning, are responsible in aiding adolescent students to attain the ideal level of school engagement.

Outside the realm of pedagogical practices, teachers continue to fulfill an integral role in building a healthy relationship with their students. Given that adolescent students are also developing individuals, teachers need to ensure that these students are able to find their own place in school. When adolescent students experience adequate teacher support, they engage more in their learning (Van Ryzin et al., 2009). One study has even shown that teacher-student relationships mediate the link between individual school-concept and school engagement (Raufelder et al., 2015), indicating that a positive connection between teachers and learners contribute to the inclination of students to engage in school. In addition, the degree of closeness in the teacher-student relationship itself fosters school engagement, while conflict in their relationship diminishes it (Engels et al., 2021).

Assessing the contributions of teachers' relationship with their students, adolescent students become more engaged when they have positive experiences with their teachers. However, the teacher alone is not the defining factor inside the school that permits engagement to flourish. Adolescents' peer groups also contribute to the level of school engagement they have.

The Peers' Role in School Engagement

As adolescent students engage in school, they also encounter peers who share the same experiences in this context. Witnessing how their peers participate in these school engagements, adolescent students may also be more driven to do the same. Following the concept of *social contagion*, one study has found out that classmates' level of engagement in school predicted one's school engagement (Mendoza & King, 2020), signifying that the interaction of adolescent students with their peers is an important aspect of their time in school. Adolescent students appear to give much weight and consideration to their peers, and this is evident in research finding showing that perceived relatedness with peers is associated with behavioral engagement in the classroom (Mikami et al., 2017).

In line with the available literature showing the different perspectives that explain adolescents' identity development and the key findings showing how school engagement is fostered, the actual foundation of how adolescents' learner identity should be understood remains unknown. Furthermore, the association of school engagement with learner identity needs more recognition. At this point, what is currently and mostly known are the processes on how identity is developed in school, but not how learner identity is fostered in the same context. To fill this research gap, this scoping review aimed to examine (1) what are the different perspectives in understanding adolescents' learner identity and (2) how does school engagement foster adolescents' learner identity.

Method

To synthesize the current findings and literature on adolescents' learner identity and school engagement, the present scoping review had the following inclusion criteria: studies that were (1) conducted in the last 20 years, (2) contained relevant information about *Adolescent Learner Identity* and/or *School Engagement*, (3) followed a quantitative, qualitative, or a mixed-methods approach, (4) utilized empirical-means of data-gathering and/or a systematic review of the topic, (5) focused on adolescent participants, and (6) published in legitimate educational institutions and/or nationally and internationally-indexed journals.

On the other hand, the scoping review also had the following exclusion criteria: studies that were (1) conducted more than 20 years ago, (2) contained relevant information about *Learner Identity* and/or *Engagement* but not in the context of schools, (3) did not follow a clear methodology, (4) were written only as an extended essay and does not follow any scientific procedure, (5) focused on infants, children, adults, and the elderly as participants, and (6) published in questionable and/or predatory journals.

After determining the eligibility of the studies to be included, articles were gathered using online databases. Specifically, literature in (1) De La Salle University's Online Database, (2) ResearchGate, (3) EBSCO, (4) Google Scholar, and (5) PsycArticles became the main platforms for searching. The search terms *Adolescent Learner Identity and School Engagement*, *Adolescent Learner Identity*, *Adolescent School Engagement*, and *Learner Identity* were all used during the initial scoping done.

Upon gathering 43 articles, each of the abstracts were all first reviewed for quality assessment. Conceptualizations or findings that were able to shed light on the different perspectives in understanding learner identity or how school engagement fosters learner identity were included in the final set of papers to be reviewed, while those that did not contribute in these two areas were excluded.

Results

13 articles in total became part of the final analysis that showed how learner identity is understood through the different perspectives and how school engagement contributes to the development of adolescents' learner identity.

Perspectives in Learner Identity: Psychosocial View

Consistent with the conceptualization of a psychosocial perspective of identity development, learner identity in this framework is regarded as a process that the adolescent learner actively

plays a role in. Specifically, factors that include their learner narrative, personal growth, values, positional identity, motivation, and autonomy are seen to be key elements in navigating one's learner identity development. Adolescent students' learner identities are composed of their personal stories, the growth they wish to achieve, the way they position their identities in certain contexts, the motivation they have for their aspirations, and the sense of autonomy they possess in achieving who they wish to be.

Relevant studies that followed a psychosocial perspective have shown that learner identity involves *who the learner is* and *how learning takes place* based on one's perception, feelings, and beliefs (Parkinson et al., 2021), *imagined possibilities* that serve as a guide for students when they engage (Stahl et al., 2021), and the adolescents' regulation of their own learning capacities and potentials (Hegna, 2019).

Perspectives in Learner Identity: Sociocultural View

Looking at the sociocultural perspective view of identity development, similar factors under this lens have been observed to contribute to the understanding of learner identity. Contextual continuities and discontinuities, classroom practices, educational situations, and interesting lectures all set the ground for the conceptualization of learner identity in this lens. Adolescents' learner identities are based on the standard beliefs by the different contexts they are a part of, the objectives of the class activities they are asked to constantly accomplish, and how lectures interested them.

Relevant studies that utilized a sociocultural perspective have found that learner identity involves understanding oneself as a learner with regard to what the school, teachers, and peers consider as a good learner (Verhoeven et al., 2021), the learning experiences that frame students' understanding of who they are and should become as learners (Rubin, 2007), educational situations that permits students to shift their learner identities as they acquire various learning experiences (Coll Salvador & Falsafi, 2010), and the positive attitude they had due to the interest and enjoyment from classes (Lawson, 2014).

Adolescent Learner Identity Fostered by Their School Engagement

A number of students have shown that adolescents' school engagement contributes to their learner identity. Four key areas have emerged from the scoping review and each of these highlight specific factors that have been found to be relevant in the process of their learner identity.

School Practices and Structures

Certain practices made available and structures implemented in the school enable adolescent students to engage more and eventually build their learner identities. These may come in the form of the type of learning track, feasible expectations set, recognition of students' effort, and apprenticeship opportunities. Adolescent students in general become more engaged if they are well-matched and interested with the track they are taking, see that the learning goals expected from them are attainable, feel that they are appreciated, and are able to engage in school work relevant to their goals.

Relevant studies in relation to these factors have shown that adolescents in pre-academic tracks explored vocational goals more often (Verhoeven et al., 2019), students identified

more with learning if the expectations were accomplishable, (Verhoeven et al., 2021), and students seek out means to become an apprentice based on the learner they wish to be (Hegna, 2019).

Meaningful Learning Activities

Since learning is the foundation of schools and the engagement of students, activities should not only be developmentally-appropriate, but also meaningful to adolescents. Meaningful learning activities refer to those that allow adolescent students to engage more through the provision of various learning strategies, explorative and reflective learning experiences, and role models. When adolescent students participate in classes that utilize appropriate learning strategies that elicit interest, exposed to learning experiences that make them explore and reflect on their identity, and witness relatable role models, they become more engaged in school and strengthen their learner identity.

Relevant studies in connection to these factors revealed that strategies that allow students to engage more are beneficial to their identities (Eccles & Roeser, 2011), reflective and explorative learning experiences engage students with their self-understanding (Verhoeven et al., 2019), and being introduced to subject-area-specific role models stimulated exploration of adolescents' own identities as learners (Hughes et al., 2013).

Teachers' Approach

As facilitators of learning, teachers have to plan out the way they manage the class and interact with their students. A supportive classroom climate, an open-minded attitude, and healthy expectations are all part of the approaches that a teacher may have to achieve this. When adolescent students become part of a classroom where they feel supported, has a teacher who is open to them and sets appropriate expectations, they engage more in school and build their learner identity.

Relevant studies where these factors are evident highlighted that supportive classroom climates help adolescent students to take risks that are integral for their identity development (Verhoeven et al., 2019), the presence of open-minded teachers help students feel more encouraged to explore their identities (Rudd, 2012), and expectations make certain identities more available for adolescents to build on (Vetter, 2010).

Peer Group Dynamics

Given that adolescent students spend a significant amount of their time with their peers, the experiences they have within their respective groups involve certain social and psychological dynamics that influence their school engagement and learner identity. The presence of the group status, social consequences, and peer norms are all part of this area. When adolescent students affiliate themselves with a certain status of a group, consider the social consequences of their decisions, and subscribe to norms established in the peer group, their school engagement and learner identity are also affected.

Relevant studies in accordance to these peer group dynamics have indicated that adolescent students may position their learner identity based on how they could safeguard their social status among all their peers (Verhoeven et al., 2021), engage in certain classes to avoid being

embarrassed by classmates (Hall, 2010), and build their learner identities in relation to the pro-school norms adopted by their peers (Verhoeven et al., 2021).

Discussion

The present scoping review has explored various research that allowed a clearer understanding of adolescent learner identity and how it is fostered by their school engagement. The gap in the literature has been filled with the presented themes and relevant findings, and clear connections are evident with the existing conceptualizations of identity development.

In the psychosocial perspective, the concepts of *identity negotiation* (Swann, 1987), *possible selves* (Markus & Nurius, 1987), *wounded learners* (Lange et al., 2015; Wojecki, 2007), and *learner voice* (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007) are reflected by the findings on the learner narrative, personal growth, values, positional identity, motivation, and autonomy of adolescents. The consistencies in the themes, results of existing studies, and the conceptual background of the psychosocial lens show that learner identity is formed as the developing adolescent navigates their experiences. In this regard, a psychosocial framework will argue that adolescents are active agents who are responsible and capable of fully understanding who they are as learners and shaping what kind of learner they aspire to be.

As for the sociocultural perspective, the concepts of *learning notions* (Verhoeven et al., 2021), *figured worlds*, (Holland et al., 1998), *positional identities* (Holland et al., 1998), are evident in the themes on contextual continuities and discontinuities, classroom practices, educational situations, and interesting lectures. Once again, the consistencies in the findings and conceptual background of the sociocultural lens present that learner identity is developed through multiple external factors that facilitate its process. A sociocultural framework will then claim that adolescents' perspective of who they are as learners and what kind of learner they wish to be is shaped by the sociocultural experiences they have in the environment.

Lastly, the significant findings in the existing literature on what promotes adolescents' school engagement have also been observed in the results that highlight how school engagement fosters adolescents' learner identity. The role of the school, teachers, and peers in school engagement are also noted in the themes of school practices and structures, meaningful learning activities, teachers' approach, and peer group dynamics. Seeing how this consistency is also present in the area of school engagement, the same psychological and sociocultural mechanisms in adolescents' school experience can help in the process of the development of their learner identity.

Conclusion: Implications and Recommendations

Due to the outcomes in school engagement brought about by the school, teachers, and peers, adolescent students may become more equipped with certain attributes and skills that help in the process of learner identity development. And as these students hone their new skillset, they eventually become more committed to engage in various school experiences to apply and build on the same skillset. Identifying which skillsets are relevant to school engagement is then necessary to be examined.

Previous researches have highlighted how particular individual characteristics, such as life satisfaction, affect, purpose in life, resilience (Awang-Hashim et al., 2015), mindfulness

(Datu et al., 2023), hope (De Guzman & Macapagal, 2020), positive emotions, adaptive coping (Reschly et al., 2008), and goal progress (Vasalampi et al., 2009) are positively associated with school engagement. Determining if these same positive outcomes are linked to learner identity development would be a good start to establish what basic competencies of adolescents are helpful in the formation of the learner identity.

Aside from quantitative approaches, a qualitative exploration of the actual process of learner identity is needed. The present scoping review has only presented the synthesis of available research. However, there is still the need to delve into on how adolescents actually internalize and reflect on their learner identity and its relevance to their personal lives. A phenomenological study on this can strengthen the foundation of the concept of learner identity development.

Through the themes that emerged from this scoping review, the educational sector may consider adopting the concepts and key results in their curriculum and school programs. Schools and universities may help their students become more competent learners by integrating strategies that foster their learner identity. Career programs and other related intervention would also benefit from the current findings, since establishing who adolescents aspire to be is a key element in career development. Instead of merely focusing on career options, counselors and educators may use the conceptualization of learner identity as part of the guiding principles and frameworks they use when helping adolescents with their career path.

As adolescents have a better and more confident understanding of who they are and what they would aspire to be as a learner, they may be have a more meaningful transition throughout their developmental stages in life.

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Exploring the Psychological Well-being of People Living With HIV/Aids in Lusikisiki, in the Eastern Cape: South Africa

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to look at the psychological health of people living with Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and acquired immunodeficiency syndrome (AIDS), exploring how they manage their daily lives on a physical, social, and psychological level. In a qualitative study conducted among participants in one of the support groups overseen by the Lusikisiki District office of Treatment Action Campaign (TAC), 15 isiXhosa-speaking participants, men and women, between the ages of 20 and 60 were interviewed. According to the findings, PLWHA are doing well in terms of accepting their HIV positive status, obtaining access to care and receiving support. As coping mechanisms, they turn to self-motivation, spirituality or religion, and support groups. However, unemployment continues to be a major factor in the psychological health of PLWHA in Lusikisiki, as people lack the resources to make ends meet, which causes them to be in a constant state of stress and worry about where their next meal will come from, negatively affecting their quality of life. It is recommended that community initiatives such as raising poultry and pigs and cultivating vegetables in gardens to provide income and for their own consumption could help improve the lives of PLWHA if sponsors would be prepared to support such initiatives and would monitor their progress and their sustainability as well.

Keywords: HIV/AIDS, antiretroviral therapy (ART), psychological well-being, unemployment

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Introduction

The Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) first emerged many years ago, posing a threat to global health (Bhatt et al., 2023). There was no treatment and no effective means of control, thus people were dying. A major factor in determining the reaction to the epidemic and promoting immediate action was the robust and vocal civil society movement in the Global North, which included many people living with HIV and AIDS. The growing consensus that prompted a decisive action was required to halt the outbreak and was greatly influenced by this movement. Advocacy groups worked tirelessly to persuade governments and international organizations to enact laws that would increase accessibility of treatment, provide funding for research, and assist with preventative initiatives. This involved advocating for the licensing of novel medications and the distribution of funds for public health programs. Globally, efforts to combat HIV/AIDS have advanced remarkably. Furthermore, the global public health strategy that has been implemented to ensure that people have access to life-saving antiretroviral therapy (ART), has transformed HIV preventive treatment and care (Gilks & Alemu, 2024; Kumah et al., 2023).

Due to the enormous treatment gap in Sub-Saharan Africa, the global south bore much of the disease burden, despite ART being widely available and used in high-income nations. AIDS patients were flooding and dying in public hospitals and antiretroviral therapy (ART) was expensive and unavailable. The UN General Assembly declared closing the treatment gap a top priority for global health, and HIV/AIDS was one of the main focuses of the Millennium Development Goals. By 2010, one objective was to ensure that everyone in need had access to therapy. The majority now feel that the global south is on track to meet the sustainable development goals (SDGs) target of ending aids as a public health treatment by 2030. Previously, the majority believed that this was unachievable, and that treatment would never be freely available throughout the global south (Gilks & Alemu, 2024; Kumah et al., 2023).

In the context of South Africa, there has been a total of 240000 of people having HIV with approximately 71000 dying from Aids-related causes (Stover et al., 2021). This shows that despite the voluntary counselling and testing programmes, people in the Sub-Saharan Africa were the most infected by HIV which required additional interventions to the prevention of progression of transmission hence the "Test and Treat" policy (TT). The "test and treat" policy is an established policy that emphasizes the idea that persons who are aware of their HIV status should start receiving treatment as soon as they are diagnosed. In 2007, the World Health Organization (WHO) suggested that everyone, including adults and teenagers, should voluntarily test for HIV and AIDS anytime they go to a medical facility as getting people tested for HIV and knowing their status before starting antiretroviral therapy (ART) was crucial in the early phases of the HIV/AIDS and in efforts to stop its spread (Sineke et al., 2023; Van Wyngaard & Whiteside, 2021).

Onoya et al. (2021) mentioned that in the past, a person with an HIV diagnosis had to go through a process before being started on ART, which included possessing a specific amount of CD4 count cells. Additionally, before receiving treatment, a newly diagnosed person was obliged to go through some screening and have counselling services offered to them and those living with them during visits to their home. Before treatment began back then, a newly diagnosed person also needed a treatment buddy. This was a lengthy process that prevented those who had been diagnosed with HIV from receiving care, sometimes resulting in PLWH getting AIDS and passing away while others chose not to begin antiretroviral therapy (ART) for a variety of reasons.

UNAIDS (2020) stated that of the estimated 8 million people living with HIV in South Africa, more than four and a half million were receiving treatment in 2019. South Africa has been making great strides in the fight against HIV despite having the highest HIV infection rate in the world. It has the most successful antiretroviral treatment program in the world and was on track to meet the UNAIDS 90-90-90 targets set for 2020, which were later reviewed and increased to 95-95-95 targets for 2030. Ehrenkranz et al. (2021) hypothesized that, by the end of 2019, 81% of PLWH around the world were aware of their HIV status, 82% were receiving treatment, and 88% of those receiving treatment had viral loads that were undetectable.

There is a significant risk to one's life when one becomes a PLWHA, biologically, socially, economically, and psychologically. Not only do PLWHA worry about their physical health, but there are also serious mental problems associated with being a PLWHA. Furthermore, PLWHA face not just medical but also social challenges related to stigma and discrimination from the community at large, in addition to medical concerns regarding their illness (Febrianti & Huwae, 2023).

There is therefore a need for governments to address the increasingly complex global health issues by driving a shift toward the adoption of holistic, people-centered approaches that will put the health and well-being of individuals, communities, and populations first (Gilks & Alemu, 2024). There is a need to establish how PLWHA in Lusikisiki cope mentally, physically and socially with the disease, hence the study. The findings of the study add to existing knowledge on HIV/AIDS which will have an influence on policy making regarding PLWHA and their empowerment within the society at large. The main objective of the study is to explore the factors which influence the psychological well-being of PLWHA in Lusikisiki.

Literature Review

Psychological Well-being of Plwha in the Global Context

Sirgy (2020) stated that two primary aspects of well-being, hedonic and eudaimonic well-being, have been identified by positive psychology researchers studying wellbeing. These notions provide us with a thorough grasp of what makes a happy and purposeful existence. Positive feelings, the absence of unpleasant emotions, and general life satisfaction are the main components of hedonic well-being. This component of well-being is linked to enjoyment, contentment, and the instant satisfying of desires. Living in harmony with one's actual self, attaining personal development, and realizing one's potential are the main components of eudaimonic well-being. Rather than focusing solely on the pursuit of pleasure, this component of well-being also stresses self-realization, meaning, and purpose.

The psychological well-being of PLWHA in Brazil is impacted by a range of issues, irrespective of their race, ethnicity, or geographic location, according to Birore et al. (2022). Factors such as poor education levels, low socioeconomic standing, poverty, unemployment, refusing to take antiretroviral medicine and lack of perceived or actual support are among them, as is being a woman. On the other hand, social support has been demonstrated to be positively and independently linked with enhanced psychological well-being of people living with HIV/AIDS in South-East Iran. Within the PLWHA setting, social support pertains to helping these populations maintain and enhance their psychological, physical, and social-

cultural well-being by providing acceptance of love, essential life necessities, helpful connections, and encouragement (Birore et al., 2022).

According to the World Health Organization (2020), extensive healthcare systems, restricted access to antiretroviral therapy (ART), and high levels of stigma and prejudice all contribute to the poor psychological well-being of those living with HIV in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. On the other hand, the impact on psychological well-being in Asia and the Pacific varies greatly throughout nations and cultural situations, and psychological distress can be made worse by a lack of access to social support and treatment. In Sub-Saharan Africa, where the greatest prevalence of HIV/AIDS is found, socioeconomic difficulties, stigma, and inadequate access to healthcare have a substantial negative influence on psychological health.

Psychological Well-being and HIV/AIDS in South Africa

Ncitakalo et al. (2021) and MacLean and Wetherall (2021) stated that PLWHA in South Africa face several difficulties to their psychological well-being, including socioeconomic hardship, healthcare access, stigma, and cultural dynamics. In addition, internalized stigma among others affects many PLWHA, resulting in low self-image, feelings of guilt and shame causing lower sense of self-worth. On the other hand, pervasive social stigma and prejudice against PLWHA can result in exclusion from community activities, social isolation, and discrimination in the job and healthcare environments. The authors further commented that many people are reluctant to disclose their HIV status out of fear of stigma or discrimination. Thus, non-disclosure can worsen psychological problems by making it more difficult to get the support and medical care PLWHA need.

Rao et al. (2020) stated that even though antiretroviral medication (ART) has been widely available in South Africa, there are still disparities in access to complete healthcare, including mental health services. It is challenging for PLWHA to obtain appropriate psychological support due to South Africa's severe lack of mental health specialists and services, especially in the public healthcare system. To guarantee that PLWHA receive comprehensive care, mental health services should be integrated into primary healthcare. Significant obstacles frequently face underserved communities and rural places. Furthermore, numerous PLWHA in the rural communities have socioeconomic hardships, such as unemployment and poverty, which heighten their stress and anxiety levels. Financial difficulties may make it more difficult to get nutritious meals, safe shelter, and medical treatment. HIV/AIDS can impair possibilities for education and work, resulting in long-term financial instability and negatively affecting one's sense of self and quality of life (Alum et al., 2023).

Carol Ryff's Model of Psychological Well-being

According to Rivera-Picón et al. (2024), in the context of chronic illnesses, psychological well-being has gained global attention. An individual's well-being is clearly threatened by chronic illnesses, which have a detrimental effect on their physical, emotional, and social aspects of their lives. But depending on the pathology, every illness involves unique alterations that affect each person's well-being differently. The authors focused on HIV infection in this context, highlighting how complicated this illness is. HIV-positive individuals encounter societal stigma, heightened discrimination, and less social support while to lead meaningful and purposeful lives, they require hope and purpose.

This study is informed by Ryff's model of psychological well-being. Ryff and Keyes (1995) contended that well-being is a multifaceted concept that extends beyond happiness. Six unique components make up Ryff's (1995) multi-dimensional model of psychological well-being: self-acceptance, positive relationships with others, environmental mastery, personal growth, and autonomy. It assumes that reaching a condition of equilibrium influenced by both rewarding and stressful life events leads to psychological well-being. They continued by saying that the model offers a strong foundation for organizing and analysing one's life and offers recommendations for improving it (Ryff, 1989). Utilizing this model as a lens to examine the psychological well-being of PLWHA and identify areas that call for support or intervention, their mental health can be understood.

Methodology

In the study, 15 PLWHA males and females from 18 to 60 years were purposively chosen as a sample from various support groups under the Treatment Action Campaign in Lusikisiki. They were selected because of the characteristic they possess and were suitable in providing the relevant data. This was a qualitative study and phenomenological research design was employed as the researcher intended to explore how PLWHA make sense of their reality. According to O'Reilly and Lester (2017), the goal of phenomenology is to comprehend individuals' experiences. In far simpler terms, it is concerned primarily with the repercussions of human experiences, and it is assumed that language makes these experiences visible to the rest of society. Furthermore, phenomenology in the field of HIV/AIDS allows for a thorough examination of the diagnosed individuals' life experiences with the disease. With participants, the researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews. This was done to investigate the opinions, experiences, motives, and points of view of everyone, as interviews are said to give a deeper understanding of social phenomena. Due to the delicate nature of the subject, the researcher conducted individual interviews with each participant to enable them to freely express themselves about their experiences with HIV/AIDS without disturbances from other people. Data was analysed using thematic analysis guided by the research objectives to uncover themes within the dataset that added to a better understanding of the lived experiences of PLWHA in Lusikisiki.

Results

Data analysis led to the emergence of several themes, including unemployment, disclosure, healthy living, support systems, empowerment programs, self-acceptance, autonomy, purpose in life, environmental mastery, and positive relationships as factors that influence the psychological wellbeing of PLWHA in Lusikisiki. According to the themes that emerged, there are negative and positive factors influencing their psychological being which shows that despite their health status, PLWHA do have positive experiences in their life.

Themes on the Negative Factors

Unemployment

According to the findings, unemployment proved to be the most common factor among PLWHA, with eight of them unemployed and relying only on the child support grant. Five participants were employed, while two were self-employed. The participants' way of life suffers because of their unemployment, as they lack necessities such as food. A concerned and depressed unemployed female participant stated:

Heeeeyy… where do I start? My wish would be for the government to assist us financially so that we could at least have a decent place to stay and be able to buy food which will boost the medication. (Miss L., Aged 42)

Another unemployed participant said:

Mhhhh...If the government can assist us in ways in which we can be able to have an income to survive as we are not working.

Raising her voice slightly and emphasizing with her gestures, she continued:

We are willing to start community projects, such as growing chickens and planting vegetables for making a living and for our own consumption, but no one is willing to assist us with funding to start those. In the past, PLWHA were given a disability grant when one was in a certain stage of the disease, but that has been stopped completely and that grant was helping in a big way. (Miss N., Aged 37)

Themes on Positive Factors

Disclosure

All participants acknowledged their HIV-positive status for a variety of reasons, and several individuals reported taking some time before disclosing their HIV+ status, however one person did not fully disclose the status. One male participant pointed out the reason for disclosing:

Well ...I had no option but to tell people about my status because I was very sick and the symptoms were evident. (Mr. R., Aged 37)

Another participant stated:

I disclosed my status with the aim of making other people aware of this disease and to encourage anyone who has it to come forward in order to get assistance because there is help available for people to manage the disease. (Miss T., Aged 45)

Another cited:

I eventually disclosed my status though it was quite a challenge for me to tell my ex-wife as I was afraid of how she was going to react to the news, but she eventually left me. (Mr. C., Aged 29)

Healthy Lifestyle

Participants reported to have done everything they could to live a healthy lifestyle, including adopting preventative actions to improve their health although they often waver from doing the right thing. One shared:

I do use protection when having sex, which is not a problem for the father of my children as he is aware of my HIV status and is open to any negotiations regarding safer sexual activities. (Miss N., Aged 37)

Another responded:

> At first I was not using any protection, which resulted in me being pregnant again after being diagnosed, which was irresponsible of me as I did not think of the consequences and of protecting others, but now I make sure that I use protection every time, I do try and eat healthily. (Mrs J., Aged 39)

Support Systems

Participants had access to a variety of support networks, including relatives, family, and friends. Some individuals reported receiving overall community support. Every participant received some form of assistance. One participant stated:

> In my community, people are well-informed about HIV/AIDS, so we get all the support though it is not easy financially…I do manage with the little I get from what I am doing since I am self-employed. (Mr. D., Aged 39)

Another one cited:

> After being diagnosed with the disease, I depended on the disability grant, which was eventually taken after a few years, but made it difficult to cope financially though we depend on the child support grant of my three children, which is quite helpful. (Miss V., Aged 48)

Empowerment Programmes

The participants identified support groups as the sole successful program that provides them with information and tools for living with HIV/AIDS. Some stated that because they are always at work, they do not have time to attend these sessions; as a result, they rely heavily on information from the internet and reading books on how to deal with disease-related issues. One participant shared:

> We, PLWHA do community mobilization teaching people on how to live a healthy lifestyle whether they are HIV-positive or not, to encourage those who are living with the disease to accept their status, adhere to treatment and be strong and carry on with life. (Mr. B., Aged 27)

Another one responded:

> Heyyyy....We have support group meetings where we meet to encourage and empower each other on how to live positively with HIV/AIDS. We try starting projects such as beading, gardening, and breeding chickens, but we always have a challenge with funding. No one is available to fund these projects, which will open opportunities for us as PLWHA so that we could plant our own vegetables for us to eat healthily and do things that will generate income for us so as to eradicate poverty. (Miss V. aged 48)

Self-Acceptance

Most of the individuals had been diagnosed with the condition and had been receiving ART for a long time. Many of them had been diagnosed for more than five to fifteen years, with only a few diagnosed for two to four years. However, except for one individual, the rest reported having accepted their HIV-positive status. One participant responded:

> It's been three years now since I was diagnosed with HIV, and I have been on treatment for two. I have accepted my HIV-positive status because I realized that is the only thing, I could do in order for me to carry on with my life. (Mr. C., Aged 29)

Another shared:

> I was diagnosed in 2004, but I had to first take TB treatment before being given ARVs, then I started ART in 2005. At first, I was shocked to find out that I was HIV-positive but then having known how reckless I lived my life, I came to accept my status which made me strong and be ready to face whatever challenge that would come my way. Accepting myself made me to be content and to be at peace with who I am regardless of what others think of me. (Miss V., Aged 48)

Another cited:

> It's been eight years since my diagnosis, and I've been on treatment for three years.

> I have accepted my status but have not accepted the way the disease has drastically changed the shape of my body. (Miss Z., Aged 39)

Autonomy

Participants reported feeling that they still had something to live for because they demonstrated self-determination and were able to make their own decisions without being influenced. One participant stated:

> I can't say that I eat healthily as I eat whatever is available as I do not have money to buy that nutritious food, I never took alcohol even before being diagnosed with HIV/AIDS and I use condoms when involved in sexual intercourse as I am able to negotiate the issue with my partner. (Miss L., Aged 42)

Purpose in Life

The participants reported having a brighter future in their minds, as they continue to anticipate what tomorrow holds for them. One participant responded:

> I want to carry on with my life, carry on with acquiring more knowledge in relevance with the kind of work I am doing, as I have been doing and making a better future for my family. (Mrs. J., Aged 38)

Another commented:

> My wish is to get well and be able to gain my strength back and be able to plant vegetables in my garden so as to have something to live by and be able to take care of my children. (Miss L., Aged 42)

Environmental Mastery

The participants stated that they had tried everything possible to adapt to their current condition by adjusting their attitude and approach toward the disease. One participant stated:

> Ooo...ja...Having accepted my present situation I am strong-willed and determined to work towards achieving my goals, while showing the young people that there is life after HIV if one puts his/her mind to it. (Miss T., Aged 45)

Another one commented:

> Jaaa....It's been eleven years since I was diagnosed with HIV infection, and I have accepted that this has happened to me to make me strong and that has made me realize that there is nothing that may hinder me in becoming what I am destined to be. I did introspection and convinced myself that I need to live and carry on with life as everything starts with the mind. (Mr. S., Aged 55)

Positive Relations

The participants had developed trusting and gratifying relationships with one another and those around them since they believed they were in the same position together. One participant responded:

> It's been four years since I've been living with HIV and I have accepted my fate, I make it my responsibility that I build healthy relationships around me and I am so encouraged by the fact that people around me have accepted me. (Mr. B., Aged 27)

Another stated:

> The fact that I have people who still love and value me for who I am, gives me reason enough for me to hold on. (Mr. C., Aged 29)

Discussion

Despite all the efforts and interventions made to control HIV/AIDS, such as providing access to treatment, the study's findings indicate that there are still factors affecting the psychological well-being of PLWHA in Lusikisiki both negatively and positively. Among the factors that negatively impacted on the psychological well-being of most participants was unemployment. Dunga and Maloma (2024) commented that the issue of unemployment affects both developed and emerging nations equally, but it is more of a problem in developing nations. For two decades prior to the democratic dispensation, South Africa has been beset by persistently poor rates of economic growth and high rates of unemployment. In addition, individuals who are HIV/AIDS positive (PLWHA) may experience more challenges in the job market while they are unemployed. This relationship has a substantial impact on

the general well-being of individuals and communities as well. Furthermore, paying for basics like food, housing, and prescription medications can be difficult for PLWHA due to fluctuating finances brought on by unemployment.

Dunga and Maloma (2024) also stated that due to financial barriers that may prevent patients from adhering to antiretroviral medication (ART), health outcomes could worsen because of this financial load. This could lead to missed doctor's appointments, inadequate condition monitoring, and limited access to necessary therapies. In addition, unemployment can lead to psychological stress, depression, and anxiety, all of which are common among PLWHA. Being one of the small towns in the Eastern Cape, Lusiksiki where the majority of the population is impoverished and jobless and mostly depends on government assistance, PLWHA are equally expected to live in such circumstances. Some people even go to an extent of not adhering to treatment because they do not want their CD4 count to rise as that would result in their disability grant being seized. This could be a barrier to the efforts to manage the disease and could lead to high rates of people dying of HIV-related illnesses.

Few participants who are employed reported that being employed has made life easier for them and that they now have something to look forward to every day. Maulsby et al. (2020) stated that higher levels of physical, role, social, cognitive, and mental functioning, as well as overall wellbeing and quality of life, are linked to employment. In addition, PLWHA with jobs have higher rates of HIV medical care, including testing, prompt linkage to care, continuation of HIV care, and adherence to HIV medication.

Participants reported having disclosed their HIV-positive status, which has opened many doors for them to get assistance, support and care. Mugo et al. (2021) stated that a person's choice to reveal their HIV status is highly personal and impacted by several variables, including their level of preparation, the dynamics of their relationships, their social and cultural surroundings, and legal safeguards. In addition, although disclosure can lead to access to healthcare, emotional and social support, and protection in relationships, it also carries risks, including potential violence, discrimination, and stigma. Offering counseling and support services, enhancing legal and policy protections, and fostering public education to reduce stigma are all necessary to facilitate safe and empowered disclosure. It is feasible to establish a more accepting atmosphere where people feel comfortable and secure disclosing their HIV status by addressing these issues. Furthermore, making disclosures can lead to receiving emotional support from friends, family, and support groups. It fosters a sense of belonging and lessens feelings of loneliness. It can be difficult to keep one's HIV status a secret.

By participating in support groups and exchanging personal stories with like-minded individuals, PLWHA in Lusikisiki discovered inspiration and strength. Furthermore, they mentioned that the basis of their psychological health was their spirituality. They stated that spirituality is very important in their lives, as it provides them with essential tools for coping and resilience. This perfectly captures the value of faith in their community. Kartono and Astutik (2022) stated that one of the greatest therapies out there is a support group, which is typically started by PLWHA to lessen discrimination and stigma. Its objectives are to offer a platform for motivation, encouragement, and exchange of knowledge. In addition, PLWHA frequently finds that spirituality is.

Conclusion

Much effort has been made to combat HIV/AIDS by implementing preventative measures and providing treatment to manage the disease, but little has been done to monitor and follow-up on how PLWHA are surviving and coping psychologically, socially, and physically in their daily lives. According to the findings, PLWHA's psychological well-being is influenced by a variety of circumstances, some of which are negative and some of which are good. Self-acceptance, disclosure, a healthy lifestyle, and support systems have all had a beneficial impact and improved the quality of life for PLWHA in Lusikisiki. However, there are elements that have a detrimental impact on PLWHA's psychological well-being, such as unemployment. This often results in mental illness.

Implications

Lazarus et al. (2021) posited that it is imperative that individuals living with HIV/AIDS receive comprehensive, supportive, and holistic care for their psychological well-being. The study's findings have significant ramifications for theory, practice, and policy. For practice, by applying these findings to real-world situations, PLWHA's mental health can be improved. The study highlights the importance of support networks for the psychological health and empowerment of PLWHA. Organizing and directing these groups ought to be a primary concern for practitioners, including social workers, counselors, and medical experts. Since participants employ self-motivation and spirituality as coping mechanisms, practitioners need to adopt a more comprehensive approach to care. This means figuring out how to incorporate self-motivation and spiritual support strategies into treatment plans. To provide more efficient and individualized care, mental health services tailored for PLWHA should consider these cultural and individual coping techniques.

For theory, according to the findings, social support, spirituality, and self-motivation ought to be incorporated into the existing psychological theories of well-being, considering the conditions surrounding chronic illnesses. The study challenges conventional views and provides a deeper knowledge of how numerous aspects combine to create psychological well-being by focusing on collective and spiritual experiences rather than individual psychological elements. This research supports the development of ideas on coping methods among PLWHA, particularly those that include positive psychology, spiritual well-being, and resilience.

For policy, the study highlights the significance of enacting legislation to guarantee the availability and accessibility of PLWHA support groups. Governments and healthcare organizations should sponsor the creation and upkeep of these groups, particularly in impoverished areas. Social, spiritual, and psychological support should all be included in complete healthcare plans. This should be recognized in policy. Health laws should mandate that mental health services for PLWHA contain these elements to ensure comprehensive and culturally competent care. To ensure that mental health and physical health are given equal attention, officials must strongly advocate for the inclusion of mental health initiatives in HIV/AIDS programs.

Limitations and Recommendations

As intriguing as the results might be in the study, there might be limitation. Because the study was conducted among a specific group of people or with a small sample size, its findings

might not be as generally relevant. Because of this limitation, the findings might not apply to other PLWHA groups that have different experiences and coping mechanisms. The research relied on self-reported data, which is vulnerable to biases related to social desirability and recollection. Participants may have overreported or underreported their experiences, coping strategies, or psychological well-being due to stigma or the need to present a particular image of oneself. This may influence the accuracy and dependability of the data, leading to outcomes that might not fairly represent the participants' actual experiences.

The cultural setting of the study may have significantly influenced the findings, which would limit their applicability in other cultural contexts. This could restrict how far the study's conclusions can be applied to communities or regions with different cultural norms and practices. Future research can solve the limitations of the current study, even though it offers insightful information about the psychological health of PLWHA.

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The Impact of Consumer Imagination and Narrative on Brand Intent in AR Advertising

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Abstract

The integration of augmented reality (AR) with the advertising and marketing industry has become a global phenomenon, with the potential to introduce unique communication models to the field. However, most research on AR has focused on technological operations and interactivity, with limited attention given to consumer perceptions of AR content narratives and consumer fantasy imagery. Scholars have noted that narratives delivered through mediums such as films, books, images, or videos can concentrate the viewer's cognitive abilities on the narrative experience, allowing them to engage in situational imagination, identify with the story, and even evoke positive or negative emotional responses. This can lead to a temporary psychological detachment from reality. AR advertising possesses the unique capability of enhancing unfinished stories within real environments, thereby inspiring consumer imagination through immersive experiences and completing brand communication. This study aims to explore, from the consumer's perspective, how consumer fantasy and imagination trigger virtual narratives in AR, subsequently generating brand intent. An experimental design was employed, using both narrative and non-narrative AR stimuli, with a sample of 250 participants. The findings indicate that narrative advertising significantly impacts advertising attitudes, brand attitudes, and behavioral intentions. The level of consumer imagination significantly moderates the effect of narrative transmission on brand intent. Specifically, when participants possess higher imaginative capacity, the impact of narrative transmission on behavioral intent is more pronounced, whereas participants with lower imaginative capacity show no significant relationship between narrative transmission and brand intent.

Keywords: narrative, imagination, augmented reality, advertising design

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Introduction

The rapid growth of augmented reality (AR) has revolutionized advertising and marketing, capturing increasing attention from researchers and practitioners. Scholz and Duffy (2018) classify AR consumers into two categories: active users, who directly interact with AR experiences, and passive observers. These groups perceive AR differently, making strategic planning essential for marketers. The ENTANGLE framework (Experiences, Nourishing Engagement, Target Audiences, Aligning AR with Marketing Programs, Neutralizing Threats, Goals, Leveraging Brand Meanings, Enticing Consumers) serves as a guide for creating immersive AR experiences that encourage consumer participation.

While AR has significant potential in integrated marketing, existing research largely focuses on operational and interactive aspects, with limited exploration of consumer perceptions, AR narratives, and imaginative engagement (Scholz & Duffy, 2018). This gap highlights the need for deeper insights into how AR can effectively engage consumers.

Fiske (2000) emphasizes that successful communication relies on shared understanding between sender and receiver. Traditional consumer experiences often prioritize efficiency over creativity and enjoyment (Jessen et al., 2020). AR bridges this gap by offering unique opportunities for creative communication, enriching both online and offline interactions and providing insights into how consumer imagination can drive engagement.

Despite its potential, research into how AR fosters creative consumer engagement remains scarce. Hilken et al. (2018) argue that guided AR experiences are critical to delivering satisfying customer journeys. This study adopts a consumer-centric perspective to explore how narrative and non-narrative AR designs influence consumer perceptions and how imagination in AR advertising impacts brand intention.

Literature Review

Narrative Transmission in Advertising

Narratives are widely applied across disciplines, including marketing advertising. Padgett and Allen (1997) highlight narrative advertising as a key research focus, explaining how consumers interpret services and experiences. Bruner (1986) identifies two cognitive modes: the paradigmatic mode, which relies on logical reasoning, and the narrative mode, which constructs meaning through goals and significance.

Narratives shape perceptions and interpretations by fostering participation and self-reflection, positioning experiences within time and place through creative expressions. These stories, evaluated via causal structures and temporal sequences, evoke strong emotional responses (van Laer et al., 2014) and enhance brand persuasion. Consumers, as travelers in a narrative journey, are influenced by immersive storytelling experiences.

This study examines the impact of narrative AR on brand intention, proposing the following hypotheses: narrative AR fosters stronger brand intention, better advertising and brand attitudes, and greater action intention compared to non-narrative AR.

> **H1:** Narrative AR leads to stronger brand intention compared to non-narrative AR.
> **H1a:** Narrative AR leads to more favorable consumer advertising attitudes compared to non-narrative AR.

H1b: Narrative AR leads to more favorable consumer brand attitudes compared to non-narrative AR.

H1c: Narrative AR leads to stronger consumer action intention compared to non-narrative AR.

Customer Fantasy and Imagination

Hunt (1994) suggests that brands solve consumer problems by transforming needs into symbolic advertisements. Creativity is defined as developing brand propositions to address consumer challenges (Mehta & Zhu, 2016). Waade (2010) emphasizes imagination as key to understanding advertisements, reflecting their effectiveness and aesthetic impact. Imaginative consumption includes thoughts, fantasies, and expectations formed in consumers' minds.

Seregina (2014) notes that technology connects real and imagined worlds, linking fantasy, nostalgia, and play. Holbrook and Hirschman (1982) introduced "consumer fantasies," highlighting their role in experiential marketing. Consumer fantasies transport individuals to imagined roles, altering experiences.

In AR advertising, virtual objects blend with reality, creating a hybrid environment. Consumers' imagination bridges these worlds, activating advertising cognition. Thus, the study hypothesizes that viewers' imagination enhances AR narrative transmission, influencing brand intention, advertising and brand attitudes, and action intentions.

H2: Viewers' imagination enhances the effect of AR narrative transmission on consumer brand intention.

H2a: Viewers' imagination enhances the effect of AR narrative transmission on consumer advertising attitudes.

H2b: Viewers' imagination enhances the effect of AR narrative transmission on consumer brand attitudes.

H2c: Viewers' imagination enhances the effect of AR narrative transmission on consumer action intention.

AR Activation Models and Narrative Design

According to Scholz and Smith (2016), AR advertising can be classified into five models: Active Print/Packaging, Bogus Window, Geo-Layer, Magic Mirror, and Projection Mapping. This study employs the Active Print/Packaging method, where consumers engage with printed material enhanced with AR layers. This approach effectively connects the physical and digital realms, fostering interactive storytelling.

While non-narrative AR formats focus on visual or sensory engagement, narrative AR integrates sequential events, characters, and user participation to create a more compelling brand experience. Understanding the effectiveness of these formats—and the role of consumer imagination in each—can guide marketers in designing impactful AR campaigns.

Methods

This study utilized a 2 (narrative vs. non-narrative AR) × 1 (viewer imagination) between-subjects design to examine how AR content type influences brand intention and how consumer imagination moderates this relationship. The independent variable was the type of AR experience (narrative or non-narrative), and the moderator variable was the level of

imagination. Dependent variables included advertising attitude, brand attitude, and action intention.

Experimental Stimuli

The experimental material, titled Taiway No.9 XR Experience Box, was designed to evoke Taiwan's historical railway culture. The narrative AR version included:

- An IP character presenting stories about Taiwan's four major industries.
- An interactive map leading users through a Q&A storytelling sequence.
- Embedded AR triggers that combined online and offline exploration.

In contrast, the non-narrative version featured:

- Static AR visualizations without storytelling structure.
- Interactive displays focusing on visual exploration and spatial scanning.
- No sequential or character-driven content.

Both conditions were designed using the Active Print/Packaging model and distributed through scannable posters.

Participants

A total of 250 valid responses were collected. Participants were recruited from universities and cultural exhibitions. Demographic breakdown:

- Gender: 76% female, 24% male
- Professional background: 75.6% with a design-related academic

This distribution ensured participants had adequate familiarity with AR and visual storytelling, increasing the validity of their responses.

Measures

All variables were measured using a 7-point Likert scale (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). The constructs and their measurement items included:

- Imagination: 12 items from Wang and Huang (2015)
- Brand Intention: 11 items adapted from Feng and Xie (2019) and Smith et al. (2008), Advertising Attitude (5 items), Brand Attitude (3 items), Action Intention (3 items)

Reliability analysis showed acceptable Cronbach's alpha values (0.705 to 0.913) and composite reliability (0.711 to 0.916), indicating strong internal consistency.

Results

Reliability and Validity, Cronbach's α ranged from 0.705 to 0.913, and Composite Reliability (CR) values ranged from 0.711 to 0.916. Correlation analysis confirmed good discriminant validity, supporting the robustness of the measurement model.

MANOVA and Hypothesis Testing, MANOVA results showed statistically significant effects of narrative AR on all three outcome variables (advertising attitude, brand attitude, and action intention), confirming H1 and its sub-hypotheses.

Moderation Analysis, Using PROCESS Model 1, moderation analysis revealed:
- Narrative transportation negatively impacted attitudes.
- Viewer imagination had a strong positive effect on all outcomes.
- Interaction effects (X × M) showed that high imagination moderated the relationship positively. Thus, H2 and all sub-hypotheses were supported.

Consumers with high imagination experience AR ads similarly to engaging with art, reflecting personal meaning. Narrative AR is most effective when aligned with consumer imagination, suggesting marketers should tailor content based on audience creativity levels.

Conclusion

Advertising communication goes beyond promoting products; effective communication relies on aligning consumers' imagination and fantasy with brand identity. Imaginative individuals, often described as daydreamers, tend to focus less on the material attributes of a brand and more on the higher emotional or spiritual joy promised by the brand's image. This aesthetic relationship between the audience and advertising parallels how people appreciate artworks or museum exhibits. A well-crafted advertising narrative activates a reflective mode of reception, allowing consumers to project their feelings and memories, create images, and experience fantasies and dreams. This reflection evokes sensory experiences tied to the brand and mirrors how audiences engage with consumer culture, fashion, and lifestyles (Waade, 2010).

In recent years, marketers have utilized AR to provide richer brand messages, propositions, and content that intersects with consumers' real-world experiences. Through autonomous personal devices, consumers freely manipulate and interact with AR, engaging deeply with the brand to understand its attributes and benefits.

The study revealed that individuals with higher imagination exhibit significantly stronger narrative transmission effects, particularly in terms of action intention. Conversely, for individuals with lower imagination, no significant relationship was observed between narrative transmission and brand intention.

Future advertising designs should emphasize integrating narratives with AR technology to enhance brand communication effectiveness. Advertisers should also tailor content based on audience characteristics, particularly levels of imagination, to achieve optimal marketing outcomes.

Acknowledgements

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Impact of Big Five Personality Traits on Response Biases in the Assessment of Negative Emotions: A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract

As the global prevalence of mental health issues continues to rise, the accurate assessment of negative emotions is crucial in both clinical and research settings. While previous studies have shown that societal expectations can lead to response biases in emotional self-reports, the role of personality traits, specifically the Big Five, in influencing such biases (i.e., concealment and exaggeration) remains underexplored. This study aims to examine how Big Five personality traits affect aberrant responding in the assessment of negative emotions. A sample of 564 university students completed the Big Five Inventory (BFI) and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scales-21 (DASS-21). The Poly-BW Indices, developed by Huang and Lu (2017), were used to measure concealment (W index), exaggeration (B index), and adjusted personality trait scores (C index). Multiple linear regression analyses were conducted to explore the relationship between the Big Five traits and aberrant responding in depression, anxiety, and stress assessments. Results showed that Neuroticism ($\beta = .32$, $p < .001$) and Agreeableness ($\beta = -.12$, $p = .005$) significantly predicted concealment in depression assessment ($R^2 = .13$). Neuroticism ($\beta = .27$, $p < .001$), Extraversion ($\beta = -.09$, $p = .040$), Agreeableness ($\beta = -.11$, $p = .010$), and Conscientiousness ($\beta = -.107$, $p = .010$) significantly predicted exaggeration in depression assessment ($R^2 = .15$). Similar patterns were observed for anxiety and stress assessments, with Neuroticism emerging as the most consistent predictor of both concealment and exaggeration across all domains. These findings suggest that individuals high in Neuroticism are more likely to both conceal and exaggerate negative emotions. Future assessments should account for these personality-driven response styles to enhance the accuracy and reliability of emotional evaluations.

Keywords: response biases, personality traits, negative emotions

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Introduction

According to the Global Burden of Disease Study 2021 (Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation [IHME], 2024), mental disorders rank sixth among all causes of health loss worldwide, with their burden steadily increasing since 1990. This trend underscores the urgent need for accurate and reliable assessment of negative emotions in both clinical and research settings.

Self-report questionnaires are widely used for this purpose due to their ease of administration and standardized format. However, their validity is frequently compromised by social desirability response bias (SDR), wherein respondents consciously or unconsciously underreport or overreport emotional symptoms to align with perceived social norms. SDR has been shown to obscure true relationships between variables, potentially distorting research findings (van de Mortel, 2008). For instance, Logan et al. (2008) found that children with chronic pain who scored higher in social desirability reported lower psychological distress, despite clinical indications to the contrary.

Social expectations surrounding emotional expression further complicate this issue. In many Western societies, the cultural idealization of happiness fosters avoidance or suppression of negative affect (Bastian et al., 2012; Dejonckheere & Bastian, 2021). This social pressure often leads to discrepancies between individuals' internal emotional states and their outward self-reports, particularly in contexts where emotions like sadness or anxiety are seen as undesirable (Fay et al., 2012). These distortions can result in inaccurate assessments and underestimations of emotional distress in population-level studies.

Personality traits may influence both emotional experience and the likelihood of response biases. The Big Five model, encompassing neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding stable individual differences in affective tendencies and self-presentation (Costa & McCrae, 1992). For example, individuals high in neuroticism tend to experience stronger and more frequent negative emotions, which may increase their tendency to either report or suppress distress, depending on context. Conversely, those high in agreeableness may underreport negative emotions to maintain social harmony. Prior work suggests that personality shapes how individuals respond to socially sensitive topics (Van der Schyff et al., 2022), but few studies have directly examined how these traits influence SDR in the context of negative emotion reporting.

This study aims to fill that gap by investigating how the Big Five personality traits predict tendencies to conceal or exaggerate symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress in self-reports. By clarifying the interplay between personality and response bias, this work contributes to a more nuanced understanding of emotion assessment and its methodological limitations.

Methods

Participants and Data Collection

This study employed a cross-sectional design and was conducted between November 24, 2021, and October 26, 2022. A total of 564 university students in Taiwan were recruited from two comprehensive universities and two universities of science and technology. The sample

comprised 115 males (20.4%) and 449 females (79.6%), with a mean age of 20.4 years (SD = 1.67). Of the participants, 193 (34.2%) were from comprehensive universities, and 371 (65.8%) were from universities of science and technology. Data were collected via a self-administered paper-based questionnaire consisting of three sections: (1) demographic characteristics (sex, age, academic program, and institution type); (2) the Big Five personality traits; and (3) negative emotional states.

Measurements

Big Five Personality Traits

The Big Five personality traits were assessed using the 44-item Big Five Inventory (BFI) developed by John et al. (1991), based on the Five-Factor Model and trait-descriptive adjectives from the Adjective Check List. The BFI includes five subscales: Openness to Experience (10 items), Conscientiousness (9 items), Extraversion (8 items), Agreeableness (9 items), and Neuroticism (8 items). Responses were rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). John et al. (1991) reported internal consistency coefficients (Cronbach's α) between .79 and .87. In the present study, reliability coefficients ranged from .67 to .79, indicating acceptable to good internal consistency.

Negative Emotional States

Negative emotional states were measured using the 21-item Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS-21), developed by Antony et al. (1998) as a shortened version of the original 42-item scale by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995), based on Clark and Watson's tripartite model of anxiety and depression. The DASS-21 comprises three subscales: Depression, Anxiety, and Stress, each containing seven items. Participants rated their experiences over the past week on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 0 ("Did not apply to me at all") to 3 ("Applied to me very much or most of the time"), with higher scores indicating greater severity. Prior studies have reported strong internal consistency for the subscales (Cronbach's α: Depression = .94, Anxiety = .87, Stress = .91; Antony et al., 1998). In the present study, internal consistency coefficients were .87 for Depression, and .81 for both Anxiety and Stress, indicating good reliability.

Poly-BW Indices

In the present study, we applied the W and B indices from the Person-Fit Statistics (PFS) framework proposed by Huang and Lu (2017) to assess atypical response patterns—namely, concealment and exaggeration—on the Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scales (DASS-21). These indices, developed based on Guttman's model and extended for use with polytomously scored items, are designed to detect tendencies to underreport (concealment) or overreport (exaggeration) negative emotional experiences. Additionally, we utilized the C index, which represents personality trait scores adjusted to remove the influence of concealment and exaggeration in personality assessments. This adjustment was used to correct for potential distortions in response behavior when participants completed the Big Five personality inventory, thereby yielding trait scores that more accurately reflect their true characteristics. All indices were computed using the PWBstar 1.0 program (Huang & Lu, 2017), a dedicated tool for analyzing person-fit statistics in multidimensional assessments. Specifically, the W index measures a person's tendency toward concealment, the B index measures a tendency toward exaggeration, and the C index represents personality trait scores corrected for the

influence of both concealment and exaggeration. The calculating formula are given from Equations 1 to 3 as follows:

Concealment (W index)

$$W_i = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^{JT_i}(1-x_{ij}/s_j)\times(q_{iT}^*-q_{.j})}{[(K-1)/2]} \tag{1}$$

Exaggeration (B index)

$$B_i = \frac{\sum_{j=J=T_i+1}^{K}(x_{ij}/s_j)\times(q_{.j}-q_{iT}^*)}{[(K-1)/2]} \tag{2}$$

Adjusted personality trait scores (C index)

$$C_i = \frac{\sum_{j=1}^{JT_i}(x_{ij}/s_j)\times(q_{iT}^*-q_{.j})}{[(K-1)/2]} \tag{3}$$

i: Represents the ith test taker.
j: Represents the jth test item.
x_{ij}/s_j: Represents the correct response rate for the jth item.
K: Test length, the square brackets $[(K-1)/2]$ indicate the floor function, representing the maximum number of response errors.
$q_{.j}$: After sorting the test items in order of increasing difficulty, the ratio of the number of people who answered the jth item incorrectly to the total number of test takers.
q_{iT}^* : Represents the cut-off value, which is the average difficulty of the $J_{Ti\text{ th}}$ and $J_{Ti+1\text{ th}}$ items when the total score of a test taker is T.

Statistical Analysis

Raw response data were processed to derive Poly-BW indices. Multiple linear regression analyses were then conducted, using the forced entry of all Big Five personality traits as predictors and the concealment and exaggeration scores, calculated separately for depression, anxiety, and stress, as dependent variables.

Results

To examine the influence of the Big Five personality traits on response biases in the self-assessment of negative emotions, a series of multiple regression analyses were conducted separately for concealment and exaggeration tendencies across depression, anxiety, and stress assessments. Each model included the C index of Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness as predictors.

Depression

For concealment level in depression assessment (Table 1), the regression model was significant, $F(5, 558) = 16.864$, $p < .001$, with an adjusted $R^2 = .123$. Neuroticism was a significant positive predictor of concealment ($\beta = .318$, $p < .001$), while Agreeableness was a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -.117$, $p = .005$). These results suggest that individuals

higher in Neuroticism were more likely to underreport depressive symptoms, whereas those higher in Agreeableness were less likely to do so.

Regarding exaggeration in depression assessment (Table 2), the regression model was also significant, F (5, 558) = 19.453, $p < .001$, with an adjusted $R^2 = .141$. Neuroticism again positively predicted exaggeration ($\beta = .271$, $p < .001$), while Extraversion ($\beta = -.090$, $p = .040$), Agreeableness ($\beta = -.106$, $p = .010$), and Conscientiousness ($\beta = -.107$, $p = .010$) were all significant negative predictors. These findings indicate that individuals lower in Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness were more likely to overreport depressive symptoms.

Table 1
Regression Analysis of Concealment Level in Depression Assessment Based on the Big Five Personality Traits (N = 564)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	0.000	0.001	—	0.641	.522
C index of Extraversion	−0.002	0.006	−.014	−0.321	.748
C index of Agreeableness	−0.013	0.005	−.117	−2.808	.005
C index of Conscientiousness	0.000	0.002	.006	0.150	.881
C index of Neuroticism	0.041	0.005	.318	7.592	< .001
C index of Openness	0.000	0.003	−.005	-0.127	.899

Note. R^2 = .131, Adjusted R^2 = .123, F (5, 558) = 16.864, $p < .001$.

Table 2
Regression Analysis of Exaggeration Level in Depression Assessment Based on the Big Five Personality Traits (N = 564)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	0.009	0.002	—	4.972	< .001
C index of Extraversion	−0.034	0.016	−.090	−2.056	.040
C index of Agreeableness	−0.033	0.013	−.106	−2.580	.010
C index of Conscientiousness	−0.015	0.006	−.107	−2.575	.010
C index of Neuroticism	0.098	0.015	.271	6.550	< .001
C index of Openness	0.002	0.009	.009	0.213	.832

Note. R^2 = .148, Adjusted R^2 = .141, F (5, 558) = 19.453, $p < .001$.

Anxiety

For concealment level in anxiety assessment (Table 3), the regression model was significant, F (5, 558) = 14.828, $p < .001$, adjusted $R^2 = .109$. Neuroticism was a strong positive predictor ($\beta = .303$, $p < .001$), and Agreeableness was a negative predictor ($\beta = -.119$, $p = .005$), mirroring the pattern observed in the depression model.

The model for exaggeration level in anxiety assessment (Table 4) was also significant, F (5, 558) = 4.993, $p < .001$, but it explained a smaller proportion of variance ($R^2 = .043$). Neuroticism ($\beta = .141$, $p = .001$) and Openness ($\beta = .098$, $p = .031$) were both significant

positive predictors of exaggeration, while the remaining traits did not contribute significantly to the model.

Table 3
Regression Analysis of Concealment Level in Anxiety Assessment Based on the Big Five Personality Traits (N = 564)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	0.004	0.003	—	1.470	.142
C index of Extraversion	0.016	0.023	.031	0.687	.493
C index of Agreeableness	−0.049	0.017	−.119	−2.834	.005
C index of Conscientiousness	−0.008	0.008	−.042	−0.995	.320
C index of Neuroticism	0.148	0.021	.303	7.194	< .001
C index of Openness	0.009	0.012	.031	0.718	.473

Note. R^2 = .117, Adjusted R^2 = .109, F (5, 558) = 14.828, p < .001.

Table 4
Regression Analysis of Exaggeration Level in Anxiety Assessment Based on the Big Five Personality Traits (N = 564)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
Constant	0.020	0.003	—	5.643	< .001
C index of Extraversion	−0.053	0.030	−.082	−1.761	.079
C index of Agreeableness	−0.036	0.023	−.068	−1.565	.118
C index of Conscientiousness	0.000	0.011	−.001	−0.025	.980
C index of Neuroticism	0.087	0.027	.141	3.209	.001
C index of Openness	0.034	0.016	.098	2.157	.031

Note. R^2 = .043, Adjusted R^2 = .034, F (5, 558) = 4.993, p < .001.

Stress

The model for Concealment Level in stress Assessment (Table 5) was the strongest among the three emotions, F (5, 558) = 40.113, p < .001, adjusted R^2 = .258. Neuroticism (β = .442, p < .001), Extraversion (β = .088, p = .032), and Openness (β = .082, p = .039) were positive predictors, while Agreeableness was a strong negative predictor (β = −.237, p < .001). This indicates that individuals high in Neuroticism, Extraversion, and Openness were more likely to conceal stress, whereas those high in Agreeableness were less likely to do so.

For Exaggeration level in stress Assessment (Table 6), the model was also significant, F (5, 558) = 13.874, p < .001, with adjusted R^2 = .103. Extraversion (β = .142, p = .002) and Neuroticism (β = .195, p < .001) positively predicted exaggeration, while Agreeableness (β = −.215, p < .001) and Conscientiousness (β = −.110, p = .010) were significant negative predictors.

Table 5

Regression Analysis of Concealment Level in Stress Assessment Based on the Big Five Personality Traits (N = 564)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
(Constant)	0.002	0.001	—	2.525	.012
C index of Extraversion	0.016	0.008	.088	2.154	.032
C index of Agreeableness	–0.036	0.006	–.237	–6.186	< .001
C index of Conscientiousness	–0.002	0.003	–.021	–0.549	.583
C index of Neuroticism	0.079	0.007	.442	11.484	< .001
C index of Openness	0.008	0.004	.082	2.073	.039

Note. R^2 = .264, Adjusted R^2 = .258, F (5, 558) = 40.113, p < .001.

Table 6

Regression Analysis of Exaggeration Level in Stress Assessment Based on the Big Five Personality Traits (N = 564)

Predictor	B	SE B	β	t	p
(Constant)	0.017	0.002	—	9.318	< .001
C index of Extraversion	0.051	0.016	0.142	3.168	.002
C index of Agreeableness	–0.064	0.012	–.215	–5.105	< .001
C index of Conscientiousness	–0.015	0.006	–.110	–2.587	.010
C index of Neuroticism	0.068	0.015	.195	4.614	.000
C index of Openness	0.007	0.009	.034	0.775	.439

Note. R^2 = .111, Adjusted R^2 = .103, F (5, 558) = 13.874, p < .001.

Overall, Neuroticism emerged as a consistent and strong predictor of both concealment and exaggeration across all three negative emotions. Agreeableness was also a significant negative predictor of both response biases, with particularly strong effects observed for concealment. These findings support the hypothesis that individual differences in personality traits significantly influence both the direction and magnitude of response biases in self-reported assessments of negative emotional states.

Discussion

This study investigated the influence of the Big Five personality traits on response biases, specifically concealment and exaggeration, in self-reports of negative emotional states. The findings demonstrate that personality traits significantly shape how individuals report experiences of depression, anxiety, and stress.

Neuroticism emerged as the most consistent and robust predictor of both concealment and exaggeration across all three emotional domains. Individuals high in Neuroticism were more likely to underreport and overreport negative emotions, suggesting a general instability in self-presentation. This pattern may reflect heightened emotional reactivity and sensitivity to perceived social evaluation, consistent with prior research indicating that individuals high in Neuroticism are more susceptible to socially desirable responding.

Agreeableness also played a significant role, particularly in predicting concealment. Individuals scoring high on Agreeableness tended to underreport negative emotions, possibly due to their motivation to maintain social harmony and avoid interpersonal conflict. This aligns with findings from Van der Schyff et al. (2022), who noted a negative association between agreeableness and socially desirable responding, suggesting that such individuals may suppress distress to avoid burdening others.

Our findings also revealed other associations between personality traits and response biases. Extraversion and Conscientiousness were negatively associated with exaggeration in depression and stress assessments, indicating that individuals lower on these traits may be more prone to overreport their emotional difficulties. These results show the complexity of personality, emotion interactions and suggest that specific traits may differentially influence response patterns depending on the emotional domain.

This study contributes to a growing body of literature recognizing that emotional self-reports are shaped not only by social norms, which often discourage the open expression of negative affect in Western cultures (Bastian et al., 2012; Dejonckheere & Bastian, 2021), but also by stable dispositional factors. By integrating personality into the assessment of response bias, our findings offer a more refined understanding of how individuals navigate the social and psychological pressures surrounding emotional disclosure.

Among the strengths of this study are the use of validated instruments and a relatively large sample, which enhances the reliability of the findings. However, some limitations should be acknowledged. The cross-sectional design precludes causal inference, and the predominantly female sample may limit generalizability. Future research should adopt longitudinal designs and more diverse samples to examine how personality-driven response biases evolve over time and across contexts.

Conclusion

This study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating how the Big Five personality traits, particularly Neuroticism, are systematically associated with tendencies to conceal or exaggerate negative emotional states. By applying the Poly-BW method, we were able to capture detailed response bias patterns that traditional self-report approaches may overlook. These findings emphasize the importance of accounting for individual personality differences when interpreting emotional assessments. Future research should explore integrating personality-based correction procedures into assessment protocols to enhance measurement precision and improve the effectiveness of emotion-focused interventions.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this work the authors used OpenAI's ChatGPT to improve the readability and language of the manuscript. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Elevating Expertise:
The Role of Lifelong Learning in Filipino Counselor Career Growth

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Abstract

This study explored the career progression of counselors and their aspirations to acquire new therapeutic techniques to foster professional growth and enhance client care. In the context of an increasingly complex mental health landscape, counselors emphasize the importance of continuous education to address diverse client needs and adapt to emerging trends in the field. Employing an explanatory sequential design, the research integrates focus-group discussions (FGDs) and Individual Development Plans (IDPs) as key tools to examine counselors' current competencies and identify the therapeutic approaches they aim to master. Quantitative data were first collected to establish baseline competencies and goals, followed by qualitative insights from FGDs to provide a deeper understanding and context. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns and themes related to counselors' professional growth, which revealed that counselors are proficient in widely used techniques such as client-centered therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and dialectical behavior therapy. They reported confidence in applying these methods due to regular practice and formal training. The study underscored the shared desire for ongoing learning opportunities, formal certifications, and structured supervision, highlighting the importance of tailored professional development strategies to support counselors' growth.

Keywords: counselors, competency, career growth, lifelong learning

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Introduction

Counselors face growing demands to remain responsive, skilled, and adaptable with the growing complexity of global mental health issues. With client concerns becoming more diverse and nuanced, there is a heightened need for counselors to pursue continuous education and master a broader range of therapeutic techniques. Moreover, the COVID-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented disruptions across all sectors of society, with higher education institutions experiencing significant shifts not only in instruction but also in the delivery of mental health services. University counseling centers, in particular, were thrust into a period of rapid adaptation as traditional face-to-face counseling was abruptly replaced by digital platforms. This transformation has not only changed the way counseling is delivered but has also reshaped the nature of students' psychological concerns, revealing deeper and more complex mental health challenges brought on by prolonged isolation, academic uncertainty, and socio-emotional stress.

This study focuses on the career progression of Filipino counselors, particularly their aspirations to acquire new therapeutic methods that can enhance the quality of client care and support their professional growth. As counselors navigate various roles and client populations, their drive for competency expansion becomes vital in maintaining effectiveness and credibility. Through formal training, supervision, and professional development, counselors seek to deepen their practice and take on advanced or specialized roles within the profession.

Utilizing an explanatory sequential research design, this study integrates both quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a comprehensive view of counselor development. The research began with the collection of quantitative data through Individual Development Plans (IDPs) to assess baseline competencies and professional goals. This was followed by focus-group discussions (FGDs) to enrich the data with narrative insights. Thematic analysis revealed that counselors are generally confident in their use of established techniques such as client-centered therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy, and dialectical behavior therapy. However, the findings also pointed to a strong collective desire for further growth through structured learning, formal certifications, and continuous supervision. These results emphasize the need for tailored professional development strategies that align with counselors' evolving roles and long-term aspirations.

Related Literature

The counseling profession in the Philippines has undergone significant development over the years, shaped by cultural, educational, and socio-political changes. Tuason et al. (2021) describe the field as still emerging, often constrained by limited resources and the absence of standardized competencies across institutions. The profession is relatively young, formally established only since 2004 with the Philippine Guidance and Counselling Act, and requires advanced qualifications, including a master's degree and licensure, which contributes to the scarcity of registered counselors in schools. Filipino counselors frequently take on multiple responsibilities beyond therapy, including guidance, academic advising, and administrative functions, particularly in school settings. A career as a school counselor in the Philippines is characterized by significant challenges alongside opportunities for meaningful impact but requires clearer role definition, increased professional support, and culturally attuned practices to overcome systemic and societal challenges (Harrison et al., 2023).

School Counseling Pre- and Post-Pandemic

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, school counselors faced Numerous and competing demands, role conflicts, overwhelming workloads, lack of clear role definition and increasing mental health needs of students (Akgul et al., 2021; Dimitriou et al., 2024; Heled & Davidovitch, 2021; Savitz-Romer et al., 2021). Before the pandemic, counselors' responsibilities were often blurred, leading to role ambiguity and burnout, especially when they were tasked with noncounseling duties (Villares et al., 2022) and under-resourced and burdened with large caseloads and non-counseling duties (Dimitriou et al., 2024; Lancaster & Brasfield, 2023).

Counselors primarily operated within traditional, face-to-face settings, where they focused on direct interactions with students in addressing typical developmental and psychosocial concerns (Mababa & Fabella, 2023). Counselors primarily addressed typical developmental and psychosocial issues faced by young people (Bozbayindir & Akalin, 2025; Długosz, 2021; Mehr et al., 2024).

The COVID-19 pandemic marked a pivotal turning point for the counseling profession, introducing significant challenges alongside opportunities for innovation and growth. The abrupt transition to remote learning increased demands for mental health support while also intensifying burnout, role ambiguity, and stress among school counselors (Akgul et al., 2021; Heled & Davidovitch, 2021). In the Philippine context, many counselors were unprepared for online modalities and faced difficulties in building rapport and adapting to digital platforms (Mababa & Fabella, 2023).

During the pandemic, counselors are expected to offer tailored interventions that consider pandemic-related challenges faced by youth (Długosz, 2021; Ogbonna et al., 2024). They must adopt agile and adaptive strategies to effectively support students and communities amidst ongoing uncertainties (Tefera et al., 2024). The scope of their emotional support has also expanded to include families and teachers, emphasizing a systemic approach to well-being (Dost et al., 2022; Mehr et al., 2024).

Despite these challenges, the pandemic became a catalyst for professional reflection and transformation. Counselors navigated the psychological impact not only on their students but also on themselves. Research by Uğur and Sarı (2022) highlighted how mindfulness and the transformative power of suffering facilitated post-traumatic growth among counselors. Similarly, Grimes et al. (2023) documented how rural counselors adopted trauma-informed practices under unique stressors, showcasing adaptability and resilience in underserved areas.

In the post-pandemic context, the role of school counselors has significantly expanded to address complex psychosocial needs. Several studies highlight the need for intentional support for counselors post-pandemic (Akgul et al., 2021). Training programs now emphasize the acquisition of new competencies to navigate the increased complexity and broadened scope of counselors' roles (Akgul et al., 2021; Behl et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024). Reducing administrative burdens and improving access to mental health resources have also emerged as critical priorities (Lancaster & Brasfield, 2023). Furthermore, specific response manuals and systematic training in crisis intervention have been recommended to enhance preparedness for future emergencies (Kim & Yoo, 2023).

Counselors have experienced increased autonomy, often supported by trust from school leaders, which has in turn enhanced their self-efficacy (Dimitriou & Panaoura, 2024). Their roles now require interdisciplinary collaboration and ongoing professional development incorporating innovative and holistic support strategies (Dimitriou & Panaoura, 2024). These include psychoeducational activities aimed at fostering psychological resilience, positive emotions, and creativity among adolescents (Dimitriou et al., 2022).

Modern guidance programs now integrate emotion regulation, conscious technology use, social skills, bullying prevention, and school motivation (Bozbayindir & Akalın, 2025). This shift underscores the importance of collaborative efforts among counselors, educators, administrators, and families in addressing students' academic and psychosocial needs. The profession continues to evolve, as counselors redefine their roles to create systemic impacts and leverage virtual tools for effective service delivery (Heled & Davidovitch, 2021).

Professional Development

Continuous professional development has consistently played a crucial role in enhancing school counselors' competencies, both before and after the COVID-19 pandemic. While pre-pandemic development efforts often focused on foundational skills and traditional practices, the pandemic underscored the urgency for dynamic, adaptive, and technology-integrated training to address emerging challenges. This evolution emphasizes the need for ongoing learning to maintain relevance, efficacy, and resilience in the counseling profession (Behl et al., 2024; Dimitriou & Panaoura, 2024; Mababa & Fabella, 2023).

Counselor effectiveness is largely influenced by adherence to professional standards and competencies. Elemino et al. (2024) highlighted the growing recognition among Filipino counselors of the need for continuing education to strengthen their skills in psychological assessment, treatment planning, and culturally responsive practices. The Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) mandates the accumulation of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) units for license renewal; however, access to these opportunities remains limited due to financial and logistical barriers (Santos & Dizon, 2020). In response to shifting demands, Harrison et al. (2023) emphasized the inclusion of leadership training, digital literacy, and administrative competence in counselor education programs. Complementing these perspectives, Yue (2025) introduced a competency model for evaluating college counselors, underscoring the necessity for continuous skill development aligned with educational innovations.

Lifelong learning, encompassing academic coursework, professional certifications, workshops, seminars, and informal peer engagement, has become increasingly vital in the counseling field. Given the breadth of knowledge and ethical responsibilities involved, counselors must remain current with evolving practices. UNESCO (2015) recognizes lifelong learning as fundamental for inclusive and sustainable development. In the counseling profession, such learning ensures alignment with ethical standards and best practices (Corey, 2017). Beyond compliance with licensure requirements, lifelong learning enables counselors to remain responsive to client needs and emerging psychological paradigms. Multiple studies affirm that ongoing professional education enhances counselor confidence, theoretical grounding, and clinical effectiveness. Anctil et al. (2012) and Hechanova (2014) observed that counselors who engage in regular learning activities tend to report greater job satisfaction and mobility. Furthermore, Bangeles et al. (2025) emphasized that advanced competencies gained through formal education and evidence-based training equip Filipino counselors for

leadership and advocacy roles. However, in the Philippine context, access and participation in CPD programs remain problematic due to economic and institutional constraints (Santos & Dizon, 2020). While professional organizations offer various development opportunities, their coverage and affordability are inconsistent across regions and sectors.

With this concern, it is still vital to address the evolving role of counselors and the need to increase competency, especially in the context of rising clinical cases and disaster-related crises like the COVID-19 pandemic. Kim and Yoo (2023) stress the necessity of developing specific response manuals and competency enhancement programs through systematic education and training to secure counselors' expertise in disaster-related crisis intervention. Moreover, the a need for the development and implementation of psychoeducational activities and interventions aimed at enhancing psychological resilience, positive emotions, and creativity-related outcomes among adolescents (Dimitriou et al., 2022). Studies also highlighted the necessity for counseling training programs for counselors to acquire new competencies with the increased complexity and breadth of their role (Behl et al., 2024; Mababa & Fabella, 2023), including enhanced training in technology (Akgul et al., 2021; Behl et al., 2024; Chen et al., 2023; Li et al., 2024).

Counselor Well-being

Counselor well-being has emerged as a key concern, especially given the emotional demands of the profession, which intensified during the pandemic. Feng et al. (2024) highlighted the importance of comprehensive support systems, including regular supervision, strong peer connections, and institutional backing, in mitigating burnout and promoting long-term professional stability.

Belief in one's professional capabilities, or self-efficacy, has also been shown to be critical in navigating evolving demands. Boon et al. (2021) found that Malaysian school counselors' self-efficacy was significantly influenced by supervisor support, mastery experiences, and access to relevant training. Similarly, Niles et al. (2024) explored the interconnections between mindfulness, occupational self-efficacy, and burnout, noting that counselors with greater mindfulness and self-confidence experienced reduced levels of burnout. Adding a sociocultural dimension, Kılıç et al. (2024) examined how multicultural counseling competencies, social justice values, and attitudes toward homosexuality contributed to counselors' self-efficacy and effectiveness.

In the Philippine context, Gojar et al. (2025) noted that many counselors struggle to balance personal and professional responsibilities, largely due to insufficient organizational support. Promoting wellness strategies, consistent supervision, and ongoing mentorship is essential for cultivating a resilient counseling workforce. Supervisory and institutional support also play a crucial role in enhancing the professional quality of life. Gojar et al. (2025) found that both supervisory and organizational support significantly influenced the well-being and job satisfaction of Filipino guidance associates and designates, prompting the development of a supportive supervision program. This finding is echoed by Salsabila et al. (2024), who emphasized that principals' social support and counselors' self-compassion were key predictors of counselor performance. It is also important to increase organizational support to prevent burnout and ensure counselors can meet both their professional obligations and personal well-being (Akgul et al., 2021; Lancaster & Brasfield, 2023), including enhancing access to school-based mental health resources (Lancaster & Brasfield, 2023).

Methodology

This study employed an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design to explore the career progression of counselors and their pursuit of new therapeutic techniques for professional development. This design was chosen to allow for a comprehensive understanding of both the measurable aspects of counselors' competencies and the deeper, qualitative insights into their professional goals and learning aspirations.

The participants in this study were licensed counselors from a university setting in Manila, Philippines. A purposive sampling method was used to select individuals actively engaged in counseling work and ongoing professional development. A total of 12 counselors participated in the study, ensuring a diverse representation of backgrounds, years of experience, and areas of specialization.

For the quantitative part, Participants completed the Counselor Initial Development Plan (IDP), a structured tool designed to assess their current competencies across key areas of counseling practice, including therapeutic techniques, assessment skills, documentation, and case management. The IDP also gathered information about counselors' goals for acquiring new competencies and areas of specialization.

The qualitative part is gathered through a focus group discussion (FGD) conducted to provide in-depth context to the quantitative findings. These discussions explored participants' experiences with professional growth, their motivation to pursue further training, and perceived barriers to acquiring new therapeutic techniques. The FGDs were semi-structured and facilitated by the researchers to encourage open dialogue and interaction among participants.

Data Analysis

The quantitative aspect is analyzed via descriptive statistics were employed to analyze the survey responses, providing a structured overview of changes in counselor competencies over time. While the qualitative data from the focus group discussions were transcribed and analyzed thematically using NVIVO software.

Themes and patterns were identified through inductive coding to reflect the subtleties of the participants' experiences. For Following individual analyses, the findings from both methodologies were compared and synthesized during the interpretation stage. This comparison allowed the researchers to detect convergences and divergences between data sets, thereby offering a deeper and more integrated understanding of how Filipino university counselors navigated the challenges introduced by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Results

The quantitative analysis aimed to outline the general competencies of counselors, their particular skills, and their comfort with different counseling techniques. Descriptive statistics, such as the mean, standard deviation, and range, were computed.

The overall competency score from the Counselor Initial Development Plan-Counselor Competency Survey yielded a mean of 2.89, with a standard deviation of 0.50, suggesting a

moderate level of self-assessed competence across participants. Scores ranged from 1.80 to 3.80, indicating varied levels of perceived proficiency among the 14 counselors.

The average scores for individual competencies show that counselors rate themselves most confidently in areas such as Client Evaluation (M = 3.07), Referral and Follow-up (M = 3.21), and Professional and Ethical Responsibilities (M = 3.29), with overall scores ranging from 2.00 to 4.00. These results indicate that counselors feel particularly competent when it comes to assessing clients and upholding ethical standards. In contrast, competencies like Family & Couples Counseling (M = 2.14) and Application to Practice (M = 2.57) received lower ratings, pointing to potential areas for further development.

In terms of counseling approaches, counselors report feeling most comfortable with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (M = 4.21) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (M = 3.93). These approaches seem to be well understood and implemented by the counselors. On the other hand, counselors are less comfortable with approaches like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Cognitive Processing Therapy, both of which have mean scores of 3.43, suggesting a moderate level of comfort. This revealed that most counselors rated themselves as proficient in widely practiced modalities such as client-centered therapy, cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT), and dialectical behavior therapy (DBT). These findings suggest that regular application and formal training contribute to counselors' confidence and competence in using evidence-based interventions. This observation aligns with previous research showing that skill mastery is often reinforced by repeated use and exposure to structured.

The qualitative analysis of the data revealed several key themes that highlight the challenges and limitations faced by counselors. These themes reflect the complexities of their roles and the various factors influencing their ability to provide effective support to students. The following themes were identified.

Counselor Competencies

The data gathered revealed that counselors recognize a diverse range of competencies as crucial for their ability to provide effective support to students. These competencies not only reflect their skill sets but also underscore the significance of specific areas of expertise in addressing students' academic and emotional needs. The following subthemes highlight key competencies identified by counselors in their practice.

Subtheme 1: Academic Counseling

Counselors in the study expressed the importance of academic counseling as a critical competency. Many counselors emphasized their role in helping students navigate academic challenges, such as course selection, managing academic pressures, and addressing learning difficulties. According to the data, counselors felt that academic counseling requires a solid understanding of both the educational system and the individual needs of students. They reported working closely with students to develop academic strategies, set achievable goals, and encourage perseverance in the face of academic setbacks.

Subtheme 2: Anxiety Management

A significant number of counselors mentioned that anxiety management was a core competency in their practice, particularly as students faced heightened stress due to academic pressures and the uncertainty brought on by the pandemic. Counselors shared that they often provide coping strategies, such as mindfulness exercises, stress reduction techniques, and cognitive-behavioral approaches, to help students manage their anxiety. The data indicated that counselors felt particularly competent in helping students address anxiety, noting that it was essential for creating a supportive environment where students could focus on their academic work without being overwhelmed by stress.

Subtheme 3: Career Counseling

Career counseling emerged as another vital competency from the data. Counselors reported that guiding students through the career exploration process was an essential aspect of their role. They noted helping students identify their strengths, interests, and potential career paths, and providing information on various career opportunities. The data revealed that counselors felt a strong sense of responsibility in assisting students with career planning, including offering advice on academic pathways and preparing students for the workforce. This competency was seen as particularly important for students who were uncertain about their future direction, with counselors providing valuable insights into job market trends and career readiness.

Subtheme 4: Counseling for Students With Clinical Diagnoses

Counselors in the study expressed that one of the significant challenges they faced was working with students who had clinical diagnoses, such as anxiety disorders, depression, or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). The data revealed that while many counselors felt competent in offering general counseling support, they recognized the need for specialized training to address the unique needs of students with clinical conditions. Counselors often described how they worked closely with mental health professionals, such as psychologists or psychiatrists, to ensure that students with clinical diagnoses received appropriate care.

Several counselors highlighted their use of tailored approaches, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) and other therapeutic interventions, to support students with clinical diagnoses. However, they also noted that the complexity of these cases sometimes left them feeling uncertain or unprepared, especially when it came to managing severe mental health issues. In many cases, counselors collaborated with families and external healthcare providers to ensure a comprehensive treatment plan for the student.

The data emphasized that while counselors are often the first point of contact for students with mental health concerns, there is a growing need for ongoing professional development to strengthen their ability to address clinical diagnoses effectively. Counselors expressed a desire for additional training in mental health assessment, crisis intervention, and trauma-informed care to better support students with these conditions.

Subtheme 5: Co-management With Other Mental Health Professionals

The data gathered also highlighted the importance of co-management with other mental health professionals as a key competency. Counselors reported collaborating regularly with school psychologists, social workers, and external therapists to provide holistic support for students. This collaborative approach allowed counselors to address both academic and emotional issues in a coordinated manner, ensuring that students received comprehensive care. Counselors shared that teamwork with other mental health professionals was essential for managing more complex cases, such as trauma or severe mental health issues, and allowed for a more integrated approach to student well-being.

Counselors' Limitations and Difficulties

From the data gathered, it became clear that counselors face a variety of challenges and limitations in their roles. These difficulties impact their ability to effectively support students, leading to stress, burnout, and a struggle to provide the highest quality of care. The following subthemes emerged from the data.

Subtheme 1: Counselors Are Spread Too Thin

Counselors consistently reported being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of their responsibilities. Many noted that they were stretched thin across multiple duties, from managing large caseloads to handling administrative tasks. As a result, counselors expressed difficulty in providing individualized attention to students, which they felt was essential for effective counseling. The pressure to juggle these multiple roles often led to burnout and frustration, with counselors feeling that their capacity to truly support students was limited.

Subtheme 2: Counselors' Mental Health

The data revealed that counselors are not immune to the emotional toll of their work. Several counselors shared that the constant exposure to students' mental health issues, trauma, and crises left them feeling emotionally drained. Many reported experiencing burnout and compassion fatigue, highlighting the psychological burden their roles placed on them. Counselors also expressed concern that their own mental health needs were often overlooked, as they focused on providing support to students, leading to feelings of isolation and stress.

Subtheme 3: Incongruence to Certain Approaches

Counselors indicated that there were times when certain counseling approaches did not align with their personal values, the school culture, or the specific needs of their students. This misalignment created challenges in fully embracing and applying certain therapeutic methods. For instance, some counselors mentioned difficulties with online counseling methods, feeling that these approaches lacked the personal connection that in-person sessions offered. This incongruence made it harder for counselors to engage fully with their work and deliver interventions that felt authentic and effective.

Subtheme 4: Lack of Experience in Handling Certain Cases

A recurring theme in the data was counselors feeling underprepared for handling certain types of cases. Many counselors mentioned that, while they had general training in student

support, there were situations involving trauma, severe mental health issues, or crisis intervention where they felt inadequate. Several counselors expressed a lack of confidence when faced with complex cases, which impacted their ability to provide effective support. They noted that more specialized training would have helped them feel more equipped to handle these challenges.

Subtheme 5: Limited Skills

The data also highlighted that many counselors felt their skill sets were limited, especially when dealing with new technologies or specialized counseling techniques. Some counselors admitted that they had not received sufficient training in digital counseling platforms, which became increasingly important during the pandemic. Others mentioned gaps in their skills related to trauma-informed care or other emerging counseling methods. This skills gap often left counselors feeling less confident in their ability to meet the diverse needs of their students.

Discussion

Counselors in the Philippines reported being most comfortable with Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), while newer approaches like Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction and Cognitive Processing Therapy indicated a need for additional training. This highlights the importance of ongoing professional development to ensure counselors are equipped for diverse client needs.

Key competencies such as Academic Counseling, Anxiety Management, and Career Counseling were identified as critical. However, many counselors expressed a need for specialized training to handle clinical diagnoses and complex cases, especially involving trauma or severe mental health issues. Collaboration with mental health professionals was also emphasized for a more holistic support system. Tuason et al. (2021) noted that local training often focuses on generalist skills, prompting counselors to seek advanced education.

The pandemic further exposed the need for competence in digital and hybrid counseling, with counselors reporting difficulties in maintaining confidentiality and rapport online. This has led to a demand for structured training in online counseling ethics and virtual engagement (Mababa & Fabella, 2023).

Additionally, counselors seek leadership development in areas like strategic planning and advocacy, which are essential for advancing in educational institutions and community settings. Bangeles et al. (2025) highlighted that leadership and evidence-based practices can enhance counselor effectiveness.

Burnout is a significant issue due to large caseloads, administrative duties, and emotional strain. Feng et al. (2024) stressed the need for interventions that address counselors' well-being, including workload management and emotional resilience training.

Lifelong learning has been key to Filipino counselors' professional growth, improving practical skills, confidence, and job satisfaction (Kılıç et al., 2024). It also enhances career mobility, as acquiring new competencies opens doors to specialized roles and leadership positions (Anctil et al., 2012; Elemino et al., 2024). Furthermore, professional development

fosters networking and exposure to innovations, enriching counselors' careers (Hechanova, 2014).

Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, continuous professional development (CPD) is a crucial foundation for the growth, resilience, and adaptability of Filipino counselors, particularly in response to challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic. This study underscores the importance of ongoing education in enhancing counselors' competencies, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction, which ultimately leads to better service delivery. The emergence of hybrid counseling models and the need for cultural responsiveness further highlight the necessity for sustained professional growth.

To strengthen the counseling profession, this study recommends several key actions: expanding access to affordable and regionally relevant CPD opportunities, integrating digital competencies into counselor education programs, and implementing structured supervision and mentoring frameworks to support counselor well-being and mitigate burnout. Additionally, fostering multicultural competence through ongoing training and promoting practitioner-led research and policy advocacy will ensure that counselors remain responsive to the evolving needs of diverse populations. By addressing these recommendations, stakeholders can help create a more competent, adaptive, and resilient counseling workforce, capable of meeting the complex needs of clients in both educational and community settings.

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The Effect of Sense of *Ibasho* and Sense of Authenticity on Mental Health: Comparison of Workplace, SNS and Third Places

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Abstract

This study examined self-usefulness and authenticity in three different situations: the workplace and school, third places such as hobby groups and groups of friends from school days, and anonymous Social Networking Services (SNS). Furthermore, it investigated the relationship between the sense of *Ibasho* and mental health. Participants were recruited through a crowdsourcing website, with approximately 300 participants initially enrolled. Data from 290 participants (148 males, 142 females; $M = 42.17$, $SD = 8.79$) were analyzed. Self-usefulness and authenticity in each situation were assessed using the *Sense of Ibasho Scale* (Ishimoto, 2010) and statistical significance was examined. Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated for each situation, confirming values of $\alpha = .89$ or higher. Therefore, the analysis was conducted using the same subscale structures as in previous studies. A one-way ANOVA (within-subjects design) was performed to examine whether there were significant differences in self-usefulness and authenticity across the three situations. The results indicated that self-usefulness was significantly higher in third places than in the workplace and school, and higher in the workplace and school than in SNS. Additionally, authenticity was significantly higher in third places than in the workplace and school, and higher in SNS than in the workplace and school. These findings align with previous research, demonstrating significant differences in the self-usefulness and authenticity depending on the situation. In addition, the result was shown that lower levels of self-usefulness and authenticity were associated with a tendency for decreased mental health.

Keywords: ibasho (existential place), sense of *ibasho*, authenticity, mental health

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Introduction

Background

In modern Japanese society, where computers and smartphones are widespread, people are increasingly communicating with friends and others online, in addition to communicating in real life at places like work, school, and home, and in third places such as hobby groups and meeting places of friends with similar interests.

Furthermore, the spread of computers and smartphones has led to an increase in users of X (Twitter) and Instagram accounts using account names of their own choosing rather than their real names, and using these accounts anonymously. As a result, it is suggested that anonymous Social Networking Services (hereafter, SNS) such as X (Twitter), Instagram, and internet bulletin boards have become part of people's daily lives and a place to be.

Translation of "*Ibasho*"

When translating the Japanese word *Ibasho* into English, it is rendered as *Ibasho* or *Ibasyo*. The difficulty of translating the Japanese word *Ibasho*, which includes psychological aspects, has been noted due to the different interpretations and definitions of *Ibasho* (Nakafuji, 2015).

In English, the most frequently used translations of the word Ibasho are Existential Place (Sugimoto & Shoji, 2006), "Psychological space we do not have rootless feeling" (Ishimoto, 2009), and Existential Place (Ishimoto, 2010).

This study uses the *Sense of Ibasho Scale* developed by Ishimoto (2010) to examine the sense of *Ibasho*, and will refer to it as *Ibasho* hereafter.

Previous Research on Authenticity

The *Sense of Authenticity Scale* was developed, and it has been suggested that a sense of authenticity has a positive impact on psychological well-being (Ito & Kodama, 2005a). In addition, a negative correlation was observed between authenticity and depressive-anxious feelings and physical responses, and the relationship between authenticity and stress responses was clarified (Ito & Kodama, 2005b). Furthermore, a positive correlation was observed between authenticity and interpersonal relationships, and a negative correlation was also observed between avoiding people and being overly concerned about what other people think (Ito & Kodama, 2006).

Ishimoto (2010) developed the *Sense of Ibasho Scale* to measure the sense of *Ibasho* based on sense of authenticity and sense of self-usefulness. The *Sense of Ibasho Scale* consists of 13 items, including six items from the *Sense of Authenticity Scale* (Ito & Kodama, 2005a) to measure the sense of authenticity, and seven items to measure the sense of self-usefulness. In addition, the *Sense of Ibasho Scale* has been reported to measure the sense of *Ibasho* in situations (e.g., friendships, family relationships) that align with the research purpose (Ishimoto, 2010).

Fujino (2017) used the *Sense of Ibasho Scale* to measure the sense of *Ibasho* on SNS and compared it with the sense of *Ibasho* in real life. Additionally, the study examined the

relationship between interpersonal relationships and well-being among friends who interact only on SNS and those in real life.

The *Sense of Ibasho Scale*, as demonstrated in previous studies, can measure the sense of *Ibasho* in various situations and will be used to measure the sense of *Ibasho* in this study.

Definition of Third Places

This study defines third places as locations where individuals interact with others in their real lives outside of work, school and home (e.g., hobby groups, groups of friends from school days, lessons and volunteer activities). Given that many individuals may have multiple third places, this study utilizes the term "third places" in the plural form.

Purpose of This Study

This study uses the *Sense of Ibasho Scale* to examine self-usefulness and authenticity in three situations: the workplace, anonymous SNS, and third places. Furthermore, this study aims to examine the relationship between the *Sense of Ibasho Scale* and mental health.

Methods

Participants

Participants were required to meet the following eligibility criteria: (a) be between 20 and 59 years old, (b) be a native Japanese speaker and able to participate in the survey with a high level of concentration, (c) regularly use an anonymous SNS, actively posting content and interacting with others, excluding those who only browsed the accounts of actors, actresses, or companies, or who registered and used their real names, (d) perceive themselves as having third places in real life outside of their home, workplace or school, and SNS communities, and (e) have read and agreed to the survey purpose on the CrowdWorks, Inc. (hereafter, CrowdWorks) recruitment page or Google Form.

In the CrowdWorks recruitment page and the Google Form, participants were explicitly informed that a third places refers to hobby groups, groups of friends from school days, or similar social settings.

The survey was completed by 298 participants who met the eligibility criteria. As a data quality check, eight participants who provided responses other than the designated answer to the satisficing screening item "Please do not select this item" were excluded from the analysis. Consequently, the final sample comprised 290 participants (148 males, 142 females), with a mean age of 42.17 years ($M = 42.17$, $SD = 8.79$). After confirming that the response form had been completed, participants were compensated with 60 yen (JPY) through CrowdWorks.

Measures

Measurement of the Sense of "Ibasho" at Workplace and School

For the 13 items of the *Sense of Ibasho Scale*, developed by Ishimoto (2010), participants were asked to respond to each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "does not apply (1)" to "applies (5)", with the following instruction:

The item assessing the sense of *Ibasho* at work and school read: "Please think about yourself when you were interacting with others at work or school. To what extent did the following statements apply to you?"

Measurement of the Sense of "Ibasho" in Third Places

For the 13 items of the *Sense of Ibasho Scale*, developed by Ishimoto (2010), participants were asked to respond to each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "does not apply (1)" to "applies (5)", with the following instruction:

The item assessing the sense of *Ibasho* in third places read: "Please think about yourself when you were spending time interacting with other people in your third places. To what extent did the following statements apply to you?"

Measurement of the Sense of "Ibasho" on SNS

For the 13 items of the *Sense of Ibasho Scale*, developed by Ishimoto (2010), participants were asked to respond to each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "does not apply (1)" to "applies (5)", with the following instruction:

The item assessing the sense of *Ibasho* on SNS read: "Please think about yourself when you were spending time interacting with others on anonymous SNS. To what extent did the following statements apply to you?"

Measurement of Mental Health

For the 10 items of the *Japanese version of the Kessler 10 Psychological Distress Scale (K10)*, developed by Furukawa et al. (2003), participants were asked to respond to each item on a five-point Likert scale ranging from "never (1)" to "always (5)", with the following instruction:

The items assessing psychological distress read: "Please select the number that best applied to you for each item."

Procedure

In November 2024, a recruitment webpage was posted on the website operated by CrowdWorks to recruit survey participants, and approximately 300 participants were recruited. Participants accessed the survey form, which was created using Google Forms, from their personal computers or smartphones at their convenience and completed the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

Statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics version 27 (Windows 64-bit).

Ethical Considerations

This study, participants were recruited from the CrowdWorks survey recruitment page, and those who provided informed consent by agreeing to the consent section on the Google Form were considered to be survey participants. In addition, the survey recruitment page and response form explicitly stated that participation in the survey was voluntary and that there would be no adverse consequences for choosing not to respond or discontinuing participation.

Furthermore, this study was conducted after thorough deliberation by psychological researchers and medical professionals to ensure that ethical considerations were adequately addressed in the survey items and content and the process of obtaining informed consent.

Results

Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient Calculation

The mean and standard deviation of the *Sense of Ibasho Scale* and the *K10*, as well as Cronbach's α, were calculated (Table 1). The self-usefulness subscale of the *Sense of Ibasho Scale* demonstrated high internal consistency across Workplace and School, Third places, and SNS ($\alpha = .90 - .93$). The authenticity subscale also demonstrated high internal consistency in all situations ($\alpha = .89 - .92$). Additionally, the *K10* demonstrated high internal consistency ($\alpha = .95$). Therefore, the subscale structures established in previous studies were retained for subsequent analyses.

Table 1
Descriptive Statistics and Cronbach's Alpha

	M	SD	α		M	SD	α
Workplace, School				**Third Places**			
Self-usefulness	3.25	0.79	.90	Self-usefulness	3.36	0.85	.92
Authenticity	3.34	0.96	.92	Authenticity	3.91	0.79	.92
SNS				**Mental Health**			
Self-usefulness	2.52	0.88	.93	K10	22.11	10.16	.95
Authenticity	3.49	0.82	.89				

Inter-Subscale Correlation

Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships among the subscales of each scale (Table 2).

Self-Usefulness

A correlational analysis using Pearson's correlation coefficient revealed significant positive relationships between workplace and school and third places ($r = .60$, $p < .001$), workplace and school and SNS ($r = .47$, $p < .001$), and third places and SNS ($r = .53$, $p < .001$).

Authenticity

A correlational analysis using Pearson's correlation coefficient revealed significant positive relationships between workplace and school and third places ($r = .46$, $p < .001$), workplace and school and SNS ($r = .34$, $p < .001$), and third places and SNS ($r = .49$, $p < .001$).

Sense of "Ibasho" and Mental Health

Self-usefulness was weakly to moderately negatively correlated with workplace and school and *K10* ($r = -.42$, $p < .001$), third places and *K10* ($r = -.32$, $p < .001$), and SNS and *K10* ($r = -.17$, $p = .003$).

Authenticity was weakly to moderately negatively correlated with workplace and school and *K10* ($r = -.39$, $p < .001$), third places and *K10* ($r = -.32$, $p < .001$), and SNS and *K10* ($r = -.21$, $p < .001$).

Table 2
Inter-subscale Correlations

|		II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
Workplace, School	I : Self-usefulness	.69 **	.60 **	.45 **	.47 **	.35 **	-.42 **
	II : Authenticity	—	.43 **	.46 **	.33 **	.34 **	-.39 **
Third Places	III : Self-usefulness		—	.63	.53 **	.33 **	-.32 **
	IV : Authenticity			—	.30 **	.49 **	-.32 **
SNS	V : Self-usefulness				—	.44 **	-.17 **
	VI : Authenticity					—	-.21 **
Mental Health	VII : K10						—

** $p < .01$

Comparison of Three Situations: One-Way ANOVA (Within-Subjects Design)

Self-Usefulness

To examine whether there were significant differences in self-usefulness scores in the three situations, a one-way ANOVA (within-subjects design) was conducted. Mauchly's sphericity test was significant ($p = .006$), and the sphericity assumption was rejected. Consequently, when the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied, a significant main effect was found (F (1.93, 558.45) = 182.62, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .39$). The results of Bonferroni's multiple comparisons test are shown in Figure 1. As depicted in Figure 1, self-usefulness scores were significantly higher for workplace and school than SNS, for third places than workplace and school, and for third places than SNS. Significant differences were found between workplace and school and third places ($p = .038$), workplace and school and SNS ($p < .001$), and third places and SNS ($p < .001$).

Figure 1
Self-Usefulness

*** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$
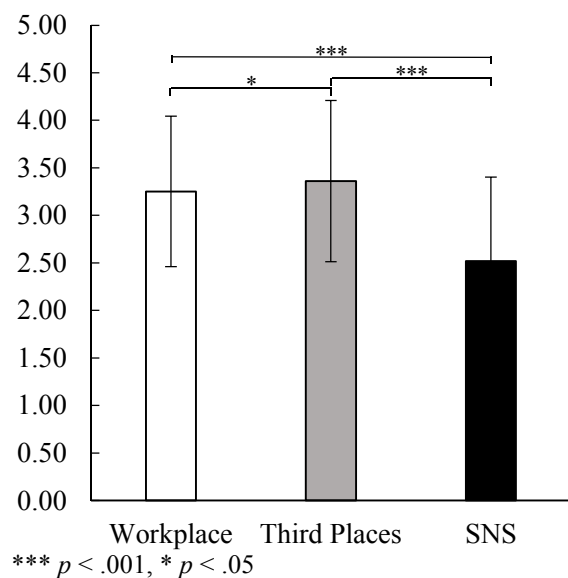
Authenticity

To examine whether there were significant differences in Authenticity scores in the three situations, a one-way ANOVA (within-subjects design) was conducted. Mauchly's sphericity test was significant ($p < .001$), and the sphericity assumption was rejected. Consequently, when the Greenhouse-Geisser correction was applied, a significant main effect was found (F $(1.88, 542.53) = 59.56$, $p < .001$, $\eta p^2 = .17$). The results of Bonferroni's multiple comparisons test are shown in Figure 2. As depicted in Figure 2, authenticity scores were significantly higher for SNS than workplace and school, for third places than workplace and school, and for third places than SNS. Significant differences were found between workplace and school and third places ($p < .001$), workplace and school and SNS ($p = .045$), and third places and SNS ($p < .001$).

Figure 2
Authenticity

*** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$
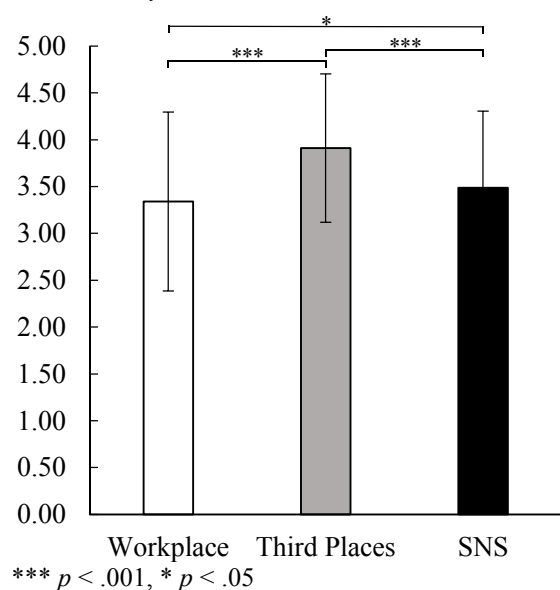
Discussion

Summary of Findings

This study used the *Sense of Ibasho Scale* to examine self-usefulness and authenticity in three situations: the workplace and school, anonymous SNS, and third places. Furthermore, this study examined the relationship between the sense of *Ibasho* and mental health.

First, the internal consistency of the subscales of the *Sense of Ibasho Scale*, self-usefulness and authenticity, was examined. The Cronbach's alpha coefficients were high across three situations ($\alpha \geq .89$). Additionally, the internal consistency of the *K10* was similarly high. Therefore, the subscale structures established in previous studies (Furukawa et al., 2003; Ishimoto, 2010) were retained for analysis.

The results of the one-way ANOVA (within-subjects design) indicated that self-usefulness was significantly higher in third places than in the workplace and school, higher in the workplace and school than in SNS, and higher in third places than in SNS. Additionally, authenticity was significantly higher in third places than in the workplace and school, higher in SNS than in the workplace and school, and higher in third places than in SNS.

Pearson's correlation analysis revealed a negative correlation between self-usefulness (workplace and school, third places, SNS) and mental health. In addition, a negative correlation was observed between authenticity (workplace and school, third places, SNS) and mental health.

Interpretation and Comparison With Previous Studies

In this study, negative correlations were observed between self-usefulness and mental health across all situations. Similarly, a negative correlation was also found between authenticity and mental health. These results are consistent with those of Sugiura & Ashihara (2025), whose study also used a similar scale. Additionally, as a relationship has been identified between the Sense of Authenticity Scale and stress responses (Ito & Kodama, 2005b), it is suggested that lower levels of self-usefulness and authenticity may contribute to poorer mental health.

Self-usefulness was significantly higher in third places than in the workplace and school, and this may be attributed to the fact that individuals experience a stronger sense of authenticity and perceive themselves as having a social role in third places.

Previous studies have indicated that people feel more like themselves when they are fulfilling a social role (Turner, 1976). This suggests that individuals may feel a stronger sense of authenticity in third places because they perceive themselves as having a role to play there, which in turn contributes to higher self-usefulness in third places compared to the workplace and school. Furthermore, Fujino (2017) also found that the score for real-life was significantly higher than that for SNS, suggesting the strength of the relationship.

Implications and Future Directions

In this study, participants were recruited from a crowdsourcing website. As a result, it was difficult to control variables such as employment status and working hours. It is suggested

that future studies examine this limitation by controlling for employment status, including full-time, part-time, and freelance work.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial for future studies to explore the relationship between the use of anonymous SNS and the sense of *Ibasho* by examining whether users primarily interact with specific individuals or engage with a broader, unspecified audience on these SNS.

Additionally, on SNS, it has been shown that there is a link between excessive vanity and SNS addiction, as people present a version of themselves that differs from their real-life persona (Ninomiya, 2017). It has also been suggested that expressing one's true self can lead to others becoming disillusioned or fearing social rejection (Masaki, 2020). Therefore, it is considered important to examine how to enhance mental health from the perspective of SNS addiction and authenticity on SNS.

Conclusion

In this study, a comparative analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between mental health, self-usefulness and authenticity in the workplace and school, anonymous SNS, and third places. The results of the analysis showed that the scores for third places were the highest in all situations, suggesting that the sense of *Ibasho* tends to be highest when individuals engage in activities within hobby groups or friend groups. In addition, the results showed that self-usefulness and authenticity were negatively correlated with mental health in all situations. These findings suggest that the sense of *Ibasho* in third places may contribute to better mental health.

Conflict of Interest Disclosure

The authors have no conflicts of interest directly relevant to the content of this study.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

During the preparation of this manuscript, the author used ChatGPT (OpenAI) and DeepL Translator (DeepL SE) for translation from Japanese into English to improve readability and language accuracy. After using these tools, the author carefully reviewed and edited the content as necessary and takes full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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Initial Challenges in Defining Personology: Laying Personological Foundations Based on a Comparative Analysis of Six Personological Publications

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Abstract

This paper defines personology as a multidisciplinary science and divides the work into theoretical and empirical parts. In the theoretical section, criteria are established to identify intellectual work as "personological." Six scientific works are analyzed according to these criteria, and personological models are extracted using the modeling method. These models are compared based on two primary criteria: 1) the "General Personology" model by Elena Borisovna Starovoytenko and Vadim Arturovich Petrovskiy, the most comprehensive and visually representative personological model, and 2) the General Personology Scale, developed by Starovoytenko, which ranks personological works by scope and practical applicability. The strengths and weaknesses of each model are discussed, and the results are generalized. In the empirical section, a structured interview with psychology students from various countries explores their understanding of personology. Thematic analysis is used to identify key themes from their responses. Additionally, a similar interview was conducted with artificial intelligence in six languages to examine online discourse on personology, and the themes were re-analyzed. The paper concludes by addressing contemporary challenges in defining personology, its scope, and methodology, and integrates the findings to advance the understanding of the field.

Keywords: personology, personality psychology, models, personality theory, students, artificial intelligence, fundamental personology, cultural personology, applied personology, personology of self-reliance

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Introduction

The Emergence of Personology

Personology is a multidisciplinary science that studies the person within their cultural and historical contexts. It acknowledges the limitations of self-examination and does not strictly adhere to positivist methodology. Conceptualized as a science "from the person - to the person - for the person - in the name of the person" (Старовойтенко, 2015, 2023), personology accepts the dual role of the person as both subject and object of study, allowing subjective interpretations. Moreover, the personality of the author behind the concept is considered an important factor in their academic contributions.

"Personality psychology is the science of personality, and personology is the science of the person[1]" (Janaков, 2017). Although these fields are often equated, key differences exist. First, personality psychology is a branch of psychology, while personology is multidisciplinary, involving sociology, philosophy, and the arts. Second, personality psychology views personality as purely psychological, while personology includes cultural-historical contexts and subjective experiences. Third, personality psychology relies on positivist, quantitative methods, while personology incorporates hermeneutics, reflection, intuition, and art. Fourth, personality psychology uses a nomothetic approach, while personology combines nomothetic and idiographic methods. Fifth, personality psychology studies general personality structures, while personology emphasizes individual uniqueness. Sixth, personality psychology dissects components, whereas personology integrates them holistically. Seventh, personality psychology prioritizes theory and empirical research, while personology values theory, practice, culture, and self-reliance. Finally, personality psychology seeks to describe and explain personality, while personology focuses on understanding it (Janaков, 2017; Хьелл & Зиглер, 2024; Старовойтенко, 2007; Старовойтенко 2023; Петровский, 2013; Hall & Lindzey, 1957; Maddi, 1989; Murray, 1977; Strack, 2005).

Methods

This work examines and compares theoretical models using comparative analysis. It aims to define personology as a modern science through modeling and explores differing author perspectives on the term. By investigating why similar terms have distinct meanings, readers will better understand psychologists' views on personology and its connection to other sciences.

Furthermore, a qualitative study with global psychology students, using six open-ended interview questions, will explore their understanding and interest in personology. This research provides insight into personology's future as a broader science beyond academic experts.

Definition of "Personology" in Each Model

Six personological models were selected for comparative and theoretical analysis based on: (1) analysis of previous theories of personality, (2) comprehensiveness in defining

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[1] Macedonian: личност (lichnost) - personality; особа (osoba) - person. Person is a broader term than personality. In the English language, these two words have the same root, but in Slavic languages, they have a different one.

personology, (3) originality in contributions, and (4) use of the term "personology" (except Jung[2]). These models systematically examine personality theories across various paradigms.

Thus, personology can be defined as:

> Metatheory, based on the appeal of theoretical and experimental research, centered on the person, as well as facts and observations from the field of multifaceted psychological practice of the development and support of the person. (Петровский, 2003, p. 2)

> Psychological theory of personality, generated from the effects of its impact on the person; practical psychology as applied personality psychology. Theory and practice are being face to face. (Петровский, 2003, p. 2)

> General personology is a kind of cultural and psychological 'tool' for the formation of personality. Fundamental psychology, applied psychology and hermeneutics of personality, forming the content of this tool, expand the boundaries of understanding and the boundaries of the life of the individual in the world. (Старовойтенко и Петровский, 2012, p. 19)

> 'Personology,' taken to denote personality psychology with an actual emphasis on the inseparability of its object, subject, contents, methods, scientific products, life and cultural contributions. (Старовойтенко, 2015, p. 34)

Starovoytenko and Petrovskiy define "general" personology as a metaconcept that covers fundamental, applied, cultural, and self-reliance aspects of studying personality. They introduce a visual model for representing personology's spheres, functions, and objectives. The authors highlight the personologist's versatility, emphasizing their responsibility to fulfill client-related tasks, conduct research, and engage in self-reflection for personal psychological growth.

> Personolology is often defined as the science of the person, which studies persons in their entirety (in their complex life contexts) in detail, comprehensively, holistically and, often, longitudinally. In accordance with such a definition, personology is more general and is not purely psychological, but a multidisciplinary science; it contains or uses knowledge from numerous scientific disciplines and areas. (Джанаков, 2017, p. 17)

> Personology is briefly defined as the science of the person; it is said to be a broad multidisciplinary area. It is a synthesis of academic (fundamental) and applied disciplines, it contains a variety of (not only scientific) knowledge about the person; the most important is the psychological knowledge. It comprehensively, systematically and deeply studies specific persons (and their lives) in natural conditions; the personological approach is complex. According to some of the aforementioned authors, it is also a practice of personal development. (Джанаков, 2018a, p. 6)

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[2] The reasons for selecting Jung's publications in this work are elaborated below in the text.

Janakov distinguishes between personology and personality psychology: personology studies the person, while personality psychology focuses on personality. His work, along with Statovoitenko and Petrovskiy, emphasizes self-knowledge, personal development and love for humanity as central to personologists' duties. Ultimately, personology aims at achieving the "well-being of the soul" (Янаков, 2017, p. 23).

> The branch of psychology which principally concerns itself with the study of human lives and the factors that influence their course, which investigates individual differences and types of personality, may be termed 'personology' instead of 'the psychology of personality'/ a clumsy and tautological expression. (Murray, 1938, p. 4)

> Personology, then, is the science of man, taken as a unit of analysis, and by definition includes 'psychoanalysis' (Freud), 'analytical psychology' (Jung), 'individual psychology' (Adler), and other terms which denote methods of investigation or doctrines rather than spheres of knowledge. (Murray, 1938, p. 4)

> Our guiding thought was that personality is a temporal whole and to understand a part of it one must have a sense, though vague, of the totality-, It was for this that we attempted comprehensiveness, despite the danger that in trying to grasp everything we might be left with nothing worth the having. (Murray, 1938, p. 4)

> ...personology is still in diapers enjoying random movements. The literature is full of accurate observations of particular events, statistical compilations, and brilliant flashes of intuition. But taken as a whole, personology is a patchwork quilt of incompatible designs. (Murray, 1938, p. 6)

Murray highlights the complexity of personology and questions the feasibility of fully integrating opposing views of personality. He emphasizes studying individual differences: not just self-identity but also comparisons with others. Personology aims to understand how individuals exist within specific life contexts—considering the time and place where they grow, develop, and take various actions.

> ...let us call him or her a personologist: someone who is expert in the study and understanding of the consistent patterns of thoughts, feelings and actions people demonstrate. (Maddi, 1989, p. 3)

> Their work involves any of all four activities: psychotherapy, assessment, research and theorizing. (Maddi, 1989, p. 3)

> … one thing the personologist looks for is evidence of difference among people when the biological and social pressures seem the same. The personologist is also intrigued when the same behavior is observed even though the biological and social pressures differ. (Maddi, 1989, p. 5)

> They [personologists] aim to integrate all these bits of knowledge into an overall account of people's functioning. (Maddi, 1989, p. 7)

> … a personologist limits his attention to those behavioral manifestations that have a certain psychological significance. The subject of his interest is thoughts, feelings and actions. (Maddi, 1989, p. 8)

> … the goal [of the personologist] is to integrate all this disparate information about a person into a single, comprehensive idea of human existence. (Maddi, 1989, p. 10)

Maddi highlights the integration of knowledge from various psychology fields and other sciences and arts to form a holistic understanding of personality. He stresses that personologists should conduct research and engage in practical activities. Maddi advocates for exploring similarities, particularly among those from different environments, but also focuses on psychological differences between individuals living in the same socio-cultural context. He compares leading personality theories, including his own, utilizing comparative analysis to support his approach.

> The science of personality - personology - is a discipline that strives to lay the foundation for the best understanding of human individuality by using a variety of research strategies. (Хьелл и Зиглер, 2024, с. 13)

> To be extremely accurate, a personologist must interpret all principles of general psychology and take into account all dynamic interactions between them. We need to know how perception depends on training, how training is related to motivation, how motivation is related to development, and so on. Students studying personality are asked to formulate theoretical propositions containing a description and explanation of these complex interactions. All the factors that determine the behavior and experiences of an individual fall within the field of personology studies. (Хьелл и Зиглер, 2024, с. 15-16)

> The goal of personality psychology is to help people get more satisfaction from life. Continuing to develop theory and experimental research, many psychologists are now engaged in more effective ways to implement more effective and productive strategies for overcoming life's difficulties. (Хьелл и Зиглер, 2024, с. 8)

Hjell and Ziegler argue that personology is a science of individuality, distinct from personality as defined by others. They emphasize the importance of developing new theories for effective psychotherapy and personal well-being. While their model focuses on a reductionist-analytical approach, they acknowledge the limitations of current methodologies and point out the need for collaboration with philosophy. Cultural aspects of personology receive little attention in their work.

> Regardless of what instruments a man uses, after a certain time he comes to the edge of certainty which conscious knowledge cannot pass. (Юнг, 2021, с. 15)

> … there is no point of view above or beyond psychology which would enable us to form a final judgment about what the psyche is. (Юнг, 2021, с. 53)

> Logical analysis is the privilege of consciousness; we choose with reason and with knowledge. The unconscious, however, seems to be mainly guided by instinctive tendencies which are represented through appropriate thought forms - that is, through archetypes. (Юнг, 2021, с. 72)

> Nothing is more vulnerable than a scientific theory, which is an ephemeral attempt to explain facts, not an eternal truth. (Юнг, 2021, с. 86)

> Such phenomena, such as symbolic images, hinder the scientific mind because they cannot be formulated in a way that satisfies intellect and logic. (Юнг, 2021, с. 85)

> Psychology cannot be learned from any textbook; it is learned only by real experience. (Юнг, 2021, с. 85)

Although Jung did not use the term personology, his intellectual work aligns with it due to his exploration of overlooked psychological phenomena beyond empirical study. His theories challenge traditional methodologies by investigating areas that cannot be easily verified. Throughout his career, Jung emphasized self-knowledge and encouraged deeper exploration of the psyche, advocating for effective, if not strictly scientific, methods. He was one of the pioneers in broadening psychology's scope, paving the way for a more open and versatile branch of the field—personology, which continues to develop today.

Comparative Analysis of Models and Interview With Students and Artificial Intelligence

Comparing the Personological Models

For comparison of the considered models, the Personological Structure [PS] of Starovoytenko (2015, p. 18) will be used, which includes nine levels of research in personology. Each model will be considered in the context of the General Personology [GP] model of Starovoytenko and Petrovskiy (2012), since only GP meets the criteria of the first level of PS. GP will serve as a meta-model for comparison of the other models, which demonstrate an unequal representation of the four spheres of GP.

Description of the Comparison Criteria

There is also a visual scheme for the GP Model (Starovoytenko and Petrovskiy, 2012, p. 3) - a symbol of this idea is a pyramid, which represents the fundamental, consultative, cultural and self-reliance personologies as four, interconnected, but independent surfaces of the GP (Figure 1).

Figure 1
Model "General Personology" (Starovoytenko and Petrovsky);
F [Ф] - Fundamental Personology; A [П] - Applied Personology;
К - [K] Cultural Personology; S - [C] Personology of Self-Reliance
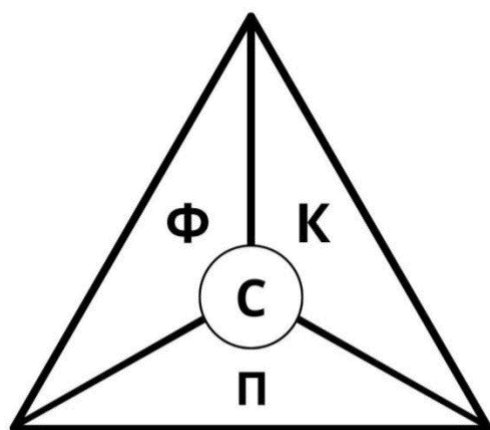
The following is a brief overview of the four projects of GP.

1. *Fundamental Personology* - encompasses theoretical and practical knowledge in personology, involving diverse approaches to defining and understanding personality. A personologist must set aside biases, analyze and compare paradigms, and work toward their integration into a unified understanding.

2. *Applied Personology* - focuses on practices tailored to client needs, includes diverse methods, each offering unique value. A personologist must identify the most effective approach for each client and skillfully apply these interventions in practice.

3. *Cultural Personology* - understands personality through cultural context, as culture shapes perceptions of reality, values, and personal growth. A personologist studies cultural symbols and creative expressions to integrate cultural heritage into individual lives.

4. *Personology of Self-Reliance* - unites all personology types, fostering integration in professional work and within the personologist's personality. It preserves individuality by reflecting subjectivity and cultural background in research, client work, relationships, and lifestyle.

"General Personology" Model - Comparison of the Models by Parts of the Pyramid

Each model is examined through the prism of the GP, assessing the representation of the spheres and comparing them. The colors of the spheres are based on Color Theory (Gage, 1999), which connects colors with unconscious associations: 1) Fundamental Personology [Ф] – blue, associated with calmness and objectivity; 2) Applied Personology [П] – red, symbolizing love and importance in the client-therapeutic relationship; 3) Cultural Personology [К] – yellow, associated with hope and connection; 4) Self-Reliance Personology [С] – green, representing growth and stability. The results are shown in Table 1 and Figure 6.

Model 2: "Fundament of Contemporary Personology" - Janakov, B.

This model approaches fundamental personology with skepticism about its methodology and systematization but does not suggest ways to improve it. It clearly distinguishes between personality psychology and personology, criticizing the misuse of terminology. Janakov highlights the value of cultural heritage as a source of personal potential and its role in personal integration (Janakov, 2018b). By combining fundamental and cultural knowledge, personologists and clients work together to explore identity, resources, and challenges, developing strategies for awareness and resolution. Janakov calls for practical reforms, advocating for personological freedom over rigid, ineffective methods. He emphasizes the importance of self-reliance in personology, viewing it as a key component. Above all, a love for humanity defines a successful personologist. This quality cannot be achieved through theoretical knowledge alone; even an untrained but empathetic individual with a deep capacity for understanding can surpass a purely theoretical expert. The model is graphically presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2

*Janakov's Fundamentals of Contemporary Personology Model Through the Prism of GP*
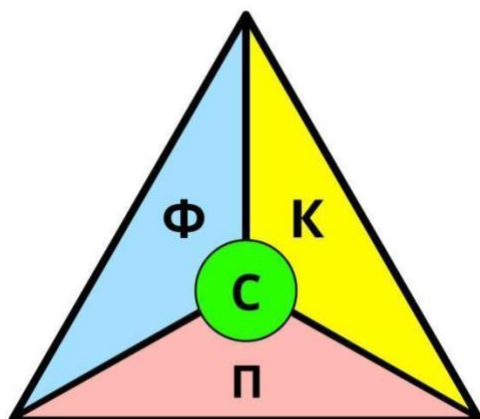
Model 3: "Model of a Holistic Approach to Personology" - Murray, H.

This model critiques current methodologies and proposes improvements, stressing the need for research across various situations and the involvement of diverse, independent scholars of both genders. Murray (1981) integrates three theories, prioritizing client needs through conversations and projective techniques. However, it overlooks the dynamics between the personologist and the client, as well as the personologist's own personality. The model promotes a holistic approach, viewing individuals within their broader context, and values the narrative method for studying personal biographies. Cultural personology is explored by analysing concrete culturally-relevant individuals and their interaction with their cultural context. Also, the concept of "spiral evolution" highlights development aligned with context. Despite focusing on practical personology and refining methods, this model neglects the significance of the personologist's role and personal experience. The model is graphically presented in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Murray's Model of a Holistic Approach to Personology Through the Prism of GP
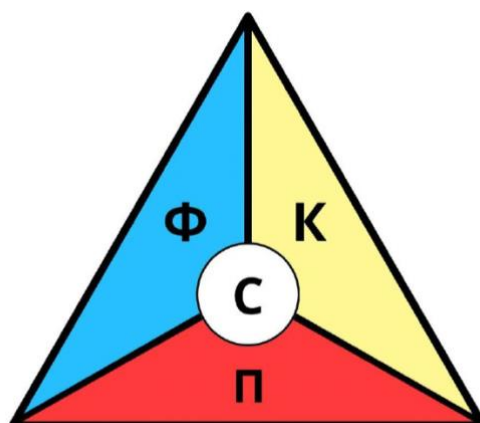

Model 4: "Model of Comparative Analysis in Personology" - Madi, S.

This model highlights its comparative analisys method as the most effective for comparing and categorizing personality theories. Maddi focuses on systematizing models and

emphasizes the importance of common sense and intuition, for which he argues are grounded in personal experience and reason rather than mysticism. The model also advocates for the development of psychometric tools and a structured approach to client work. However, cultural personology is marginalized, limited to empirical comparisons of personality traits with little focus on intuition. The aspects of the relationship with the client are also overlooked. While Maddy contributes to the theoretical development of personology, the cultural component and self-reliance are addressed minimally. The model is graphically presented in Figure 4.

Figure 4
Maddi's Model of Comparative Analysis in Personology Through the Prism of GP
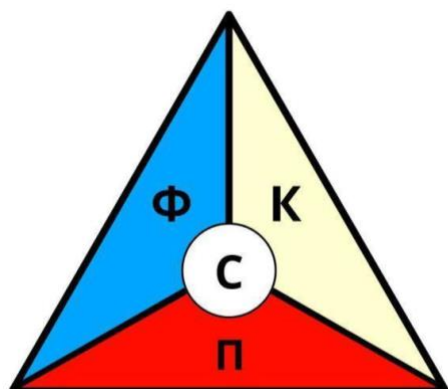

Model 5: "Model of Correspondence Between Theory and Practice" – Hjell, L. & Ziegler, D.

This model rejects non-scientific approaches, recognizing philosophy as the sole valid non-empirical source of knowledge. It highlights a multidisciplinary approach, combining philosophy with empirical psychology. Hjell and Ziegler propose a cyclical process where tested interventions yield insights, prompting further research and theory refinement. Unverifiable knowledge is dismissed as "useless for any practical application" (Хьелл и Зиглер, 2024, стр. 27), emphasizing systematic, empirically validated information. The model includes criteria like empirical testability and heuristic value. Cultural knowledge is addressed within empirical testing but separated from scientific knowledge. It integrates fundamental and applied personology, neglecting cultural and self-reliance aspects. The model is graphically presented in Figure 5.
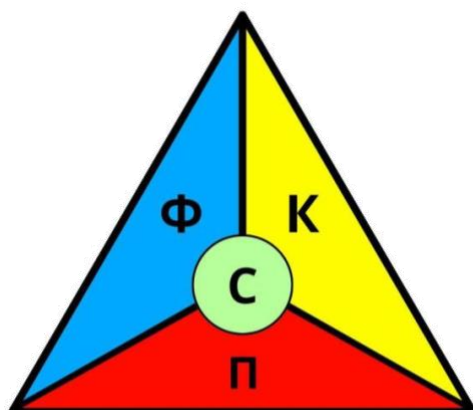
Figure 5
Hell and Ziegler's Model of Correspondence Between Theory and Practice Through the Prism of GP
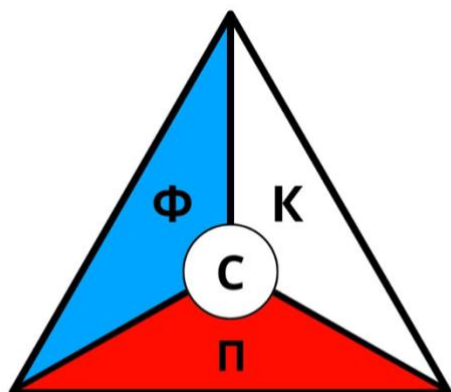
Model 6: "Analytical Personology" - Jung, C. G.

Jung's model begins with fundamental personology, combining empirical research and cultural phenomena to link the inner world with science. He balances scientific rigor with subjectivity: "Growing on the soil of the natural sciences, it [psychology] transfers the objective empirical method to the phenomenology of the spirit…" (Юнг, 2022, p. 17). Typification bridges universal and individual aspects, viewing personality as a microcosm integrating ancestral heritage and individuation. Jung emphasizes four knowledge sources—thinking, feeling, sensory, and intuitive—while stressing psychologists' self-reliance to avoid unconscious biases (Юнг, 2003). He integrates fundamental, cultural, and applied personology, prioritizing self-development for effective client guidance (Юнг, 2006). The model is graphically presented in Figure 6.

Figure 6
Jung's Model of Analytical Personology Through the Prism of GP

The summarized results can be seen in Table 1 and are graphically displayed in Figure 7.

Table 1

Evaluating How GP Spheres Are Represented in Personological Models by Various Authors, Individually and Collectively

	Fundamental Personology	Applied Personology	Cultural Personology	Personology of Self-Reliance
Janakov	2	2	3	3
Murray	3	3	2	0
Maddi	3	3	1	0
Hjell & Ziegler	3	3	0	0
Jung	3	3	3	2
Average grade	2.8	2.8	1.8	1

0 - the sphere is not mentioned at all or it is mentioned, but its relevance is categorically denied;
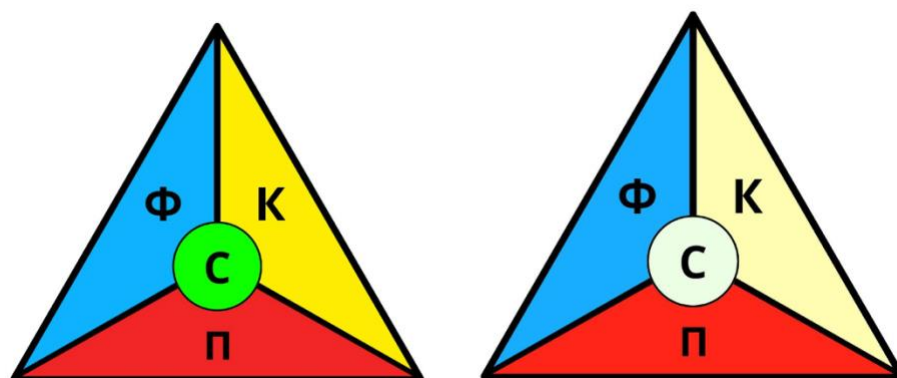
1 - the sphere is briefly mentioned, but not explained;

2 - the sphere is mentioned and explained, but is not assessed as a thoroughly studied component;

3 - the sphere is explained in detail and is considered as a separate component of personology as a science;

Figure 7

Merged View of All Models in the OP Pyramid: Ideal Version (Left) and Current Version (Right)

A summary of the main points of the models can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Comparison of Similarities and Differences in GP Spheres Across Personological Models of Six Authors

	Theory	Methodology	Methodology Critique	Basic Method	Unit of Analysis	Methods of the Cultural Personology	Personality of the Personologist
Janakov	Both own theory and comparison of others	Non-scientific knowledge is also allowed	Strongly present	Own theory: integration; Review of other theories: eclecticism	Person as a psycho-physical whole	Reflection, hermene- utics, study of folk and national creations, intuition, interpre- tation of dreams and fantasies, projective techniques	Key component: life experience and the love for humanity are strongly valued
Murray	Own theory	Strictly empirical metho-dology	Strongly present	Integration	Organism as a spatio-temporal whole	Thematic appercep- tion test (projective technique)	Not mentioned

Maddi	Both own theory and comparison of others	Non-scientific knowledge is also allowed	Strongly present	Own theory: integration; Review of other theories: comparati-ve analysis	Psycho-logically significant thoughts, feelings and behaviors	Intuition, reflection	Not mentioned
Hjell & Ziegler	Compari- son of several theories	Strictly empirical metho-dology	Moderately present	Comparati-ve analysis	Thoughts, feelings, human behavior in real conditions	Not allowed	Not mentioned
Jung	Own theory	Non-scientific knowledge is also allowed	Strongly present	Integration	Human as a microcosm	Dream interpre- tation, active fantasy, free associ= ations, herme-neutics, intuition, reflection, literary and artistic analysis	Important: a professio-nal must work on their own self-awareness and their own individu-ation

Structure of "General Personology": Comparison of the Models by Levels of the Structure

When laying the foundations of personology as a science, it was necessary to organize and systematize its methods, which was partially done in the SP, proposed by Starovoytenko (2015). This structure will be presented, followed by hierarchical ordering the models discussed above.

1. *First level:* broad space for explicit and implicit sources of personological knowledge from scientific and cultural backgrounds;

a. *General Personology - Starovoytenko and Petrovsky.* This model represents a metatheory that integrates and balances personological spheres into four categories. The model encourages professional organization and self-reflection of the personologist through self-questioning about theoretical knowledge and its application, about learning from interlocutors, and about cultural aspects. This framework allows the personologist to analyze theories, practices, and interactions, laying the foundation for continuous professional and personal development.

2. *Second level:* metatheory of personality, generated on broad philosophical and psychological ideas, categories and personality paradigms;

a. *Holistic approach to personology - Murray.* Integrating psychoanalysis, analytical and individual psychology, Murray develops his own personological approach. He expands the concept of personality, proposing that it should not be divided into parts, because they alone do not explain the whole. Personality should be considered not only at a given moment, but throughout the entire process of life. Murray offers his own methodological approaches and a view of understanding the client, in order to help him in awareness and change.

b. *Analytical personology - Jung.* Jung integrated his theory with knowledge from psychology, religion, literature, philosophy, mythology and art, creating a model of the

structure of the human psyche. He discovered new phenomena and developed methods for their study. His focus is on the personality in a cultural-historical context, especially in the creation and development of consciousness as a uniquely human property. Jung emphasizes the importance of self-reflection and recognition of psychological processes, in order to effectively help people face life's challenges.

3.   *Third level:* correlated and unified psychological theories of personality, relevant to the nature of contemporary human life;

a.   *Foundations of Personology - Janakov.* Janakov analyzes various psychological paradigms and develops an unfinished conception of personality. Although he negatively evaluates the methodology, he does not offer alternatives. He criticizes existing interventions as ineffective for personal change. His approach focuses on self-help and cultural roots, pointing to the dehumanization of modern man. He supports orientation towards others as a path to "personologization", with an emphasis on the love for humanity and understanding of the Other.

4.   *Fourth level:* personality models for research and diagnostic applicability, which are focused on solving real problems in individual life;

a.   *A comparative analysis model in personology - Maddi.* Maddi uses comparative analysis to compare theories of personality, including his own. He classifies them according to their focus on universal or individual characteristics, and whether personality is characterized by conflict, self-actualization, or consistency. His approach is empirical, with an emphasis on evidence. While he allows common sense and intuition, he does not apply them. His work provides empirical guidance for practical activity and its theoretical framework.

b.   *Model of correspondence between theory and practice - Hjell and Ziegler.* The authors systematically develop criteria for classifying personality theories, presented in the form of continuums for positioning according to their fulfillment. Hjell and Ziegler raise questions about human nature, which is the basis of personality theory, but also outside of psychology. They do not propose their own theory and reject unscientific approaches. Personality is not considered in the context of culture, and there is a lack of knowledge about the personologists' self-reliance.

The following levels of the SP encompass simpler approaches than the ones reviewed in the analysed papers:

5.   *Fifth level:* creation of models for practical application in counseling and psychotherapeutic practice, which are based on various theories from the field of social psychology, developmental psychology and general psychology;

6.   *Sixth level:* a set of well-correlated counseling and psychotherapeutic practices, which allows for a multidisciplinary approach to the support of a specific individual;

7.   *Seventh level:* scientifically significant personal facts, models of individual cases, phenomenological models of personality, etc.;

8.   *Eighth level:* creating models of interdisciplinary reflection for a personological approach in the spread of "personal culture" in society;

9.　*Ninth level:* forms of individual appropriation and implementation of personological knowledge that influence the individual's life effectiveness.

Students' Perception of Personology

A short written structured interview with psychology students from different parts of the world was conducted in order to discover their understanding of personology, its familiarity and appeal, awareness and professional interest in it, as well as their perception of its applicability. The survey was conducted via Google Forms in six languages. The aim was to include students with an average grade above 7.5, believing that they would know more about personology. The survey began with demographic data and was followed by six questions:

1. Please explain how you came across the term "personology" during your studies.
2. Please briefly explain in your own words what personology is.
3. Are you familiar with the "General Personology" model, and if so, what do you know about it?
4. In your opinion, does personology differ from personality psychology and if so, how?
5. What practical applications do you think personology has?
6. How do you feel about the possibility of continuing to study personology? Are you interested in it?

The results are summarized in Table 3. The study involved 10 students, 2 male and 8 female, aged 21 to 44, from all three cycles of higher education in psychology. Table 2 presents the participants' responses, including the ones that stand out.

Table 3
Free Summarised Translation of the Answers Received From the Interview With Students

	Macedonia	Thailand	Ghana	England	Russia	El Salvador	Germany
Please explain how you came across the term "personology" during your studies.	At the university, in the subjects "Personality" and "Personality Theories".	At the university, when we were studying personality types.	At the university, during my undergraduate degree.	On the course "Personality and Individual Differences" in my undergraduate degree.	/	At the university.	At the university.
Please briefly explain in your own words what personology is.	The study of personality with all its characteristics, development and functioning	The science of human characteristics and the conditions in which it develops.	It speaks of conceptual features that distinguish groups of people.	A part of personality psychology aimed at studying a person as a whole and considering the biosocio-psychological context.	**This is the science of the "I"**	The study of personality from a broad approach; **Murray's theory**	A section of psychology that studies personality

Are you familiar with the "General Perso-nology" model, and if so, what do you know about it?	Yes, it explains the **person as being**	No (maybe it is connected with the Big Five model)	No	No	No	I don't know much	No
In your opinion, does perso-nology differ from personality psychology and if so, how?	Yes and no answers	**Perso-nality psycho-logy also studies physical objects (the brain); perso-nology is the science of purely mental pheno-mena.**	No	They are not very different. **Perso-nology may have been more of a movement at the time**, but they share most of the principles and have a common basis.	**Perso-nality psychology may be a little broader than perso-nology.**	They are related, they have the same basis	**There is no significant difference**
What practical appli-cations do you think perso-nology has?	Counseling and therapy, career develop-ment and manage-ment, education	**Learn how to present yourself in society.**	This **helps me as a college tutor**	In therapy, educational psychology and other applied fields that require a more individual approach.	**Learn to know yourself better.**	Conducting research for the further develop-ment of personality psycholog.	Develop-ment of psycho-logical tools for measuring personality characte-ristics.
How do you feel about the possibility of continuing to study perso-nology? Are you interested in it?	Yes, in the direction of personal growth and develop-ment for me as a psycho-logist.	Maybe, it seems interesting	Yes	Not very interesting	Yes, I would like to know more about it.	Yes	Possibly, if it is applicable in **sports psychology**

The top row indicates the countries in which the students study, and the left column indicates the questions that were asked in Google Forms.

Going in order, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. All participants first encountered the term "personology" at university. This term is not yet widespread in public discourse.
2. Students from different cultures have different ideas about personology. Most consider it to be the study of personality, with some giving elementaristic and others holistic answers. The only specific answer comes from a master's student in psychology in Russia, who says that "it's a science on the study of the 'I'", but it is not explained in detail. A student from El Salvador also mentions Murray, without further information.
3. The answers to the "General Personology" model were generally negative, with no knowledge of it, except from the Russian student. However, the three participants from Macedonia gave a positive answer, especially one student, who emphasized that she was familiar with personology, considering it a complex and comprehensive discipline that requires an understanding of human existence and functioning.
4. Participants consider personology and personality psychology to be similar, but the results from Macedonia indicate a difference: psychology focuses on behavior, while personology focuses on the person as a whole.
5. The answers to the practical application of personology are varied, with a tendency to see it in personal growth and development, as well as in consulting, education, work organizations, and psychometrics.
6. Regarding the interest in continuing to study personology, there are different answers: from a categorical "no" to an interested "yes", which indicates a moderate level of interest among students.

Artificial Intelligences' Perception of Personology

The AI responses to questions about personology posed to students in six languages were also analyzed. The responses were analyzed and compared, and the summarized results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4
Free Summarised Translation of the Answers Received From the AI

	Russian	Macedonian	English	German	French	Spanish
Please explain how you think psychology students encountered the term "personology" during their studies?	**No specific answer**	Courses, subjects; textbooks, literature; research work and practical classes; lectures and seminars	Writing a term paper; reading scientific articles or journals	In lectures, seminars or literature. This could be regular or additional courses.	Through reading, through courses on personality theory, research, work or discussions with professors.	Academic materials related to personality psychology. **Students also may not have encountered this term** given its infrequent use.
Please briefly explain in your own words what personology is.	Studies the individual characteristics of a person, their characteristic behaviors, and their **inner world,** the factors that influence personality growth	A branch of psychology that studies individual differences in personality.	A branch of psychology that studies individual differences and personality traits; how they affect behavior, relationships, and overall well-being	The science that studies personality and how its individual characteristics are formed and developed, distinguishing the person from others.	A discipline that studies personality and attempts to understand its **unique characteristics** and motivation using various personality theories.	A discipline of psychology that focuses on the comprehensive study of personality, taking into account biological, psychological, social, and spiritual aspects.

Are you familiar with the "General Personology" model, and if so, what do you know about it?	Refers to the work of **Anatoly Karpov.** Three components of GP: indivi- duality, social environ- ment and cultural context.	Refers to the **General Perso- nality Theory**; authors not written. Characte- ristics: integrative, biopsych- osocial approach, dynamism and flexibility, traits, and cultural factors.	Refers to the work of **Kazimir Dom- browski** - the theory of positive disinte- gration	Refers to the model of **Ludwig Klages** - a study of the general laws of human personality.	Refers to the **five-factor model of perso- nality**, authors not written.	Refers to the approach of **Jose Luis Sampedro**, which is based on the idea of the uniqueness and uniqueness of each person.
In your opinion, does personology differ from personality psychology and if so, how?	Both are branches of psychology and both study personality. Differences in methods and approaches. **Perso- nality psychology as a broader and more compre- hensive discipline, incorporating various theories and approa- ches.**	Perso- nology: broad focus, integrative approach, and systems perspective. Personality psychology: specific focus, theoretical approach, and research practice	Generally overlap, but perso- nology is more compre- hensive: includes cultural background, life experiences, and personal values	Generally similar, difference in focus and approach. Perso- nology: holistic approach, individual personality; personality psychology: scientific study of personality structure, psycho- logical types	Closely related, but different: personality psychology studies the main general theories and models of personality, while perso- nology studies the personality of a specific person in depth.	Personology takes an integrative approach to the individual as a whole, while personality psychology considers thoughts, feelings, and behavior separately.
What practical applications do you think personology has?	Recruit- ment for various organi- zations and groups; psycho- logical counseling; personal life; time and task manage- ment; education and upbringing	Clinical psychology, counseling and psycho- therapy, education, organi- zational psychology, **forensic psychology**, health psychology, marketing and consumer behavior.	Counseling and therapy; career counseling and develop- ment; leadership and develop- ment; education; organi- zational psychology	Personal develop- ment, recruitment, team building, leadership develop- ment, conflict manage- ment. **Emphasis on the organiza- tional context.**	Clinical psychology; recruitment and personal management; counseling, coaching and personal develop- ment; education; health care and medicine	Recruitment, personal and professional development, psychotherapy, career guidance, improving interpersonal relationships.
How do you think students feel about the possibility of continuing to study personology? Are they interested in it?	Recruit- ment for various organiza- tions and groups; psycho- logical counseling; personal life; time and task manage- ment; education and upbringing	Clinical psychology, counseling and psycho- therapy, education, organiza- tional psychology, **forensic psychology**, health psychology, marketing and consumer behavior.	Counseling and therapy; career counseling and develop- ment; leadership and develop- ment; education; organiza- tional psychology	Personal develop- ment, recruit- ment, team building, leadership develop- ment, conflict manage- ment. **Emphasis on the organizational context.**	Clinical psychology; recruitment and personnel manage- ment; counseling, coaching and personal develop- ment; education; health care and medicine	Recruitment, personal and professional development, psychotherapy, career guidance, **improving interpersonal relationships.**

The top row indicates the languages in which the questions were asked, and the left column shows the questions themselves. Deviating answers are highlighted in bold.

Going in order, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. The answers in most languages associated personology with scientific literature or courses on personality psychology, except for the Spanish version, which allowed the possibility of not encountering the term, and the Russian version, which did not provide a specific answer.

2. The answers to the definition of personology were similar: it studies personality. Russian, Macedonian, English and Spanish versions classified it as a psychological science, while German and French did not provide a specific answer. The French version mentioned "unique", Russian – the inner world of a person.

3. All language versions confirmed familiarity with the General Personology model, but each gave different and incorrect answers to the question about it.

4. The answers to the difference between personology and personality psychology were generally correct. The Russian version stated that personality psychology is a more complex science. The other five versions emphasized the integrative approach and in personology.

5. All versions of the answers on the practical application of personology highlighted organizational psychology. Forensic psychology (Macedonian version) and improving interpersonal relationships (Spanish version) were also mentioned.

6. AI answers that students are generally interested in continuing their studies in personology, but the choice depends on various factors, including personal interests. The Russian version suggested a questionnaire, the Macedonian mentioned inspiring professors, and the Spanish highlighted personal psychotherapy experience as an important factor in the decision.

Conclusion

This paper analyzes different definitions of personology, focusing on theoretical models and their comparison based on the GP model (content comparison) and the SP (comparison of coverage). Six personology works were analyzed, key models and ideas were identified. These ideas were sorted and compared by "saturation" they give to GP. A structured online interview was conducted with students and AI about their perception of personology and interest in studying it.

This research clarifies what personology is, how it is positioned and what methods it applies. Opposing views have been revealed among the authors, which indicates a lack of generally accepted definitions. The assessment of the comprehensiveness of the contents is relatively subjective, but elaborated in detail. The GP model as a reference shows that there is a significant lack of knowledge of cultural personology and the personology of self-reliance.

For the empirical part to be more scientifically relevant, a larger sample of participants from all continents is needed, which will enable a mutual comparison of the answers of students with different demographic characteristics. AI studies have shown useful answers about personology, exported on the Internet. At the same time, the GP model is practically not recognized, which emphasizes the necessity of its systematic presentation both in the academic environment and among the general public.

In this research, some of the questions related to personology were answered, but some remain open. The admission of hermeneutics as a method is considered necessary by some (Starovoytenko and Petrovskiy, Janakov and Jung), while according to Hjell and Ziegler, it is "speculation". Contradictions have also been noted: Maddi writes about the necessity of

intuition in extracting personologically relevant knowledge, but he himself strictly adheres to empirical methods and does not include Jungian theory, believing that "it does not have a strong enough influence on the psychology of personality" (Maddi, 1989; p. 28). Jung points to the resistance in academic discourse to the unconscious, which leads to dehumanization in the study of man. Hjell and Ziegler argue that the resistance is to empiricism, not mysticism, because the scientific study of man is difficult, which leads researchers to focus on less achievable qualities such as transcendence.

Other differences in the description of personology are also noted, such as the question of the unit of analysis. The answers were very diverse: from the person, the organism, the thoughts, feelings and behaviors of psychological significance, to the human as a microcosm. Maddi, Hjell and Ziegler agree on the analysis of thoughts, feelings and behaviors, but Maddi emphasizes that not all mental processes are personal, which further complicates the answer. Furthermore, while Maddy, Hjell and Ziegler are more elementalist, Janakov, Murray and Jung call for a holistic approach, studying the human as a whole and their life context. The authors are unanimous that personology studies the human as a whole with his life context - but how then to explain the proposals by Maddy and Hjell and Ziegler?

However, not everything is so "dispersed" in personology - the authors are unanimous on several points: 1) the multidisciplinary nature of personology; 2) the study of man in context; 3) the need to improve empirical methodology; 4) the achievement of life satisfaction as a personological goal. It can be concluded that there is a foundation on which personology as a science is based.

In future research, it is important to analyze the views of other authors on personality and the characteristics of the personologist, who is both the subject and object of research. The personality factors that determine the success of the personologist should be studied. This research considered six models of personology, but there are other significant authors, such as V. J. Semke (2001), I. E. Alexander (1990), S. Strack (2005), Jr, P. T. Costa, R. R. McCrae and Löckenhoff (2019; 2021), whose works should be considered in the future.

Personology is a young multidisciplinary science that studies the human as a psychophysical whole in their real socio-cultural context. Its goal is to understand the personality and provide a basis for successful work with people and for people. Now that the foundations have been laid, it remains for us to continue building this science, to recognize the remaining dilemmas and to actively work on overcoming them, preserving the integrative component as a uniqueness of this "humanized" discipline.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

The author responsibly claims that Artificial Intelligence in this paper was used solely for the purpose of reducing the number of words in the written content.

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Constructivist-Oriented Sandtray Supervision Model:
A Case Study of a Novice Counseling Supervisor

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Abstract

The novice counseling supervisor is at an early stage in the development of their supervisory practice, experiencing anxiety, doubts, and conflicts related to their abilities, role identity, and supervisory relationships. Therefore, in addition to supervising counselors, they also require "supervision of supervision." This study employs a case study method to present the process of a novice counseling supervisor engaging in "constructivist-oriented sandtray supervision." The purpose is to observe and reflect on the supervisory process, synthesizing how this supervisory model facilitates learning for novice counseling supervisors. Constructivist-oriented sandtray supervision emphasizes the mutual subjectivity between the supervisor and the supervisee. Through discussion and reflection, it allows for the emergence of personal knowledge specific to the novice counselor supervisor, integrating the sandtray therapy method. This approach provides a free and safe exploratory environment to reduce supervisee anxiety, visualizes supervisory issues through sensory and tactile engagement, and uses metaphors to increase awareness of the supervisee's inner states, countertransference, and parallel processes. It also aids the supervisee in expressing emotions, reconstructing meaning, and taking action. The research findings indicate that the process of constructivist-oriented sandtray supervision can be divided into four stages: (1) the pre-supervision stage, involving non-verbal communication through object selection and placement; (2) clarifying the supervisee's confusion and case conceptualization; (3) developing a deeper conceptualization of the supervisee's issues; and (4) helping the novice supervisor recognize themselves in the supervisory relationship with the supervisee. Reflecting on this process offers the potential to expand the possibilities of novice counseling supervisor models.

Keywords: novice counseling supervisor, constructivism, sandtray

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Introduction

As a counselor in a helping profession, reflection is one of the critical competencies for continuously enhancing professional expertise and promoting clients' best interests. As a counseling supervisor, in addition to promoting the reflection and professional development of counselors in the process of supervision, how can counseling supervisors develop their own professional competence in supervision? In the supervision course training of the doctoral class, the author is a learner in the novice stage, and after receiving the process of constructive orientation sandtray supervision, the author's vision of consulting supervision has been opened: it turns out that the way of consulting supervision can be so creative and diverse, especially under the concept of constructive orientation, you can have further reflection and learning on the author's supervision process. Therefore, the author tries to sort out the literature on the application of constructive orientation to sandtray supervision, and analyzes the records of the process of receiving constructive orientation sandtray supervision in the classroom, as a reflection on the learning process of novice counselor supervisors, and also helps to become a model for assisting supervisees to reflect on learning in the future.

The Learning Needs and Challenges of Novice Counseling and Supervision

The Development Process of Novice Counseling and Supervision

The professional development process of a counselor, like the education and training process of a counselor, has different learning needs, dilemmas or breakthroughs from the novice to the proficient stage. Novice counseling supervisors, much like novice counselors, often exhibit traits such as anxiety, naivety, high motivation, self-focus, concern about whether each action is "correct," a preference for structure, and reliance on "supervision-of-supervision." Their engagement with and identification of the supervisory role may remain unclear, with anxiety stemming from their new role potentially impacting their self-efficacy. Similar to the professional development process of counselors, novice supervisors must confront various challenges (Fickling & Tangen, 2017; Hess, 1986; Stoltenberg & Delworth, 1987; Watkinson et al., 2021). Research on novice supervisors, such as Gazzola et al. (2013), has examined the challenges faced by doctoral students supervising master's-level trainees, including the transition from the counselor role to the supervisor role and engagement in less pleasant tasks. Consequently, supervision-of-supervision for novice supervisors must address not only supervisory techniques, theories, and ethical considerations but also their emotional responses and cognitive processes during the supervision process. Similarly, Su (2015) found that novice supervisors in training and at the early stages of practical supervision frequently expressed the need for structured supervision-of-supervision arrangements. These studies indicate that novice counseling supervisors are in the initial stages of supervisory development. Their lack of mastery in areas such as role identification, theory, techniques, and ethics creates a significant need for supervision-of-supervision. Therefore, understanding how supervision-of-supervision can facilitate the growth of novice counseling supervisors remains a critical area of inquiry for both counseling supervisors and educators in supervisor training programs.

The Importance of Reflection in the Learning Process of Novice Counseling Supervisors

Reflection during the practical supervision process is a critical attitude for novice supervisors learning to become effective supervisors. In the professional development of counselors, self-assessment and reflection are recognized as optimal strategies for supervisees to enhance learning in the context of client and supervisory relationships (Pearson, 2004). A prerequisite

for becoming an effective supervisor is active engagement in the supervision process (Hawkins & Shohet, 2000). In this sense, awareness and reflection during supervision are essential skills for supervisory development. Reflective learning enables counselors and supervisors to reconstruct their counseling or supervision experiences and modify them into new action plans (Ward & House, 1998).

Nelson et al. (2006) interviewed 13 doctoral students who participated in three semesters of supervision practical. Their findings revealed that dialogues during supervision constructed the process of "becoming a supervisor," facilitating awareness and significant connections for novice supervisors. Osborn et al. (2007) reflected on a 15-week supervision process involving three roles—faculty supervisor, doctoral supervisor, and master's-level counseling supervisee. They identified five shared activities that fostered collaborative learning in supervision. Among these, reflective dialogues during supervision, where supervisors and supervisees discuss assumptions, curiosities, perspectives, and feelings about cases, employed personal (e.g., "I wonder…"), invitational, and exploratory language. This approach positioned supervisors as co-participants in the learning process rather than as all-knowing experts. Su (2015) investigated eight novice supervisors who underwent training in the Self-Awareness Supervision Model. The results indicated that reflective practices in a meta-position helped novice supervisors better understand their stage of professional development, define their supervisory role, enhance self-awareness, and develop a personalized supervision style.

In summary, addressing the learning needs of novice supervisors through reflective practices and dialogical exercises during their developmental process can reconstruct supervisory relationships, supervisee conceptualizations, and case conceptualizations. These practices significantly contribute to the enhancement of supervisory competence.

Application of Constructivism in Sandtray Supervision

Constructivism in Counseling Supervision

Constructivism, as part of postmodern philosophy, contrasts with the positivist or post-positivist "received view of science". Constructivism emphasizes the "perceived view of science," positing that knowledge is pluralistic, subjective, contextual, and constructed through individual experiences and social interactions (Chiu & Chen, 2014; Guiffrida, 2015). In psychology, constructivism has influenced many scholars, such as Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development in children and the constructivist theories of personality by Mahoney (2003) and Kelly (1955). These theories provide valuable insights into understanding clients' constructed perspectives, promoting growth and change.

When applied to the counseling supervision process, constructivism similarly benefits supervisees. It has long been regarded as an effective approach for fostering critical self-reflection, critical thinking, and tolerance for ambiguity in counselors (McAuliffe & Eriksen, 2011; Nelson & Neufeldt, 1998). Guiffrida (2015) proposed the Constructivist Developmental Theory, which creates space for supervisees to reflect and actively construct counseling knowledge. This approach encourages supervisors to apply traditional supervision theories while assisting supervisees in understanding their interactions with clients through their unique constructs. It also helps supervisees process their experiences and challenges during change, providing the necessary counseling strategies. Guiffrida (2015) identified several constructivist supervision strategies that foster supervisee growth and development: (1) Positive regard; (2) Empathy; (3) Congruence; (4) Mindfulness guidance; (5) Partnership in the journey; (5)

Reflective questioning; (6) Challenging change; (7) Experimental practices; (8) Narrative language; (9) Self-reflective exercises; (10) Constructivist counseling. Supervision allows supervisees to reflect on their counseling knowledge, relationships with clients, and personal issues. It is worth exploring whether applying this approach to supervisors themselves can similarly enhance their reflective capacity regarding supervisory knowledge, relationships with supervisees, and personalized supervisory challenges.

The Application of Sandtray Therapy in Supervision Practice

Sandtray therapy is an expressive therapeutic approach. It's a nonverbal communication medium used by trained therapists to address clients' intrapersonal and interpersonal issues (Homeyer & Sweeney, 2017a, 2017b). Its adaptability, flexibility, and distinctiveness allow it to integrate various psychotherapeutic theories and techniques (Anekstein et al., 2014; McCurdy & Owen, 2008; Stark et al., 2015; Tsai, 2022). Armstrong (2012) identified several principles underlying the use of sandtray therapy: (1) Kinesthetic properties: The sensory experience of sand and the sense of control while arranging objects; (2) Indirectness: A safer way to express issues and emotions; (3) Emotional release: Allowing the expression of intense, even previously unrecognized, emotions; (4) Inclusiveness: Facilitating participation among family members; (5) Metaphor: Understanding symbolic meanings within clients' creations; (6) Deep Self-Disclosure: Catalyzing profound personal revelations. Due to its expressive, nonverbal, and metaphorical nature, sandtray therapy aids clients in gaining awareness and expressing themselves during counseling. Similarly, it has been widely adopted in supervision processes. Fall and Sutton (2004) emphasize that using sandtray therapy in supervision can lower supervisees' defensiveness, foster creativity, and activate right-brain processes. By intuitively representing client cases, supervisees enhance their case conceptualization skills. Markos and Hyatt (1999) found that sandtray representations of clients during supervision internships helped supervisees explore unconscious aspects of the counseling relationship. Furthermore, Markos et al. (2007) conducted sandtray-based supervision with master's-level counseling students, finding that creative supervision processes facilitated parallel processes, addressed countertransference issues, and heightened awareness of supervisees' conscious and unconscious thoughts and feelings. In Taiwan, research on sandtray supervision has primarily focused on novice counselors (Huang, 2014) and counseling interns (Hsieh, 2009; Lai, 2011; Liao, 2013; Lin, 2011; Tsai, 2022; Wu, 2012;). Studies have explored topics such as experiences during sandtray supervision, self-awareness, metaphors, significant subjective events, unspoken phenomena, supervisee anxiety, supervision effectiveness, and the development and evaluation of group sandtray supervision models.

From the above research, the impacts of sandtray supervision on supervisees can be summarized as follows: (1) Providing a safe and open environment for exploration, reducing supervisee anxiety; (2) Visual and kinesthetic concretization of case-related issues; (3) Enhancing awareness of supervisee and client internal states, countertransference, and parallel processes through metaphors; (4) Facilitating emotional expression, reconstruction, and actionable insights. The purpose of this study is exploring how sandtray supervision influences the supervision process itself—regarding supervisees' experiences and the aforementioned four dimensions.

Constructivist-Oriented Sandtray Supervision

Constructivism offers a framework where individuals construct their futures by drawing upon their perceptions of themselves and the world. Similarly, sandtray therapy employs symbolic

representations to reconstruct and understand the world. This shared foundation makes it feasible to integrate constructivism with sandtray supervision. As in traditional sandtray supervision, constructivist-oriented sandtray supervisors provide sand and an array of symbolic objects for supervisees to utilize (Saltis et al., 2019).

Saltis et al. (2019) suggest implementing constructivist-oriented sandtray supervision in practical training courses as a reflective teaching method. Watkinson et al. (2021) incorporated mindfulness into constructivist-oriented supervision to help counseling interns manage anxiety during their internships. Wu (2022) also applied constructivist-oriented supervision theory to enhance supervisees' skills in conceptualization, processing, and personalization during supervision.

Although the above discussions and studies primarily focus on the supervisory processes of counselors, they highlight the potential for enhancing novice supervisors' reflective and awareness abilities. To explore this further, the author has synthesized the constructivist emphasis on individual experiential construction with the function of sandtray supervision in fostering supervisee growth. The resulting constructivist-oriented sandtray supervision model is outlined as follows: (1) role and task of the supervisor: Assist supervisees in reframing and reconstructing their perspectives on the supervision process, fostering new awareness and changes. The supervisor acts as a companion, collaboratively exploring and experiencing the supervisee's supervision journey; (2) supervisory relationship: The supervisor establishes a relationship characterized by positive regard, empathy, and authenticity toward the supervisee; (3) supervisory format and stages: Formats include: one-on-one, one (supervisor) to multiple (supervisees), or peer supervision. stages include: clarifying supervision goals and establishing the supervisory relationship; understanding the challenges faced by supervisees and their perceptions of these challenges through sandtray therapy; reflecting on supervisees' emotional responses to sandtray symbols and incorporating their emotions; Encouraging supervisees to adopt alternative perspectives within the sandtray to reflect and reconstruct their views on interactions; Integrating sandtray symbols and encouraging dialogue between supervisees and objects. (4) supervisory techniques: Mindfulness guidance and self-reflection exercises.

The author analyzed the recorded supervision processes of doctoral students who received constructivist-oriented sandtray supervision. This initial exploration aims to examine the integration of constructivism and sandtray supervision in enhancing reflective capacities in novice supervisors.

The Learning and Reflective Process of Novice Supervisors in Constructivist-Oriented Sandtray Supervision

The supervisee under the author's guidance was an intern counselor, a senior undergraduate majoring in a helping profession-related program. The supervisee had previous client experience but expressed confusion about the role of a specialized counseling teacher after discussing job situations with a professional counseling teacher during the internship. They were contemplating their future direction, considering a career in human resources while planning to reassess their decision after completing their educational internship.

The supervisee's client was a second-year middle school girl dealing with interpersonal, family, and academic issues, with interpersonal relationships being the primary concern. The client was dissatisfied with her social interactions at school, feeling anxious about not having a close,

dependable friend. She expressed a strong desire for someone to confide in and feared being left alone.

The supervisee initially sought supervision to address challenges in working with the client, aiming for sessions every two to three weeks. However, the supervision process concluded prematurely after only four client sessions, as the client decided to terminate counseling. This early termination also left the supervision process unfinished. The novice supervisor felt a sense of unease regarding this abrupt conclusion and sought to use this case as an opportunity to reflect on the supervision process. The supervision adopted a constructivist-oriented sandtray supervision approach as a demonstration. At the beginning of the supervision, the novice supervisor was invited to create a sandtray titled "Me, My Supervisee, and the Client" (Figure 1). The symbolic representations within the sandtray were analyzed and discussed throughout the supervision process (Table 1). Due to space limitations, only a portion of the transcript is presented below.

Figure 1
"Me, My Supervisee, and the Client"

Table 1

Supervision Process and Strategy Explanation

The Supervision Dialogue	The Supervisee (Novice Supervisor)'S Explanations
Supervisor 38: When I described the phenomenon of not being valued by the counselor, you see, what you just said—this is the kind of symbolic specificity that we get with sandtray supervision. If we weren't using sandtray, we wouldn't be able to be this concrete. For example, she (the supervisee/counselor) described to me how this cat (the client) has irregular scheduling. Normally, don't we fix a certain time for sessions? But to accommodate the student, we align with whatever time she prefers. This cat (the client) has a very free schedule, choosing whatever time she wants, but since I (the supervisee/counselor) need to intern, I adjust my schedule to fit hers. The problem is, I (the supervisee/counselor) long for freedom, for autonomy. How does this affect her internally? What happens when I don't express these things? But I describe this phenomenon and ask her (the supervisee/counselor)—this cat (the client), with an irregular schedule, while this cat (the supervisee/counselor) also desires wings (freedom)—how does she think? How does she feel? Something like that. We're not assuming she has a certain feeling, but we are presenting the phenomenon to her (the supervisee/counselor), which is what we need to do. I've just laid out a lot of phenomena, right?	The supervisor demonstrates how to use the characteristics of an object (autonomy) to guide the supervisee/counselor in recognizing their difficulties in case management (inability to autonomously decide on the case scheduling).
Supervisee 36: I feel like this is what seems to be lacking in the conversation...	The supervisee becomes aware of their own shortcomings through the supervisor's demonstration.
Supervisor 39: And from the cat, we also see the qualities of interaction with others and with the outside world. She's not ready to let me ask, so I'll ask myself, "Should I do this?" And then I'll say, "Wow, this quality... what do you think?" I wouldn't immediately say it's like a cat, but I'll turn it around and ask: What is the quality of a cat? When I was reflecting on the cat's qualities, a lot of things came up. She really needs affirmation, needs care, but you can't get too close to her. She doesn't need to be too close, but after having enough security, she will naturally come closer, right? Isn't this the way the supervisee/counselor needs? Is this how she needs it? She doesn't tend to ask the client for in-depth things. Could it be because she herself is not used to such a way? A lot of things are pointed out but not explored in depth.	The supervisor demonstrates how to start with the qualities of an object, allowing the supervisee to share more comfortably, and from this, the supervisee becomes aware of the parallel process in the counseling and supervision relationship.
(There is more content)	

Comprehensive Analysis and Discussion of the Supervision Process

Before Supervision: Non-verbal Messages of Object Selection and Placement

Before the supervision session began, the supervisor and peer supervisors had already reviewed the supervision topics provided by the supervisee, including the supervisee's/counselor's background, case conceptualization, and a transcript of the supervision process. In the process of selecting objects, the supervisee not only sought clues based on the original conceptualization but also made decisions intuitively and subconsciously to choose appropriate objects. The supervisor encouraged the supervisee to select two objects to symbolize different roles, allowing the images of the client, supervisee/counselor, and supervisee self to be presented in more varied ways, rather than being limited to a single representation. During the placement of the objects, the size contrast, positions, and directions of the objects subtly revealed the supervisee's thoughts and feelings regarding the client, the supervisee/counselor, and their interaction. The supervisee realized that before describing the supervision issue or before any inquiry or clarification from the supervisor, the objects and arrangement in the sandtray already conveyed rich non-verbal messages.

Supervision Initiation Phase: Clarifying the Supervisee's Confusions and Case Conceptualization

At the beginning of the supervision session, the supervisor first inquired: "What is the issue you would like to focus on in supervision?" This question, centered on the supervisee, allowed the discussion to focus on the supervisee's concerns, better addressing their needs. Through self-deprecating humor, the supervisor lightened the atmosphere, alleviating the supervisee's initial worries and tension about the supervision process. This made the supervisee and their classmates laugh, helping them feel more relaxed and at ease.

The supervisor then asked the supervisee to provide an example of an interaction with the supervisor, demonstrating how to enter the supervisee's phenomenological field, showing curiosity and attempting to understand the situation, which brought the supervisor closer to the supervisee's described confusion. The supervisee shared an example of the supervisor's response to the case's closure, as well as their own response and reflection. The supervisor first affirmed the supervisee's original response, suggesting that the only adjustment needed was in the sequence of the response, and expressed approval. At this point, the supervisee seemed to feel reassured, no longer fearing judgment, and gained more courage to continue exploring.

Regarding the supervisee's/counselor's state, the supervisor further inquired, "Could it be that the supervisee/counselor is also accustomed to this way of responding? So, in terms of understanding the case's feelings and thoughts less, that's what I'm curious about." This was an attempt to encourage the supervisee to reconsider the supervisee's/counselor's traits and habits, as described by the supervisee, and their impact on the supervisory relationship, subtly expanding the supervisee's conceptualization and awareness of the supervisee/counselor.

The supervisor then asked the supervisee to share the background and issues of the client the supervisee/counselor was working on. This prompted the supervisee to reflect on the goal of supervision, which, beyond helping the supervisee become more aware and improve professional skills, primarily aimed to foster the supervisee's ability to support the growth of the case. At the same time, in understanding the case, it also led to awareness of the parallel processes between the supervisee/counselor and the client, as well as between the

supervisee/counselor and the supervisee. Additionally, the supervisor encouraged the supervisee to share their conceptualization of the case and invited the peers to imagine the interpersonal patterns the "cat" (symbolizing the case) learned in its family environment. The supervisor also asked, "What is going on with the cat in its relationships?" This allowed the supervisee and peers to break free from preconceived notions about the case and use the cat's traits and behaviors to explore potential interpersonal issues, opening up more possibilities in the conceptualization process.

Mid-supervision Phase: Deep Conceptualization of the Supervisor

After the initial exploration of the case conceptualization, the focus of supervision shifted back to the counselor (supervisee). When the supervisor asked the supervisee, "Is the counselor also a feline like the case? How does the counselor view this cat? What are the interpersonal difficulties in this situation, and how does the counselor understand it?" the supervisee found this line of inquiry interesting, as replacing "How does the counselor view the client?" with "How does the cat view the cat?" allowed for richer symbolic meaning. This shift enabled the supervisee to construct a new understanding of the relationship between the counselor and the client. When the counselor observed that the client was unwilling to explore their own issues in relationships, the supervisor's curiosity was piqued: "Doesn't this cat want to confront this other cat?" This prompted the supervisee to consider the counselor's handling approach. When the counselor asked the client why they might feel disregarded in interpersonal interactions but the client struggled to respond, the supervisor used a metaphor, saying, "You ask the cat, why do you have this habit? I'd say, I don't know; it's just how I am!" This prompted the supervisee to realize that the counselor's way of clarifying the case's interpersonal issues—"exploring the case's thoughts and feelings about interpersonal phenomena"—was more effective than "asking the case to think about the causes of their interpersonal problems," which helped to better understand the case's situation and challenges.

In discussing the supervisee's conceptualization of the supervisee/counselor, the supervisor asked the supervisee to share another symbolic object of the counselor besides the "cat"—the "wings." The supervisee responded that the wings symbolized the counselor's thoughts about their role and the course, as well as the decision to terminate the course and supervision, as if the counselor had a direction they wished to fly toward. The supervisor responded, "This cat has its wings, and it wants to fly," but also inquired, "What hit him, such that he didn't even want to finish the course? What exactly is going on?" The supervisor invited peers to brainstorm, and the peers offered their observations and guesses, encouraging the supervisee to think more diversely. The supervisor then clarified, "What are the traits of the cat? Because the cat doesn't get close or deeply involved. As soon as you don't want to talk, I'll withdraw, or I won't get close. Not getting close or involved seems to be the cat's interpersonal pattern. What are the traits of the cat?" This led everyone to collectively reflect on the supervisor's traits and interpersonal patterns, as well as their influence on the counseling process and future career choices. Using the cat's traits as a metaphor not only concretized the supervisee's subconscious imaginations and feelings toward the supervisee/counselor but also further clarified and verified the supervisee's/counselor's characteristics, providing a clearer and more detailed understanding compared to the supervisee's verbal descriptions.

End of Supervision Phase: Seeing Myself Through the Relationship With the Supervisee

Finally, the focus of supervision shifted back to the relationship between the supervisee and the counselor. The supervisor humorously asked, "How is this rabbit going to deal with these

two cats?" and "The treasure hasn't even been dug up yet (the supervisory relationship is already ending)," allowing the supervisee to temporarily shift their focus from herself to the symbolic objects and gain clearer insight into the interactions between themselves, the counselor, and the client. After responding with empathy to the "rabbit's" (supervisee's) frustration, the supervisor suggested, "If there's an opportunity for the cat to look at the rabbit, try moving this cat a little bit. The cat can have a chance to look at the rabbit. You can move its position." During the process of moving the objects, the supervisee seemed to be moved and made a realization: the shifting of the viewpoint and the change in positioning offered an opportunity to witness the potential for a change in their relationship. The supervisor then inquired, "In this position, what kind of rabbit does the cat see?" prompting the supervisee to try and perceive their role and function from the counselor's perspective, and in doing so, providing affirmation.

At the same time, the supervisor keenly observed, "Their (the supervisee's and counselor's) qualities are quite different, aren't they? The rabbit is faster, the cat is slower. What should the rabbit do? Let's see if we can give the rabbit a chance to see the cat." At this point, the supervisee seemed to have found a way to synchronize with the counselor: slowing down, waiting, and accompanying, and was able to anticipate how such an adjustment could bring changes to the supervisory relationship. The realization in that moment left a lasting impression on the supervisee. Finally, returning to the relationship between the counselor and the client, the supervisor asked, "If we go back, and the cat and the rabbit synchronize like this, they've been together for some time, and they both know what happens when the cat (the client) encounters the rabbit. They also know what happens to themselves. When the cat encounters the rabbit again, what will be different?" By reflecting on the changes in the counselor's behavior due to the supervisor's accompaniment, the supervisor allowed the supervisee to consider the potential changes in their interactions with the client, as seen through the lens of parallel process.

At the close of supervision, the supervisor encouraged the supervisee by saying, "The rabbit is also learning, but the rabbit is very active," and "The rabbit is very wise; it knows when to stop," affirming the supervisee's potential for growth despite the many uncertainties and areas of self-awareness the supervisee experienced during their interactions with the counselor. This affirmation helped the supervisee recognize their potential for growth.

Reflection and Integration: Combining Constructivist Approach and Sandtray Supervision Through Real Experience

In the process of receiving constructivist sandtray supervision in counseling supervision, the author experienced the supervisor's positive and active engagement (affirming the supervisee's awareness and agency), empathy (understanding the supervisee's frustration), genuineness and consistency (believing the supervisee can find the answers and guiding them to think in this way), partnership (allowing the supervisee to determine the theme of the supervision), reflective questioning (assisting the supervisee in exploring feelings and thoughts about the counselor and the case, as well as their awareness of changes in their positions), experimental exploration (using the symbolic and metaphorical aspects of objects and their movement to promote reflection), narrative language (asking open-ended questions to express curiosity about the supervisee's thoughts and feelings), and self-reflection exercises (practicing throughout the sandtray exercise). These practices align with the concrete implementation of the constructivist supervisory approach proposed by Guiffrida (2015).

Regarding the functions of sandtray supervision, the author could feel that it provided a free and safe environment for exploration, reducing anxiety. The supervisee had the freedom to select objects and decide the direction and depth of the discussion, which allowed for a sense of security when expressing thoughts and feelings through the objects. The use of objects and the process of placing and moving them concretized the issues related to the casework through visual and kinesthetic experiences (presenting the supervisory interaction and relationships through images made the process vivid and intuitive, and the action of moving the objects triggered changes in psychological processes). Furthermore, through the metaphor of the objects, the supervisee became more aware of the internal states of the case and themselves, countertransference, and parallel processes (gaining deeper understanding and awareness of the interpersonal qualities and patterns of the client, counselor, and supervisee through the symbolic traits of the objects). Lastly, sandtray supervision helped the supervisee express emotions (articulating worries and anxieties), reconstruct perspectives and actions (seeing the positive effects of the changed supervisory relationship from the counselor's viewpoint, and understanding how they could change). These experiences also echo the findings in the literature on the impact of sandtray supervision on supervisees, as discussed in the previous sections of this paper.

Conclusion

In reviewing the literature on the constructivist approach and sandtray supervision, similarities between the two can be identified: both constructivism advocates for using one's sense of self and the world to construct the future, while sandtray uses symbolic representations to rebuild and understand the world. The focus in both approaches is on understanding, reconstructing, and taking action based on the subjective thoughts and feelings of the individual. Through personal experiences and reflections during learning process, the author have indeed found that the combination of a constructivist approach and sandtray supervision is not only applicable in counselor supervision but can also be employed in the supervision process of novice supervisors. By applying this reflective and dialogic approach in the development of novice supervisors, it allows the supervisee to reconstruct and take new actions in their supervision relationships, conceptualization of themselves as supervisees, and case conceptualization. The novice counseling supervisor not only assist supervisees in fostering more reflection and growth but also cultivate her/himself into a more aware and mature supervisor.

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Recognizing the Wounds of Teachers:
An Exploration of the Teacher Trauma-Informed Support Integration Model

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Abstract

When faced with students who may experience adversity, teachers are often the first individuals, aside from family members, to recognize and feel the impact of students' trauma. While teachers are expected to be trauma-informed helpers, there is limited research on how trauma-informed care affects teachers' physical and mental health, with little attention given to the trauma experiences that teachers themselves may face. This study explores the trauma and its effects encountered by teachers, integrating trauma-informed principles to construct a "Teacher Trauma-Informed Support Integration Model" as a practical reference framework for addressing teacher trauma issues, supported by case examples. The findings are as follows: 1) Realizing Teacher Trauma: Teachers must become aware of their own trauma experiences, and schools and communities should have a basic understanding of teacher trauma; 2) Recognizing Teacher Trauma: Teachers should recognize symptoms related to trauma. Schools can provide resources for teacher trauma assessment, and communities should be cautious about secondary harm caused by commentary or reporting on teachers; 3) Responding to Teacher Trauma: Teachers should be supported in developing self-care capabilities. Schools should create a safe and accepting atmosphere, establish two-way communication channels, and implement strategies to support teachers. Communities should work on building institutional support systems for teachers; and 4) Resisting Further Trauma for Teachers: Preventing further trauma for teachers requires a fundamental reduction of systemic oppression, addressing teachers' work well-being, and advocating for fairness and justice in teachers' working conditions. This approach offers a more proactive response to teacher trauma.

Keywords: trauma-informed care, mental health of teacher, teacher support, self-care

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Introduction

Due to the prevalence of trauma and its long-term impact on the physical and psychological well-being of individuals, trauma-informed care (Fallot & Harris, 2001) has become an increasingly important topic in recent years. In school settings, teachers often serve as the first individuals outside of students' families to recognize and experience the effects of trauma among children and adolescents who may encounter adversity during their developmental years (Atkins & Rodger, 2016). Consequently, teachers are expected to act as trauma-informed caregivers, fostering an environment of understanding, safety, and support. However, limited research has examined how trauma-informed care affects teachers' own physical and psychological well-being (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). How do teachers cope with the stress and emotional impact of understanding students' traumatic experiences? How are secondary trauma and vicarious trauma—potential stressors that may arise from these experiences—recognized and supported? Furthermore, if teachers have personally experienced trauma, are they able to recognize how their own traumatic experiences influence their understanding and support of students?

In recent years, changes in the domestic educational landscape have subjected teachers to significant stressors, including shifts in their professional roles due to educational reforms, changes in counseling and disciplinary approaches, increasing parental involvement and expectations, evolving family structures and student behavioral characteristics, the diversification of student learning needs, declining birth rates leading to faculty downsizing and enrollment pressures, and challenges faced by substitute teachers (Ho, 2009; Lin, 2020; Liu, 2011; Ting et al., 2023). When teachers are exposed to multiple, prolonged stressors without effective management of their personal well-being or timely institutional and organizational support, they may experience burnout (Agyapong et al., 2022) or even trauma (Brencio & Novak, 2019).

Despite the potential for teachers to experience trauma, a review of domestic literature on trauma in school settings reveals a predominant focus on student trauma (Chang & Chen, 2021; Chien & Wang, 2012; Cho, 2023; Chuang, 2019;) or on vicarious trauma among psychologists handling school-related trauma cases (Chen et al., 2012; Chou, 2010; Fan, 2015; Hu, 2007). There has been less attention given to the issue of vicarious trauma among teachers, who are often the first to engage with students before referring them to school counselors or psychologists. Additionally, little research has explored teachers' own traumatic experiences and their potential impact on professional practice. Therefore, this study aims to examine the trauma and challenges faced by teachers and, from a trauma-informed perspective, propose strategies and practical guidelines for addressing teacher trauma in educational settings.

Trauma and Its Impact on Teachers

The Multifaceted Nature of Teacher Trauma

What types of trauma do teachers face? According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), trauma is defined as "an event, series of events, or circumstances experienced by an individual as physically or emotionally harmful or life-threatening and that has lasting adverse effects on the individual's functioning and mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being" (SAMHSA, 2014, p. 7). Therefore, trauma may result from a single event or a series of experiences, including war, natural

disasters, life-threatening accidents, sexual assault, abandonment, the death of a loved one, and other psychologically overwhelming situations (Stephens, 2020). Chronic exposure to threats can also lead to trauma, such as domestic violence, bullying, poverty, abuse, or discrimination based on race, gender, and other identity markers (Davidson, 2017). When teachers encounter such distressing experiences, they may suffer psychological trauma.

A landmark study on adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) found that negative experiences in childhood are common and strongly correlated with long-term risks to adult health, behaviors, and overall well-being (Felitti et al., 1998). Teachers may have faced adversity in their own childhoods, which could affect their health, personal lives, and professional experiences in adulthood.

Beyond potential trauma from their past, teachers also face stress and threats from crisis events within school environments. According to the Ministry of Education (2023) Taiwan analysis of school safety and disaster incidents across different educational levels, the highest category of reported incidents was health-related events (81.95%), followed by accidental incidents (6.38%), child and adolescent protection cases (5.83%), violent and deviant behaviors (3.11%), security maintenance issues (1.29%), other incidents (0.70%), disciplinary conflicts (0.45%), and natural disasters (0.29%). The significant increase in reported health-related incidents highlights the severe impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on schools. Among accidental incidents, student suicides and self-harm were most prevalent, while the number of suicides and self-harm cases among faculty and staff also increased compared to the previous year, raising concerns about the mental health of educators. Child and adolescent protection cases have consistently ranked among the top three categories in school safety reports, underscoring the need for teachers to remain vigilant about students' family and life crises to ensure their safety.

Thus, in addition to the threats posed by pandemics and health crises, teachers must also cope with the emotional toll of student or staff injuries and fatalities, the challenges of supporting high-risk students and vulnerable families, as well as persistent issues such as school bullying, violence, and gender discrimination. In certain regions, teachers even face extreme crises such as war, natural disasters, and threats involving lethal weapons on school grounds. Research has also found that teachers have experienced verbal and physical threats from students (Anderman et al., 2018).

Moreover, due to evolving educational policies and social changes, teachers are increasingly burdened with escalating pressures and demands in their professional roles. These overwhelming emotional, psychological, and physical stressors often exceed their coping capacities, reaching the threshold of trauma for some educators (Brencio & Novak, 2019). Given the potential crises in teachers' personal histories, the traumatic incidents they encounter in school settings, and the immense pressures arising from shifts in the educational landscape, it is crucial to examine how these challenges impact teachers' well-being and whether adequate resources are available to support them in navigating these adversities.

Secondary Trauma and Vicarious Trauma Among Teachers

In addition to experiencing direct trauma—such as personal exposure to traumatic events or developing trauma and burnout due to excessive stress—teachers may also develop secondary trauma or vicarious trauma in the process of supporting students who have experienced trauma. Secondary trauma arises from witnessing or learning about another

person's traumatic experiences, leading to emotional distress. This occurs due to the empathetic engagement of caregivers or professionals with trauma survivors and the emotional connection formed between them (Gilbert-Eliot, 2020; Wang, 2014). Vicarious trauma has broader implications, not only leading to physical and psychological symptoms but also altering the helper's internal beliefs, cognitive frameworks, and social interactions in lasting ways (Pearlman & Saakvitne, 1995). Both secondary and vicarious trauma originate from a helper's empathetic engagement with trauma survivors and result in biopsychosocial symptoms (Wang, 2010). Since teachers empathize with students' traumatic experiences, they are also at risk of developing secondary or vicarious trauma.

Teachers frequently serve as the first responders to students' trauma, listening to their experiences and managing their emotional and behavioral crises (Hydon et al., 2015). This role increases teachers' emotional burden, stress, and anxiety (Alisic, 2012; Caringi et al., 2015). When teachers become aware of students facing crises such as domestic violence, sexual assault, the sudden death of a family member, or major disasters, they must report these incidents, assess their impact on students, and understand potential trauma responses. During campus crises—such as when students witness a peer engaging in self-harm or suicide—teachers must not only accompany the affected student to receive medical care and comfort other students but also contact parents, monitor students' psychological well-being over time, manage classroom dynamics, and report crisis intervention measures to school administration. The intense, multitasking nature of these responsibilities places a significant emotional strain on teachers.

Despite their critical role in crisis management and student care, teachers' potential trauma is often overlooked. As Galand et al. (2007) found, research on school violence and aggression typically focuses on its impact on students, with teachers acting as reporters rather than recognized victims. However, teachers face students' trauma almost daily in the classroom (Tehrani, 2007). Schools often delegate student mental health issues to counselors and social workers without providing adequate resources for teachers (Miller & Flint-Stipp, 2019). Given that teachers inevitably encounter student trauma, it is crucial to examine how excessive empathy and emotional involvement may lead to secondary or vicarious trauma, subsequently affecting their teaching and ability to support students (Alisic, 2012). Addressing this issue is essential for ensuring teachers' well-being and sustaining a supportive educational environment.

Trauma-Informed Support Model for Teachers

In school settings, trauma-informed care (TIC) represents a new approach to supporting students with a history of trauma. The core principle of this perspective is to minimize the risk of unintentional retraumatization, secondary trauma, or new trauma during service provision, ensuring individual safety (Carello & Butler, 2014). However, trauma can stem from both individual and collective experiences (Stephens, 2020). While TIC enhances support for students affected by trauma, it also implies that teachers' roles in schools are primarily focused on addressing the impact of trauma rather than its root causes. When trauma-informed educators center their efforts on equity and social justice, they drive changes at the individual, classroom, school, and systemic levels (Venet, 2021). This suggests that trauma-informed care should extend its focus beyond individuals to encompass systemic dimensions as well.

Building on the discussion of trauma types and trauma-informed intervention levels, this study integrates multiple frameworks to address teacher trauma. Specifically, it incorporates the four "R" principles of trauma-informed care proposed by SAMHSA (2014): **Realize** (understanding trauma), **Recognize** (identifying trauma symptoms), **Respond** (implementing appropriate interventions), and **Resist Re-traumatization** (preventing further harm). Additionally, it draws from Van Dernoot Lipsky's (2009) "Trauma Stewardship model", which emphasizes trauma care at the individual, organizational, and societal levels. Furthermore, it aligns with Venet's (2021) "equity-centered trauma-informed education" principles, which advocate for practical, pedagogical, and policy changes. By integrating these perspectives, this study proposes the "Integrated Trauma-Informed Support Model for Teachers" (Figure 1) as a conceptual framework for addressing teacher trauma and guiding practical interventions.

Figure 1
Integrated Trauma-Informed Support Model for Teachers
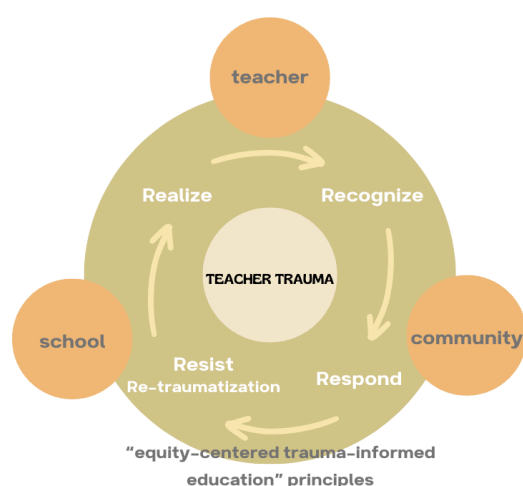
Understanding Teacher Trauma

In a trauma-informed approach, all individuals within an organization or system are expected to have a fundamental understanding of trauma and recognize its impact on families, groups, organizations, communities, and individuals (SAMHSA, 2014). At the individual level, teachers should reflect on their own experiences of adversity, suffering, and trauma—whether past (e.g., childhood neglect) or present (e.g., workplace bullying), direct (e.g., verbal threats from students) or indirect (e.g., supporting abused students). They should consider what resources they sought for support and explore the connection between their trauma experiences and their decision to enter the teaching profession (Van Dernoot Lipsky, 2009). Recognizing the pervasiveness of trauma allows teachers to understand that certain heightened or diminished emotional responses—such as excessive discipline in response to student misconduct or avoidance when facing parental criticism—or even maladaptive behaviors (e.g., inappropriate interactions with students) may stem from unresolved trauma. Importantly, these reactions are not fixed but can be addressed through various recovery approaches.

Beyond teachers' individual awareness of trauma, it is crucial that all members of the school environment—including students, colleagues, department heads, and principals—possess a basic understanding of teacher trauma. Venet (2021) argues that trauma-informed practice

should shift from a passive stance (identifying and supporting those affected by trauma) to a proactive approach, where the widespread adoption of trauma-informed practices benefits everyone. When all school community members recognize that teacher trauma may arise from personal life challenges or overwhelming school-related stressors, and that such experiences are common and can happen to anyone, stigma surrounding teacher trauma can be reduced. This means reframing reactions to teachers' emotional responses—not labeling them as signs of incompetence or irresponsibility, but rather as normal trauma reactions—and actively working to mitigate occupational trauma risks. In doing so, schools can foster a supportive work environment where assistance and care replace punitive measures.

Expanding beyond the school system, broader community stakeholders—including parents, professional organizations, and the media—should also develop an understanding of teacher trauma. When incidents of teacher-student conflict or disciplinary actions arise, this awareness can help contextualize teacher behavior as potentially trauma-related rather than solely attributing it to negligence or misconduct. This shift in perspective can reduce the tendency to blame teachers and instead encourage greater societal support, enabling teachers to remain engaged and committed to their roles in education.

Recognizing Teacher Trauma

Individuals within an organization or system should be able to recognize signs of trauma (SAMHSA, 2014). Two individuals who experience the same traumatic event may react differently, leading to varying effects on their mental health (Thrive NYC, 2021). At the individual level, teachers should identify trauma-related symptoms such as anxiety, depression, panic, physical ailments, and relational difficulties. Additionally, they should recognize more apparent trauma responses, including intrusive reactions, avoidance behaviors, negative cognition and emotions, and hyperarousal. By tracking changes in these symptoms and responses, teachers can gain a clearer understanding of whether and how trauma is affecting them (Gilbert-Eliot, 2020).

At the organizational level, schools can support trauma recognition by providing screening and assessment resources for teachers (SAMHSA, 2014). Peer support, human resources departments, teacher support networks, and professional learning communities can all play a role in identifying trauma responses and symptoms. Rather than attributing such reactions solely to poor emotional regulation and responding with excessive or dismissive measures, recognizing trauma can help schools implement appropriate interventions and support mechanisms for teachers. As Van Dernoot Lipsky (2009) asserts, institutions have the potential to either mitigate or exacerbate the impact of trauma on their employees. The way an institution addresses trauma among its staff ultimately influences the experiences of those they serve. When a school organization develops a clear understanding of teacher trauma, the benefits extend beyond the teachers themselves to the entire student body.

Responding To Teacher Trauma

When we recognize that traumatic experiences can directly or indirectly impact all individuals involved, the next step is to integrate trauma knowledge into policies, procedures, and practices to ensure an effective response (SAMHSA, 2014). At the individual level, there are various ways to respond to trauma. As Van Dernoot Lipsky (2009) suggests, "The essence of trauma stewardship is cultivating our ability to be present, engage in self-exploration, practice self-care, and maintain patience." Teachers can develop self-care

plans by either independently managing their well-being or seeking counseling resources, focusing on their emotions, thoughts, physical health, and interpersonal relationships (Gilbert-Eliot, 2020).

However, Wright (2023), in a review of trauma-informed literature, found that most trauma-informed models tend to prioritize compliance and self-regulation. Therefore, responding to teacher trauma should not rely solely on individual efforts but also involve school organizations and broader social structures. Resilience—the ability to recover from adversity—can be fostered by enhancing interpersonal relationships, promoting safety, transparency, and collaboration within communities and institutions, thereby reducing stress and supporting recovery (Thrive NYC, 2021). Schools can address teacher trauma by fostering a safe and inclusive environment, providing spaces for self-care, establishing transparent and bidirectional communication channels between teachers and administrators, implementing reasonable workload adjustments, developing teacher support strategies, and promoting peer support. For instance, conflicts between teachers and parents, particularly when teachers face parental complaints or pressure, can be a source of trauma. While encouraging teachers to seek support services (e.g., counseling), schools can also alleviate stress by offering administrative or legal consultation during complaint processes or assigning appropriate personnel to mediate communication between teachers and parents, thereby providing teachers with the space needed for trauma recovery.

Understanding that social, historical, and political factors contribute to trauma allows us to envision how schools can influence these factors in pursuit of a more just world. Schools and teachers should not only focus on how trauma affects the classroom but also consider how classroom dynamics can contribute to social change. Teachers can collaborate with students to become agents of a more equitable society (Venet, 2021). Beyond integrating critical reflection on structural factors contributing to teacher trauma (e.g., the imposition of unrealistic moral standards on educators) into classroom discussions, schools and educational authorities must acknowledge the importance of teacher trauma, advocate for teacher support, and establish systemic measures to provide tangible, institutional backing for teachers.

Preventing Teacher Re-traumatization

A trauma-informed approach seeks to prevent both individuals and staff from experiencing re-traumatization. However, organizations often unintentionally create stressful or toxic environments that hinder recovery, compromise the well-being of workers, and obstruct the fulfillment of their mission (SAMHSA, 2014). Therefore, trauma-informed educational practices should address the impact of trauma on the entire school community, critically examine which responses and institutional structures may contribute to harm, and proactively implement preventive measures to mitigate future trauma (Venet, 2021).

Teachers have long been expected to embody a profession of self-sacrifice, leading them to prioritize the needs of others over their own and hesitate to seek help. This issue is exacerbated by both direct and indirect messages from school systems and their surrounding communities, which glorify the heroism of teachers and emphasize their vital role in students' lives—potentially reinforcing these societal expectations in unhealthy ways (McCarthy et al., 2022). Preventing teacher re-traumatization requires addressing systemic pressures at the societal level, such as the excessive scrutiny teachers face when making mistakes, the disregard for teachers' well-being amid overwhelming teaching and administrative workloads, and the need to advocate for fairness and justice in teachers' working conditions. Taking such

proactive steps would represent a more meaningful and constructive response to teacher trauma.

Practical Application Principles of the Trauma-Informed Support Model for Teachers

Building upon the discussions above, this section applies the "Integrated Trauma-Informed Support Model for Teachers" in practice, using an observed case of teacher trauma from the educational setting as an example (Table 1).

Mr. Chang is a middle school teacher who, in addition to his regular teaching responsibilities, took on administrative duties and the task of coaching students for a competition this semester. The overwhelming workload and multiple roles left him exhausted and struggling to balance his responsibilities. One day, while disciplining a student in the classroom, Mr. Chang experienced a severe verbal altercation. The student verbally threatened his personal safety and even made a physical gesture of aggression, causing him to feel fearful and anxious. Despite reporting the incident to the school's student affairs office and the school issuing a minor disciplinary action against the student, the student's parents reacted with dissatisfaction. They escalated the situation by threatening Mr. Chang on campus and even warning that they would report his "misconduct" to the media. As a result, Mr. Chang's initial distress was compounded, and past traumatic experiences were reactivated, leading to symptoms of depression and anxiety. Overwhelmed by the fear of parental complaints, he became reluctant to confront the issue. Consequently, his approach to student discipline became increasingly passive, negatively affecting both his teaching effectiveness and overall well-being.

Table 1
Practical Application Principles of the "Integrated Trauma-Informed Support Model for Teachers"

4R principles	Intervention Level	Key Practical Applications	Available Resources/Support Units
Understanding Teacher Trauma	teacher	Awareness of Personal Trauma Experiences: • When facing threats from students or parents, teachers should reflect on whether they have had similar experiences in the past. • How have past trauma experiences been addressed and recovered from?	• within the school: guidance office • outside the school: ministry of education / teacher counseling and support services in various cities and counties, community psychological counseling resources
	school	Awareness of Personal Trauma Experiences: • When facing threats from students or parents, teachers should reflect on whether they have had similar experiences in the past. • How have past trauma experiences been addressed and recovered from?	principal, human resources office, academic affairs office, student affairs office, guidance office
	community	Awareness of Personal Trauma Experiences: • When facing threats from students or parents, teachers	parents, professional organizations, media

		should reflect on whether they have had similar experiences in the past. • How have past trauma experiences been addressed and recovered from?	
Recognizing Teacher Trauma	teacher	Recognizing One's Own Trauma Symptoms: • A teacher's fear, anxiety, and depression may stem from the impact of trauma.	• within the school: guidance office • outside the school: ministry of education / teacher counseling and support services in various cities and counties, community psychological counseling resources
	school	Providing Trauma Screening and Assessment Resources for Teachers: • Assist teachers in assessing intense emotions such as fear, anxiety, and distress in relation to trauma.	guidance office
	community	Gaining a Clearer Understanding of Teachers' Trauma Responses: • Parents recognize trauma-related reactions in teachers' interactions with students and parents. • Professional organizations and media develop a deeper understanding of teachers' trauma responses, ensuring more informed commentary and reporting.	parents, professional organizations, media
Responding to Teacher Trauma	teacher	• Proactively express support needs (e.g., course arrangement, communication with parents, psychological counseling). • Allow oneself, as a teacher, to be imperfect and not always strong. • Accept trauma responses as a self-protective mechanism. • Learn self-care strategies to facilitate recovery.	• within the school: human resources office, academic affairs office, guidance office • outside the school: ministry of education / teacher counseling and support services in various cities and counties, community psychological counseling resources
	school	Developing Teacher Support Strategies and Providing Space for Self-Care: • Establish a transparent and two-way communication channel between teachers and administration, allowing teachers to safely express their support needs. • Implement appropriate work adjustments (e.g., temporarily stepping out of the classroom, flexible leave policies). • Provide communication channels for parents, with administrative support for mediation (e.g., understanding parental expectations, helping parents comprehend teachers' trauma	principal, human resources office, academic affairs office, student affairs office, guidance office

		experiences). • Foster peer support (e.g., forming support groups to offer emotional and professional assistance to teachers).	
	community	• Raising Awareness Among Parents, Professional Organizations, and Media About the Impact of Social Expectations on Teacher Trauma: • Collaborate with schools and teachers to enhance the quality of teacher-student relationships through a cooperative approach.	parents, professional organizations, media
Preventing Teacher Re-Traumatization	teacher	• Reevaluate the role and limitations of teachers. • Continuously monitor one's physical and mental state and proactively seek support or professional assistance.	• within the school: human resources office, academic affairs office, guidance office • outside the school: ministry of education / teacher counseling and support services in various cities and counties, community psychological counseling resources
	school	Creating a Supportive and Friendly School Environment: • Reduce pressure on teachers (e.g., avoiding blame for emotional regulation difficulties or reluctance to confront parents). • Recognize and address teachers' well-being (e.g., the impact of excessive teaching and administrative workload on personal mental and physical health). • Invite experts and scholars to introduce this model to teachers or to educate students and parents on the concept of teacher trauma. • School principals and administrators should lead by example in fostering a supportive and teacher-friendly campus environment.	principal, human resources office, academic affairs office, student affairs office, guidance office
	community	Advocacy for Fairness and Justice in Teachers' Working Conditions: • Professional organizations and media should advocate for equity and justice in the teaching profession, promoting a societal dialogue and reevaluation of teachers' roles. • Educational authorities should encourage schools to implement and promote this model, ensuring a more comprehensive response strategy for addressing teacher trauma.	professional organizations, media, and educational authorities.

Conclusion

Recognizing and Supporting Teachers' Trauma With Compassion and Equity

In the school environment, teachers serve as trauma-informed caregivers, yet they may also be wounded individuals who have experienced trauma themselves. When teachers' life experiences and campus crises directly or indirectly lead to trauma, impacting their mental and physical well-being, their ability to support students, and even the quality of their teaching, it becomes a shared challenge for teachers, students, schools, and society as a whole.

This paper seeks to understand the multifaceted nature of teachers' trauma and integrates principles from trauma-informed care, trauma stewardship, and equity-centered trauma-informed education to propose the "Integrated Trauma-Informed Support Model for Teachers" as a reference framework for addressing teacher trauma. Throughout the trauma-informed process—"understanding, identifying, responding to, and preventing re-traumatization"—it is crucial not only to provide teachers with the necessary support resources at the individual level but also to cultivate an awareness of equity. Recognizing the systemic and structural factors that contribute to teachers' trauma requires coordinated efforts at the organizational and societal levels.

When teachers' trauma is acknowledged, their well-being can be enhanced, empowering them to better support students. As the quality of teaching and teacher-student interactions improves, the educational mission of schools is reinforced, ensuring the sustainability of meaningful educational values for future generations.

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Scoping Review: Eating Disorders Among Filipino Youth:
The Role of Cultural Attitudes and Stigma in Help-Seeking Behavior

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Abstract

Eating disorders (EDs) are a significant yet underexplored public health issue in the Philippines, particularly among adolescents and young adults. Despite extensive research on EDs in Western societies, little is known about these disorders in the Philippines, where cultural attitudes profoundly influence mental health perceptions and help-seeking behaviors. This scoping review investigates how cultural attitudes and stigma affect help-seeking behaviors, serving as barriers to treatment and recovery for Filipinos with EDs. Following Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework, the review implemented five stages: (1) identifying the research question, (2) identifying relevant studies, (3) study selection, (4) charting the data, and (5) collating, summarizing, and reporting results. Inclusion criteria focused on studies from 2000 onwards examining EDs (anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, and binge eating disorder) that mention cultural attitudes, stigma, and treatment barriers within Filipino youth to young adult populations. Databases searched included Scopus, APA PsycArticles, Taylor & Francis, PUBMED, Scidirect, university repositories, and other government documents pertaining to eating disorders in the Philippines. Findings highlight the significant impact of stigma and cultural norms in shaping help-seeking behaviors, perpetuating misconceptions about EDs, and reducing access to care. Though resources about eating disorders are limited, this review underscores the need for culturally sensitive strategies to reduce stigma and improve access to treatment in the Philippines. Insights from this study aim to inform practitioners in tailoring interventions to Filipino contexts, fostering recovery for individuals with EDs.

Keywords: eating disorders, Philippines, stigma, barriers to treatment, university students, low-middle income countries, cultural attitudes, mental health

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Introduction

Eating disorders (ED) affect young people worldwide. The prevalence of DSM-5 eating disorders worldwide ranges from 3.7% to 32.9% in women aged 16 to 22 and 0.5% to 12.8% in men of the same age group (Silén & Keski-Rahkonen, 2022). While research on eating disorders is extensive in Western countries, these conditions are increasingly recognized as a global public health issue among the youth, with relatively high rates of disordered eating behaviors reported in Southeast Asian countries, including Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam (Pengpid & Peltzer, 2018). Eating disorders (ED) remain an inadequately examined public health issue in the Philippines. Despite this, there were reports of Filipino youth engaging in abnormal eating attitudes (Lorenzo et al., 2002). The limited research in the Philippine context contrasts with the growing global recognition of ED, particularly among other Southeast Asian countries (Pengpid & Peltzer, 2018). Globally, the rate of help-seeking among individuals with elevated eating disorder symptoms remains low, with slight improvement observed over the last decade (Hart et al., 2011). Cultural attitudes significantly influence perceptions of mental health challenges and discourage help-seeking behaviors, as reported in studies on other mental health conditions (Garabiles et al., 2011; Tuliao & Velasquez, in press). These cultural attitudes may similarly impact eating disorders, further acting as a barrier to treatment-seeking behavior.

This scoping review aims to explore the prevalence, cultural attitudes, and help-seeking behaviors related to eating disorders among Filipino youth while identifying barriers to treatment and drawing comparisons with other countries.

Methodology

This scoping review follows the five-stage framework outlined by Arksey and O'Malley (2005) and is reported according to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Review and Meta-Analyses Extension for Scoping Reviews Guidelines or PRISMA-ScR (Page et al., 2020). The review was implemented in five stages:

Stage 1: Identifying Research Questions

The review aimed to address the following research questions: (1) What is the prevalence of eating disorders among Filipino youth both in the Philippines and abroad? (2) How do cultural attitudes shape the perception of eating disorders and influence help-seeking behaviors? (3) What forms of stigma are present among Filipino youth, and how do they impact help-seeking behaviors? The objective was to describe the extent of the effects of eating disorders (ED) among Filipino youth and understand how cultural attitudes and stigma influence their help-seeking behaviors.

Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies

Eligibility Criteria

The review included research literature focusing on quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods studies. Studies must examine eating disorders, including anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa, binge eating disorder, and other specified eating disorders (OSFED). The target population includes Filipino children, adolescents (<18 years), and emerging adults (18-25 years), or studies comparing Filipino youth's experiences with ED in other countries. Studies

that focus on individuals with ED older than 25 years, research unrelated to eating disorders, such as obesity or body image issues, and studies not published in English are excluded. Non-clinical presentations such as emotional eating, stress eating were also excluded.

Database and Literature Search Strategy

The review utilized a systematic search method using 5 primary databases, SCOPUS, PubMed, APA PsycArticles, Taylor & Francis, and ScienceDIRECT. Gray literature sources like institutional repositories such as Animo repository, government reports, reports from non-government organizations, and other mental health organizations such as DOST-PCHRD HERDIN database will also be included. The search will cover articles published between January 2000 to January 2025. The sample search strategy included, but was not limited to, various combinations of the following keywords based on the research question: "eating disorders" "disordered eating behaviors" "Filipino" "Philippines" "Cultural attitudes" "Stigma" "help-seeking behaviors" "Treatment-barriers".

Stage 3: Study Selection

The third stage, study selection, involved screening titles and abstracts, retrieval of full-articles, followed by full-text assessment to ensure alignment with the inclusion criteria.

Stage 4: Data Charting Process

The fourth stage, data charting, involves extracting key information from each study, including author details, study design, sample demographics, cultural attitudes, stigma factors, and treatment barriers. A data chart will be created to summarize these details, allowing for easier synthesis in the final stage.

Step 5: Summarizing Results

In the fifth stage, the findings will be collated, summarized, and presented through thematic synthesis. The results were categorized into several key areas. First, studies on the prevalence and presentation of eating disorders among Filipino youth, including research on Filipino experiences, reported prevalence rates and comparisons with other countries, as well as differences based on gender and sexual minority status. Another category focused on cultural and ethnic influences on risk factors, such as parenting styles, family influence, stigmatizing beliefs, and feelings of guilt and shame, alongside the impact of internalized Western attitudes and discrimination because of ethnicity. Lastly, the review examined barriers to treatment, including stigma, lack of awareness about eating disorders, and insufficient familial communication and support. The review follows the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines—extension for scoping reviews.

Results

A total of 5,879 abstracts were identified from primary databases, along with 161 from gray literature and various government and non-government sources. After removing duplicates, screening abstracts, and reviewing full-text articles that excluded those studies with non-clinical presentation of eating behaviors, no mention of filipino youth population, and those

who do not fall under the age range parameters, the final selection included 12 articles from primary databases and 5 from other sources, totaling 17 included articles.

Figure 1
PRISMA Flow Chart
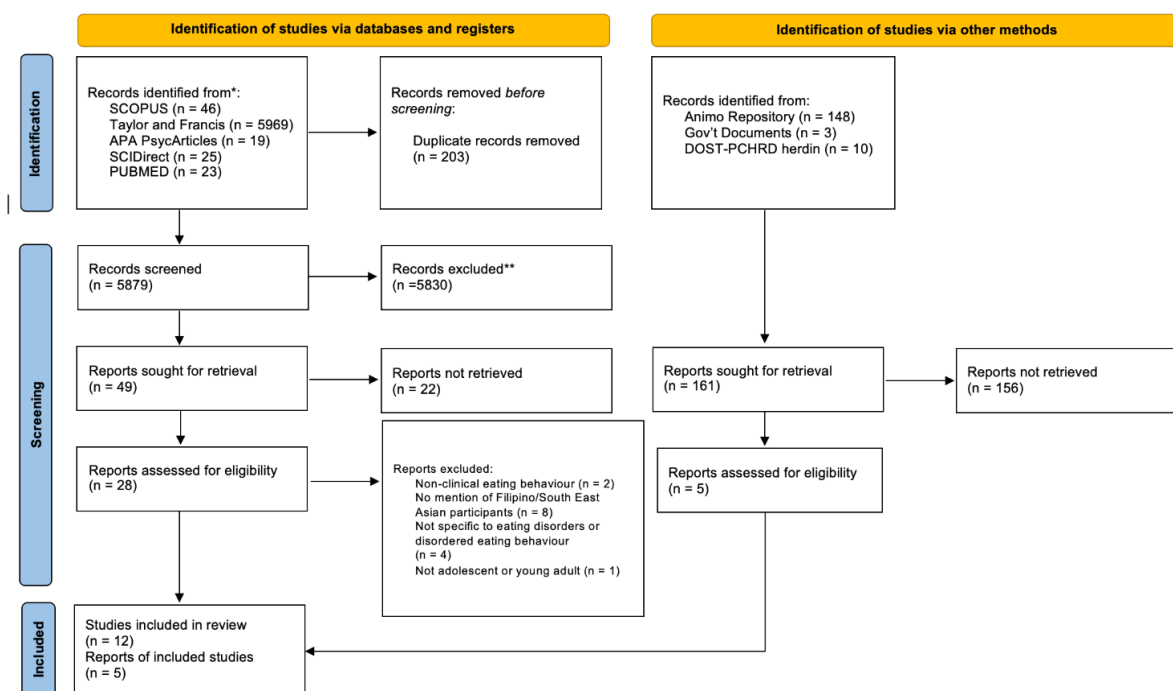
This diagram illustrates the selection process for the scoping review, showing how the initial search results were screened and narrowed down to the final set of included studies.

The scoping review identified a total of 17 studies and documents on Filipino youths' experiences and documentation of eating disorders. Of these, 12 were quantitative studies, 2 were qualitative studies, and 3 were government documents, policies, or acts. Among the quantitative studies, 10 focused on comparative research, while 2 specifically examined the Filipino student population. All included works involved Filipino participants. Among the sources, 12 were published in open-access journals and conference proceedings, 2 were theses or dissertations from academic repositories, and 3 were congressional acts or policies issued by the government.

Table 1

Summary of Data Extraction Table

Study	Participants	Design	Publication Type
Viernes et al. (2007)	Omani and Filipino students (n = 444), Filipino participants, (*n* = 135)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings
Ma et al. (2025)	Asian American college students (N = 118), Filipino participants (*n* = 8)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings
Le et al. (2023)	Participants, (n = 180), Filipino Participants (*n* = 17)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings
Cheng (2014)	Asian American Women, (n = 587), Filipino Participants (n = 17)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings
Han (2020)	Asian American Women, (n = 244), Filipino Participants (n = 10)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings
Javier & Belgrave (2019)	Diverse Asian subgroups (Korean: N = 6; Chinese: N = 1; Vietnamese: N = 5; Indian N = 6; Filipino: N = 3; Pakistani: N = 3; Nepali: N = 1; Half-Vietnamese, Half-Lao: N = 1).	Qualitative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings
Cheng et al. (2017)	N = 592, other Asian American identities, Filipino (n = 107)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings
Lorenzo et al. (2002)	Filipino students (n = 932)	Quantitative Survey	Journal Article and Proceedings
Edman & Yates (2005)	Filipino participants (n = 133), Caucasian (n = 157)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings
Madanat et al. (2006)	Filipino students (n = 202), American (n = 138)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings
Kayano et al. (2008)	Japanese (n = 411), Indian (n = 130), Omani (n = 135), Euro-American (n = 113), and Filipino adolescents (n = 196)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings
Assari & DeFreitas (2018)	N = 17,729, Vietnamese (n = 520), Filipino (n = 508), Chinese (n = 600), Other Asian (n = 656), Cuban (n =577), Puerto Rican (n = 495), Mexican (n =1442), Other Hispanic (n =1106) , African American (n = 4746), and Non-Latino Whites (n= 7587).	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings
Dar Juan (2023)	Filipino Students (n = 207)	Quantitative Survey	Thesis and Dissertations
Dang et al. (2024)	Filipino Students (n = 4)	Qualitative Study	Thesis and Dissertations
Fifteenth Congress (2010)	NA	Congressional Act	Policies and Reports
Thirteenth Congress (2005)	NA	Congressional Act	Policies and Reports
Eighteenth Congress (2021)	NA	Congressional Act	Policies and Reports

This table presents an overview of the 17 included articles, detailing study authors, participant characteristics, study design, and type of publication. A full data extraction table is available in the Appendix for reference.

Discussion

Prevalence and Presentation of Eating Disorder Symptomatology Among Adolescent Filipinos

5 studies were found to tackle eating disorders among Filipino youth that reflected a concerning prevalence of disordered eating attitudes and behaviors. A quantitative study found a high percentage of adolescent Filipinos, both male and female, with pathological Eating Attitudes Test (EAT) scores, though these scores showed only slight correlations with Body Mass Index (BMI) or Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) scores (Lorenzo et al., 2002). Another study revealed that Filipino females exhibited higher Drive for Thinness, dieting tendencies, and body dissatisfaction compared to males while Filipino males reported higher Drive for Thinness and body dissatisfaction than their Caucasian counterparts (Edman & Yates, 2005). Additionally, Filipino students were found to be 10.9 times more likely to have disordered eating attitudes and behaviors than their American peers, even after controlling for demographics (Madanat et al., 2006). Furthermore, comparative research highlighted that Filipinos demonstrated the most abnormal eating attitudes, including excessive dieting, bulimic behaviors, and a strong need for control over their eating patterns, with Indian and Filipino populations displaying greater dysfunction in eating attitudes compared to Europeans, particularly among women (Kayano et al., 2008). It is reflected that appearance-focused social comparison among youth was identified as a significant predictor of disordered eating behaviors, mediated by body dissatisfaction among Filipino students (Dar Juan, 2023). Despite these alarming trends, there are no exact national statistics on the prevalence of specific eating disorders in the Philippines.

Although attempts have been made to address the issue, including the proposal of three government documents introduced by Senator Miriam Defensor Santiago and Senator Ramon Bong Revilla, Jr. under an act mandating the Department of Education to create educational programs on eating disorder awareness among Filipino children, comprehensive nationwide data remains lacking. This acknowledges the government's understanding and awareness of this issue (Thirteenth Congress, 2005, Fifteenth Congress, 2010; Eighteenth Congress, 2021). The proposed acts seek to enhance the recognition, prevention, and treatment of eating disorders among students. This legislation mandates the Department of Education (DepEd), the Commission on Higher Education (CHED), and the Department of Health (DOH) to implement programs that facilitate the early identification of eating disorders, raise awareness among students and parents, and equip educators with effective prevention and support strategies. Public service announcements will serve as a tool to reach a wider audience and encourage open discussions about eating disorders. Moreover, research findings will guide evidence-based policies and improvements in existing programs, ensuring that prevention and awareness efforts remain effective and responsive to the needs of Filipino students. This is especially important as the review reflects the lack of data on the prevalence, awareness, and need for eating disorders within the Philippine setting.

Cultural Attitudes That Influence Eating Disorder Behaviors and Risk Factors

Socioeconomic and Racial Risk Factors in the Philippines

Socioeconomic and racial risk factors significantly influence the development and maintenance of disordered eating behaviors among Filipino youth. As a low- and middle-income country (LMIC), the Philippines faces structural challenges that shape health

outcomes, including those related to nutritional education, and body image. Economic and social adversity such as poverty, food insecurity, and low parental education have been linked to heightened vulnerability to both obesity and disordered eating, particularly in marginalized communities (Edman & Yates, 2005). Research indicates that obesity is especially prevalent among Filipino males, with corresponding health concerns such as hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes. These outcomes are often due to insufficient nutritional knowledge and education (Devlin et al., 2000). Economic instability may also limit access to balanced diets and reinforce patterns of eating that are reactive rather than preventive. This may interfere with developing healthy eating habits that may lead to disordered eating behaviors.

In urban areas, the Philippines has experienced rapid economic growth and a shift in nutritional environments, which was observed to affect their response to food. For instance, Filipino college women were more likely to eat based on non-hunger-based cues. These cues include frequent exposure to appetizing food, increased dining out, and the use of food as a coping mechanism for emotional stress—such as anxiety or loneliness— and have been identified as triggers for disordered eating behaviors (Kayano et al., 2008). Furthermore, body dissatisfaction is also shaped by social and cultural expectations primarily about Western beauty standards. In the Philippine context, shorter stature, lower social status, and slower acculturation have been associated with low self-esteem and increased desire for weight loss, often as a means of achieving perceived social or romantic acceptability (Kayano et al., 2008). These issues are exacerbated by the internalization of Western beauty standards, especially among Filipino women exposed to global media. Cheng (2014) found that Asian American women, particularly those of Filipino descent, often experience body dissatisfaction stemming from comparisons to idealized Western body types. Experiences of racial discrimination and teasing contribute to the internalization of dominant beauty ideals, which may contribute to body dissatisfaction and disordered eating behaviors (Cheng et al., 2017). These racialized experiences intersect with socioeconomic vulnerability, compounding stressors that impact mental health and body image. This concern is further extended to sexual minorities who feel more negatively about their race and are shown to engage in more disordered eating habits. It was found that emotional eating mediated the relationship between internalized racism and disordered eating behavior (Le et al., 2023). With globalization trends, Filipino adolescents are increasingly exposed to Western beauty through social media, which may reinforce social comparison and low self-worth. These findings highlight the need for an understanding of both socioeconomic and racial factors in the context of eating disorders in the Philippines. Though social comparison is a known risk factor, body dissatisfaction plays a mediating role in the development of disordered eating. This distinction points to the layered psychological mechanism where cultural attitudes influence how body dissatisfaction is internalized and expressed through eating habits (Dar Juan, 2023).

Cultural Differences in Attitudes Toward Body Dissatisfaction

Cultural context significantly shapes how individuals perceive their bodies and experience distress related to body image. Several studies have explored how Filipino cultural perspectives differ from Western conceptualizations of body dissatisfaction and disordered eating. While Western research often emphasizes fat phobia and the pursuit of thinness as central to eating disorder pathology, this framework may not fully capture the Filipino experience. Some research do suggest that despite having no poor ratings on mental and physical health on disordered eating prevalence, cultural factors play a role in how eating behaviors relate to perception of health (Assari & DeFreitas, 2018).

In a comparative study by Viernes et al. (2007), Filipino adolescents demonstrated notably different attitudes toward body image compared with their Euro-American and Omani counterparts. Western teens showed concern over weight gain and exhibited fat phobia, Filipino youth did not appear to share the same level of fear around fatness. However, this does not necessarily suggest an absence of body image issues. It was further expounded that Filipino adolescents may experience and express body dissatisfaction differently—potentially through more indirect or internalized forms of distress.

The concealment or denial of body dissatisfaction among Filipino youth may also reflect broader cultural themes, such as emotional restraint or a reluctance to express personal distress. These tendencies may stem from deeply rooted values around *hiya* (shame) and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), which often discourage open discussions about psychological suffering (Garabiles et al., 2011; Tuliao & Velasquez, in press). In this light, emotional responses like shame and guilt can manifest as introjected regulation of eating— where eating behaviors are driven not by personal goals but by internalized standards and perceived social obligations. (Ma et al., 2025). Moreover, body dissatisfaction among Asian women has also been linked to their generally smaller body frames compared to their Western counterparts. Kawamura (2012) stated that this may heighten distress when women perceive themselves as deviating from their cultural body ideals. It is observed that Filipino women in particular may struggle with disordered eating behaviors when their body size diverges from both traditional and Westernized ideals, contributing to a distorted sense of self and body image conflict (Cheng, 2014). These insights affirm that culture shapes how individuals understand and evaluate their bodies. In Filipino society, where indirect communication, emotional restraint, and collective identity are highly valued, distress related to body image may be less overt and more entangled with broader relational and cultural dynamics. This calls for culturally informed models of assessment and treatment that do not simply impose Western frameworks but instead seek to understand how body dissatisfaction is felt, hidden, or transformed within specific sociocultural settings.

The Role of Family, Expectations, and Parenting in Shaping Eating Attitudes

Cultural values surrounding family dynamics and parenting styles are central to understanding the development of eating attitudes and behaviors in Filipino youth. In many Filipino and broader Asian households, familial relationships are not only foundational but also deeply intertwined with personal identity and expectations. These dynamics create a unique environment in which eating behaviors and body image are shaped. Immediate family members (ie. mother, father, grandparents) influence how Filipino youth perceive and shape ideas around eating behavior and body image. Comments from elders, even when well-intentioned, often reinforce societal ideals about appearance, thinness, or suitability for marriage (Javier & Belgrave, 2019). This reflects a cultural link between physical appearance and familial honor. The strong emphasis on family honor, achievement, and conformity, stated as "Asian Values" further emphasizes the pressure to meet external expectations (Han, 2020). When young people perceive themselves as failing to live up to these ideals, they may experience internal distress, which can manifest through disordered eating behaviors such as binge eating or dietary restriction. These behaviors may be coping strategies for managing feelings of inadequacy, shame, or loss of control.

Parenting style plays a crucial role in this dynamic. Authoritarian parenting, characterized by strict rules, high expectations, and limited emotional responsiveness, has been linked to an increased risk of disordered eating. Dang et al. (2024) emphasized that children raised in such

environments often internalize feelings of self-consciousness and inadequacy, especially when love and acceptance are perceived as conditional. In the Filipino context, narratives from youth reveal how food is sometimes used as a tool for discipline, whether through restriction, forced eating, or body-shaming remarks intended to instill obedience or uphold family values (Javier & Belgrave, 2019). These forms of control can affect self-efficacy and the development of a healthy relationship with food.

All of these factors not only contribute to the development of disordered eating but also shape attitudes toward seeking help. In cultures that highly value familial harmony and discourage the open expression of distress, discussing mental health struggles—including eating disorders—can feel taboo. Shame, fear of dishonoring the family, or the belief that problems should be handled privately may prevent individuals from accessing professional support.

Barriers and Difficulties in the Treatment of Culture and Stigma

Cultural stigma was shown to hinder the recognition and treatment of eating disorders among Filipino youth and Asian communities. While familial and cultural attitudes deeply influence body image and eating behaviors, they also shape how individuals interpret their struggles and whether they consider seeking treatment. As previously discussed, the apparent lack of overt fat phobia among Filipinos does not necessarily reflect an absence of body image concerns. Rather, it may indicate a difficulty in expressing distress, emphasizing concealment, denial, or emotional restraint over explicit dissatisfaction (Viernes et al., 2007). This may be related to the stigma within the family unit and culture. Javier and Belgrave (2019) highlights how families who remain silent or pressure their children to maintain appearances can further discourage seeking professional help. Cheng et al. (2013) point out that among Asian populations, including Filipinos, mental health treatment is often avoided due to fears of bringing shame to the family or appearing emotionally vulnerable. Similarly found high levels of reluctance among Asian and Asian American individuals to seek professional psychological support, including for disordered eating (Franko, 2007). Even when individuals do acknowledge their struggles, structural barriers are also a primary concern that hinders treatment. Access to specialized services remains limited in many Filipino communities due to financial, geographic, and systemic constraints (Javier & Belgrave, 2019). For those who do enter treatment, family support is crucial. While it can foster healing, it can also reinforce denial or cultural beliefs that minimize the disorder (Dang et al., 2024).

Addressing eating disorders in Filipino youth requires a multi-layered approach that considers not just individual behaviors, but also the cultural, familial, and systemic forces at play. In a university setting, there is a way to address these concerns by normalizing mental health conversations, reducing stigma, and creating access points for care. This can be achieved through peer-led mental health initiatives, culturally competent training for staff, and inclusive campaigns that validate diverse expressions of distress. By fostering a compassionate and informed environment, students feel safe, seen, and supported in seeking the care they deserve.

Limitations

A key limitation of this scoping review is the limited availability of studies and resources specifically focusing on Filipino youth's experiences with eating disorders. Due to this scarcity, the researcher included comparative studies conducted abroad to provide a broader

understanding of the issue. However, while these studies offer valuable insights, they may not fully capture the unique sociocultural and economic factors that influence eating disorders in the Philippines. Additionally, access to data remains restricted, with many local studies being unpublished, inaccessible, or lacking rigorous documentation.

Moving forward, it is crucial to encourage more research on eating disorders among Filipino youth. As time passes, increased academic interest and funding should be directed toward studying this issue in local contexts. Universities, mental health organizations, and government institutions can play a key role in supporting research initiatives, improving data accessibility, and addressing barriers to publication. While current data remains scarce, the absence of extensive research does not equate to the absence of the problem. The growing awareness of eating disorders in the Philippines highlights the urgent need for more studies to inform culturally sensitive interventions, policies, and support systems tailored to the Filipino experience.

Conclusion

This review highlights the significant cultural, social, and familial influences that shape the prevalence, manifestation, and treatment of eating disorders among Filipino youth. Socioeconomic adversity, shifting dietary habits, and internalized beauty standards contribute to the development of disordered eating behaviors, while the stigma surrounding mental health and limited access to care further hinder treatment-seeking. The perception of body image in the Philippines differs from Western ideals, with fat phobia being less prominent, leading to atypical presentations that may delay recognition and diagnosis. Additionally, family plays a dual role—both reinforcing societal pressures and serving as a key factor in treatment decisions, underscoring the need for culturally sensitive approaches.

To address these challenges, policy efforts should focus on education, awareness, and access to care. The Department of Education (DepEd) should implement school-based programs that integrate discussions on body image, mental health, and eating disorders into the curriculum, helping to normalize conversations around these issues and reduce stigma. Teacher training on identifying warning signs and providing support should also be prioritized. Public health campaigns tailored to Filipino cultural contexts can further challenge harmful beauty standards and promote positive body image. Additionally, universities should offer mental health resources specifically addressing eating disorders, including peer support groups and culturally competent counseling services. Strengthening the country's mental health infrastructure by integrating specialized ED services within existing healthcare systems will ensure that individuals struggling with disordered eating receive timely and appropriate care. Finally, future research should continue exploring cultural barriers to treatment, to develop interventions that are both effective and culturally responsive. By addressing these factors at multiple levels, we can work toward reducing stigma, improving access to care, and fostering a more supportive environment for Filipino youth struggling with eating disorders.

Declaration of Generative AI and AI-Assisted Technologies in the Writing Process

In the development of this scoping review, I utilized Scopes AI to support the gathering, organization, and initial synthesis of relevant literature. Grammarly was also used to assist with grammar, spelling, and clarity checks throughout the writing process. All final analyses, interpretations, and conclusions were made by the author.

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Appendix

Figure 2
Full Data Extraction Table

Study	Participants	Design	Publication Type	Prevalence of ED in the Philippines	Cultural Context and Attitudes	Barriers and Challenges
Viernes et al. (2007)	Omani and Filipino students (n = 444), Filipino participants, (*n* = 135)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings		The majority of Euro-American teenagers had strong desires or preoccupations with weight and body shape suggesting morbid fear of weight gain, an excessive concern with dieting or a strong desire for thinness, mindsets that were significantly different for teenagers from Oman and the Philippines.	Such a study is likely to shed light on whether 'concealment', 'denial' or 'atypical' manifestations equated with lack of fat phobia may be instead due to a different way of communicating distress.
Cheah et al. (2025)	Asian American college students (N = 118), Filipino participants (*n* = 8)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings		Controlling eating behaviors due to shame or guilt (i.e., introjected regulation of eating) is a core symptom across different types of eating disorders, - parental practices among asian american college students increasing the risk of eating behavior disordered	As Asians/Asian Americans tend to report high levels of stigma toward seeking mental health services (Cheng, Kwan, & Sevig, 2013), it is perhaps not surprising that few Asian/Asian American women seek needed treatment for disordered eating issues (Franko et al., 2007).
Le et al. (2023)	Participants, (n = 180), Filipino Participants (*n* = 17)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings		Asian American men who feel more negatively about their own race also engage in greater disordered eating habits. Additionally, we found that emotional eating mediated the relationship between internalized racism and disordered eating. These findings suggest that sexual minority Asian American men may respond to the negative emotions elicited by internalized racism	

					by engaging in emotional eating, which can then invoke disordered eating behaviors.	
Cheng (2014)	Asian American Women, (n = 587), Filipino Participants (n = 17)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings		Given that most Asian/Asian American women tend to have relatively smaller body size (Kawamura, 2011), perhaps having a larger body size, which would be further from one's cultural norm, is relatively more influential on Asian/Asian American women's disordered eating than subjective feelings of body dissatisfaction	
Han (2020)	Asian American Women, (n = 244), Filipino Participants (n = 10)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings		"The Asian values that I found associated with binge eating and restricted eating were family honor through achievement and conformity to norms"	
Javier & Belgrave (2019)	Diverse Asian subgroups (Korean: N = 6; Chinese: N = 1; Vietnamese: N = 5; Indian N = 6; Filipino: N = 3; Pakistani: N = 3; Nepali: N = 1; Half-Vietnamese, Half-Lao: N = 1).	Qualitative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings		Salient among South Asian American women and families - the mention of marriage in relation to appearance is a factor for ED behaviors and dissatisfaction the influence of immediate family, especially in the form of elders (e.g. mother, father, grandparents), on body image and eating behaviors. specifically in shaping attitudes about body image and eating behaviors.	The biggest barrier to treatment seeking apart from lack of available resources was cultural stigmatization of mental illness. - discuss a lack of acknowledgement that mental illness exists, which can be seen as neutral. Other individuals describe mental illness using a negative perspective or mention that members of their cultural and ethnic groups see mental illness in a negative way. The family unit permeated not only body image ideals, but also treatment-seeking motivations among Asian American women. In fact, family seems to

						be the single most prevalent driving factor in an individual's decisions to both seek out and remain in treatment for an eating disorder. Family influence did not occur in a vacuum, however, and may extend from cultural stigmatization of mental illness in general.
Cheng et al. (2017)	N = 592, other Asian American identities, Filipino (n = 107)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings		In terms of similar mediation patterns, we found that Asian American women who reported greater levels of racial/ethnic teasing or racial discrimination were more likely to adopt main- stream media prescriptions of beauty ideals.	
Lorenzo et al. (2002)	Filipino students (n = 932)	Quantitative Survey	Journal Article and Proceedings	high percentage of boys and girls with pathological EAT scores, with only slight correlations between them and either BMI or BDI scores		
Edman & Yates (2005)	Filipino participants (n = 133), Caucasian (n = 157)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings	females and Filipino males appeared to be at higher risk for eating disorders than Caucasian males. Females reported higher Drive for Thinness, dieting, and self-dissatisfaction scores than males, and Filipino males, reported higher drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction than Caucasian males.	high percentage of obese Filipino males, as obesity has been linked to a variety of health concerns such as hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes mellitus (Devlin, Yanovski, & Wilson, 2000). Past studies suggest that some ethnic minority populations may have a high risk of obesity (Devlin, Yanovski, & Wilson), and this may be due to higher levels of economic and social adversity. Childhood adversity, including low parental education, low parental involvement, and	

					poverty have been found to be associated with eating and weight problems among adolescents and young adults The majority of Filipino males and both groups of females preferred a smaller figure.	
Madanat et al. (2006)	Filipino students (n = 202), American (n = 138)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings	Filipino students were 10.9 times (p-value <0.0001) more likely to have eating disordered attitudes and behaviors than their American counterparts controlling for the demographics collected.		
Kayano et al. (2008)	Japanese (n = 411), Indian (n = 130), Omani (n = 135), Euro-American (n = 113), and Filipino adolescents (n = 196)	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings	Filipinos had the most abnormal eating attitudes, including dieting, bulimic behavior and a strong need for control over their eating. Indian and Filipino subjects had greater dysfunction in eating attitudes compared to Europeans, and mostly bulimic in nature especially in women.	The more disordered eating behavior of Filipino subjects compared to Europeans may be due to the Philippines following predicted trends associated with demographic changes, economic development and nutritional transitions. Short stature, lower social status, or slower acculturation lead to a risk for low self-esteem and disappointment in romantic relationships; this, in turn, could generate a sense of disenfranchisement and a heightened desire to lose weight to make the body more pleasing to women	
Assari & DeFreitas (2018)	N = 17,729, Vietnamese (n = 520), Filipino (n = 508), Chinese (n = 600), Other Asian (n = 656), Cuban (n =577),	Quantitative Survey - Comparative Study	Journal Article and Proceedings		As reflected in the results there was no significant association with poor ratings on mental and physical health on disordered	

	Puerto Rican (n = 495), Mexican (n =1442), Other Hispanic (n =1106) , African American (n = 4746), and Non-Latino Whites (n= 7587).				eating prevalence. It is suggested that cultural factors may play a role in how eating behaviors relate to an individual's perception of both physical and mental health.	
Dar Juan (2023)	Filipino Students (n = 207)	Quantitative Survey	Thesis and Dissertations	The results showed that appearance focused social comparison predicted disordered eating behaviors through body dissatisfaction as a mediator in filipino students.	
Dang et al. (2024)	Filipino Students (n = 4)	Qualitative Study	Thesis and Dissertations		In the case of the participants, most did not mention in their narratives the internal processing that occurred within their family, which consequently led to misunderstanding and confusion in addressing their weight issues. - internalization of comments as well
Fifteenth Congress (2010)	NA	Congressional Act	Policies and Reports		
Thirteenth Congress (2005)	NA	Congressional Act	Policies and Reports		
Eighteenth Congress (2021)	NA	Congressional Act	Policies and Reports		

The Role of Expectancy-Value Theory in Predicting Academic Success Among Psychology Students

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Abstract

This study investigates the academic achievement of senior psychology students through the framework of Expectancy-Value Theory. Self-efficacy and task value were examined as primary predictors of academic outcomes, with mastery and performance goals assessed as mediating variables to better understand their influence on students' academic behaviors and performance. A total of 120 senior psychology students participated in the study. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized to examine the hypothesized relationships among the predictor variables, mediating variables, and academic achievement outcomes. Results revealed that self-efficacy and task value significantly predicted both mastery and performance goals. Mastery goals demonstrated a stronger mediating effect on academic achievement, underscoring the critical role of intrinsic motivation in driving academic success. Conversely, performance goals showed a moderate mediating effect, suggesting their relevance in specific achievement contexts. These findings support the validity of the Expectancy-Value Theory in understanding student achievement and provide practical insights for educators to foster motivation and achievement among psychology students.

Keywords: expectancy-value theory, self-efficacy, task value, mastery goal, performance goal, achievement

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Introduction

Among the various antecedents of academic behavior, motivation has consistently been identified as a key factor influencing students' choices, engagement, and academic achievement (Schunk et al., 2008). In the field of educational psychology, the expectancy-value model has emerged as one of the most influential theoretical frameworks for understanding students' motivation and its impact on their academic-related choices, learning behaviors, and outcomes (Eccles et al., 1983).

Students' competence beliefs, which include self-efficacy, beliefs about ability, or expectations for future success, have been shown to positively predict both engagement and achievement across a range of academic subjects (Schunk, 1991). Meanwhile, students' perceptions of task value have also been found to reliably predict their intentions and actual decisions to pursue further studies or engage in related activities (Wigfield et al., 2017). Moreover, achievement goals, defined as the underlying reasons students engage in academic work, provide additional insight into the motivational processes that guide learning behavior (Dweck & Leggett, 1988).

Together, these constructs emphasize the complex and multifaceted nature of academic motivation, highlighting the importance of understanding how students' beliefs and values interact to influence their future educational paths.

Relevant Research Findings

Relevant research has emphasized the significance of both cognitive and emotional factors in influencing students' academic outcomes. Students' competence beliefs, including self-efficacy, perceptions of ability, and expectations for future success, have been positively associated with their academic engagement and achievement across a variety of subjects (Pajares, 1996). These beliefs influence students' attitudes and behaviors toward learning, such as their level of effort, persistence, and motivation in facing academic challenges.

In addition, emotional factors, particularly positive affect, also play a critical role in students' educational experiences. Students who experience higher levels of positive affect tend to benefit in multiple ways, including greater satisfaction with school, stronger self-efficacy beliefs, and improved academic performance (Suldo & Huebner, 2006). These findings highlight the importance of promoting both strong competence beliefs and positive emotional well-being to foster students' long-term academic success.

The Present Study

The present study aimed to examine the academic achievement of senior psychology students within the framework of Expectancy-Value Theory. Specifically, the study focused on two key motivational constructs—self-efficacy, reflecting students' confidence in their ability to succeed academically, and task value, indicating the perceived importance, usefulness, and interest of academic tasks. These constructs were examined as direct predictors of academic outcomes. In addition, the study explored the mediating roles of achievement goals, specifically mastery goals and performance goals, in shaping students' academic behaviors and outcomes.

Method

Participants

Data were collected from 120 senior psychology students (49 males and 71 females) at Srinakharinwirot University in Bangkok, Thailand. All participants were undergraduate students majoring in psychology. The data for this study were collected using a Google Form, which contained 33 items organized into seven sections. The survey was disseminated through public relations channels to ensure it reached the intended participants.

Measures

In this study, a quantitative survey approach was used to explore how key motivational factors relate to one another in an academic setting. Data were collected through standardized self-report questionnaires, allowing for the measurement of students' self-perceived ability, subjective task value, learning goals, and performance goals. To analyze these complex relationships, Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized, which enabled the examination of both direct and indirect effects among the variables. The analytical model specifically examined whether learning and performance goals acted as mediators in the relationships between self-perceived ability, task value, and academic outcomes. Overall, SEM offered a strong analytical approach for evaluating the proposed model and gaining deeper insights into how motivational processes function in educational contexts.

All survey items were initially developed in English and were out through a translation-back procedure to ensure accuracy. The items were specifically tailored to reflect the context of students' psychology courses or the field of psychology. The survey items were designed to assess key motivational constructs, including self-efficacy, task value, mastery goal, and performance goal. All measuring items were based on five-point Likert scales ranging from 1 (not relevant to me at all) to 5 (most relevant to me). To evaluate the reliability of the measures, correlation coefficients were calculated.

Table 1 presents a correlation matrix of study variables. All variables in the study were positively correlated with one another, indicating consistent relationships among self-efficacy, achievement, task value, mastery goal, and performance goal.

Table 1
Correlation Matrix of Study Variables (n = 120)

Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. Self-efficacy	1				
2. Achievement	.58**	1			
3. Task value	.59**	.67**	1		
4. Mastery Goal	.49**	.34**	.43**	1	
5. Performance Goal	.47**	.37**	.42**	.61**	1

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the importance of motivational constructs in influencing academic achievement. Competence beliefs, particularly self-efficacy, were identified as powerful predictors of student success across academic domains. The findings also suggest that performance goals, which focus on achieving superiority by comparing oneself to others, may serve as an effective strategy for enhancing students' self-worth beliefs. Moreover, students who perceived higher task value tended to pursue approach goals and have more positive affect.

Limitation

Although the present study yielded important findings, several limitations should be acknowledged in order to enhance the validity and generalizability of the results. First, the study relied exclusively on self-report survey data, which may be subject to various biases such as social desirability and self-perception inaccuracies. A logical next step for future research would be to employ longitudinal or experimental research designs, which would allow for the examination of causal directions among variables while controlling for prior academic achievement.

Additionally, the sample was limited to senior psychology students at a Thai university, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts, academic disciplines, or age groups. The experiences, motivations, and academic behaviors of students may vary considerably across educational levels, institutional types, and sociocultural environments. As a result, caution should be exercised when generalizing these results to broader populations. Future research should consider replicating this study with more diverse populations to examine the extent to which these findings hold across different educational settings, age ranges, and cultural backgrounds.

Furthermore, it would be beneficial to examine how students' perceptions and motivations develop over time or in response to changing situational contexts within the academic environment. Research that integrates both individual differences and situational variability may yield a more comprehensive understanding of the complex nature of academic motivation.

Acknowledgement

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Musical Skills Develop Progressively With the Visual and Auditory Perception of Musical Notes

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Abstract

Music learning is a complex cognitive process. It remains unclear how visual and auditory musical perception is developed along the music learning trajectories during adulthood. This study examines music learning trajectories among younger adults using a 10-week training paradigm. Three groups of participants, including a melodica training group, a computer game training group, and a control group, with matched demographics, were recruited. The pre-tests and post-tests were arranged before and after the 10-week training period. The tests consisted of sequential matching tasks on visual musical perception (notes, segments reading) and auditory musical perception (notes, chords listening). Musicality was assessed by the Goldsmiths Musical Sophistication Index (Gold-MSI). Repeated measures ANOVA was used to examine participants' accuracy (ACC) and response time (RT) in the sequential matching tasks between the post-tests and pre-tests. No significant differences were shown in the ACC and RT of the sequential matching tasks between post-tests and pre-tests among the three groups. However, in Gold-MSI, the music training group showed a significant increase in musicality after the 10-week melodica training. In addition, the higher the increase in musicality, the higher the increase in the ACC between post-tests and pre-tests as shown in the visual and auditory perception of notes, but not segments and chords, among the music training group. No similar findings were observed in the other two groups. This study shows that musical skills may develop progressively with the visual and auditory perception of musical notes, with very limited near-transfer to complex musical elements, at the initial stage.

Keywords: music learning, music perception, music reading, music listening, adulthood

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Introduction

Musical perception is one of the fundamental skills in music training. Extensive musical training allows musicians to develop skills in both visual and auditory musical perception, such as musical note and segment matching (Li, 2024; Li & Hsiao, 2018), as well as musical note and interval auditory recognition (Waters et al., 1998).

The development of musical perception was examined in some previous studies (see Trainor, 2005 for a review). A critical period, refers to a specific timeframe during the early stage of life that is open to specific learning experience (American Psychological Association, 2025), was suggested in the development of pitch perception (Trainor, 2005). Yet, multiple pathways were also observed in the development of musical expertise (Trainor, 2005). Some studies demonstrated the possibility for older adults to acquire musical skills thorough a 4-month piano training (e.g., Seinfeld et al., 2013). The diversity in music training remains unclear that how visual and auditory musical perception is developed along the music learning trajectories out of the critical period, such as during adulthood. In addition, previous studies in music cognition focused on comparing musicians and non-musicians in terms of their musical and non-musical abilities. It remains open whether musical skills could be developed with a short music-training paradigm during adulthood.

To address the above research questions, this study examines the development of visual and auditory musical perception in music learning during adulthood within a 10-week music training paradigm. Participants enrolled in a music training group as an experimental group, a computer game training group as an active control group, and a control group as a passive control group. A set of pre-tests and post-tests, consisted of sequential matching tasks on visual and auditory musical perception, were conducted before and after the 10-week training phase. Participants in the music training group were hypothesized to outperform participants in the computer game training group and control group in simple visual and auditory musical perception tasks, instead of the complex tasks, given the short training phase.

Methods

Participants

We recruited three groups of participants with matched demographics from Hong Kong Metropolitan University, including a music training group ($n = 25$) as an experimental group, a computer game training group ($n = 28$) as an active control group, and a control group ($n = 26$) as a passive control group. No participants received any formal music training before.

In the music training group, participants (8 males, 17 females; age = 22.64; age range = 18-34) engaged in 12 hours of instructed melodica classes and 40 hours of practice across the 10-week training phase, resulting in total 52 hours of music training. A sample piece that participants learned to play was *Fly me to the moon*.

In the computer game training group, participants (15 males, 13 females; age = 21.67; age range = 18-36) engaged in 12 hours of instructed computer game training classes and 40 hours of practice across the 10-week training phase, resulting in total 52 hours of computer game training. A sample game that participants learned to play was Twirl & Block Champ (e.g., a digital puzzle game; https://www.crazygames.com/game/block-champ).

In the control group, participants (10 males, 16 females; age = 21.35; age range = 18-35) were not assigned any specific activities during the 10-week training phase.

Materials

Musical Notes and Segments

A set of musical notes and segments were created using MuseScore (i.e., a free music composition and notation software; https://musescore.org/en) and PhotoScapeX as visual stimuli. Notes were crotchets ranging from pitch A3 to D6 ($n = 20$). Segments were single bars selected from Bach Chorales. All segments were in C major, with time signature 4/4, and each consisted of 4 to 6 notes ($n = 128$).

Notes and segments were arranged in pairs within their categories respectively. Same trials refer to two identical stimuli. Different trials refer to two stimuli with slight alternation in pitch. For notes, the different trials referred to two notes with a major 2nd or 3rd difference. For segments, the different trials referred to two bars with a note that has a major 2nd or 3rd difference. The positions of the altered note were counterbalanced across segment trials.

Musical Notes and Chords

A set of musical notes and chords were created using MuseScore (i.e., a free music composition and notation software; https://musescore.org/en)/ as auditory stimuli. Notes were semitones, quartertones, and three-quarter-tones, ranging from B3 to A5, in melodica ($n = 90$). Chords were major chords, minor chords, dominant seventh major/ minor chords in the root of G3 to D6, in piano ($n = 57$).

Notes and chords were arranged in pairs within their categories respectively. Same trials refer to two identical stimuli. Different trials refer to two stimuli with slight alternation in pitch. For notes, the different trials referred to two notes with a semitone/quartertone/three-quarter-tone interval difference. For chords, the different trials referred to two chords with the same root in either pairs: major chord vs. dominant major chord and minor chord vs. dominant minor chord.

Goldsmiths Musical Sophistication Index (Gold-MSI; Müllensiefen et al., 2014)

Goldsmiths Musical Sophistication Index (Gold-MSI; Müllensiefen et al., 2014) examines individual differences in musicality among general population. Musicality is represented by a general musical sophistication score based on five components, including active engagement, perceptual abilities, musical training, emotion, and singing abilities.

Demographic Questionnaire

A demographic questionnaire examines participants' age, gender, music training background, visual and auditory deficiencies, and intellectual deficiencies.

Design

This study has a 3 (groups: a music training group, a computer game training group, a control group) × 2 (time: pre-test vs. post-test) × 2 (visual/auditory perception: visual musical

perception vs. auditory musical perception) × 2 (simple/complex musical elements: notes vs. segments/chords) mixed design.

A set of pre-tests were conducted within one-month prior to the training phase for all three groups of participants. The music training group and computer game training then engaged in a 10-week training in melodica and computer games respectively, while no specific training was assigned for the control group. A set of post-tests were conducted within one-month after the training phase.

Procedures

A set of pre-tests and post-tests were conducted for three groups of participants before and after the 10-week training. Pre-tests and post-tests consist of two sequential matching tasks on visual musical perception (i.e., note, segment reading), two sequential matching tasks on auditory musical perception (i.e., note, chord listening), Goldsmiths Musical Sophistication Index (Gold-MSI; Müllensiefen et al., 2014), and a demographic questionnaire.

The sequential matching tasks on visual musical perception (note, segment reading) and auditory musical perception (note, chord listening) were conducted using Eprime 3.0 software (Psychology Software Tools, Pittsburgh, PA) with a Chronos response box (Psychology Software Tools, Pittsburgh, PA). A headphone was provided for the sequential matching tasks on auditory musical perception.
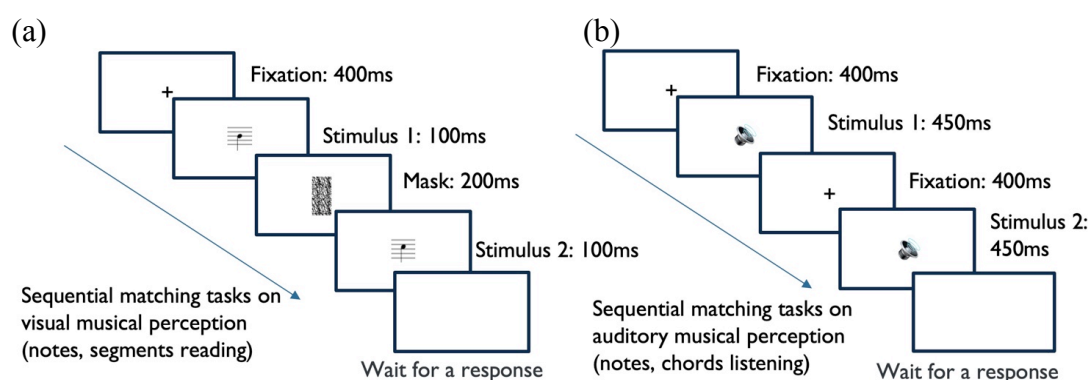
In the sequential matching tasks on visual musical perception (i.e., note, segment reading), each trial began with a fixation cross presenting for 400ms. The first stimulus was then presented for 100ms, followed by a mask presented for 200ms, and the second stimulus presented for 100ms. Participants judged if the two stimuli are identical as quickly and accurately as possible (Figure 1a).

Similarly, in the sequential matching tasks on auditory musical perception (i.e., note, chord listening), each trial began with a fixation cross presenting for 400ms. The first stimulus was then presented for 450ms, followed by a fixation across presented for 400ms, and the second stimulus presented for 450ms. Participants judged if the two stimuli are identical as quickly and accurately as possible (Figure 1b).

The Goldsmiths Musical Sophistication Index (Gold-MSI; Müllensiefen et al., 2014), and a demographic questionnaire was presented using Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT).

Figure 1

The Procedures of Sequential Matching Tasks on (a) Visual Musical Perception (Note, Segment Reading) and (b) Auditory Musical Perception (Note, Chord Listening)


Results

Repeated measures ANOVA was used to examine participants' accuracy (ACC) and response time (RT) in the sequential matching tasks on visual musical perception (note, segment reading) and auditory musical perception (note, chord listening), and the General sophistication scores from Goldsmiths Musical Sophistication Index (Gold-MSI; Müllensiefen et al., 2014) between the post-tests and pre-tests.

No significant interactions were observed in the ACC of the sequential matching tasks on visual and auditory musical perception in simple and complex musical elements between the post-tests and pre-tests among the three groups (Groups × time × Visual/auditory perception × simple/ complex musical elements; $F (2,76) = 2.28, p = .11$). Similarly, no significant differences were observed in the RT (Groups × time × Visual/auditory perception × simple/complex musical elements ($F (2,76) = 1.62, p = .20$).

Nonetheless, a significant result was observed in the difference between the post-tests and pre-tests of the General sophistication scores from Gold-MSI among the three groups ($F (2,76) = 8.60, p < .001$). Post-hoc comparisons using the LSD showed that the music training group showed a significant increase in musicality ($M = 0.53, SD = 0.59$) between the post-tests and pre-tests than that of the computer game training group ($M = 0.20, SD = 0.54$) and control group ($M = 0.02, SD = 0.36$) in the 10-week music training interval, indicating the effectiveness of music training as shown from musicality (See Figure 2).
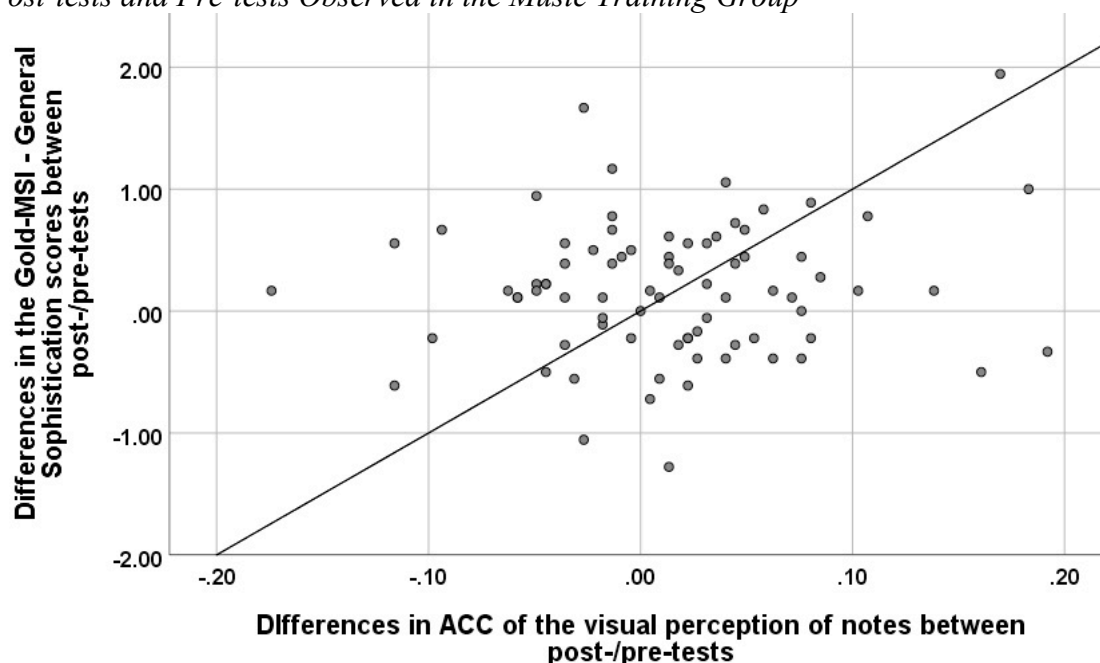
Figure 2

The Differences Between the Post-tests and Pre-tests of the General Sophistication Scores From Gold-MSI Among the Music Training Group, Computer Game Training Group, and Control Group
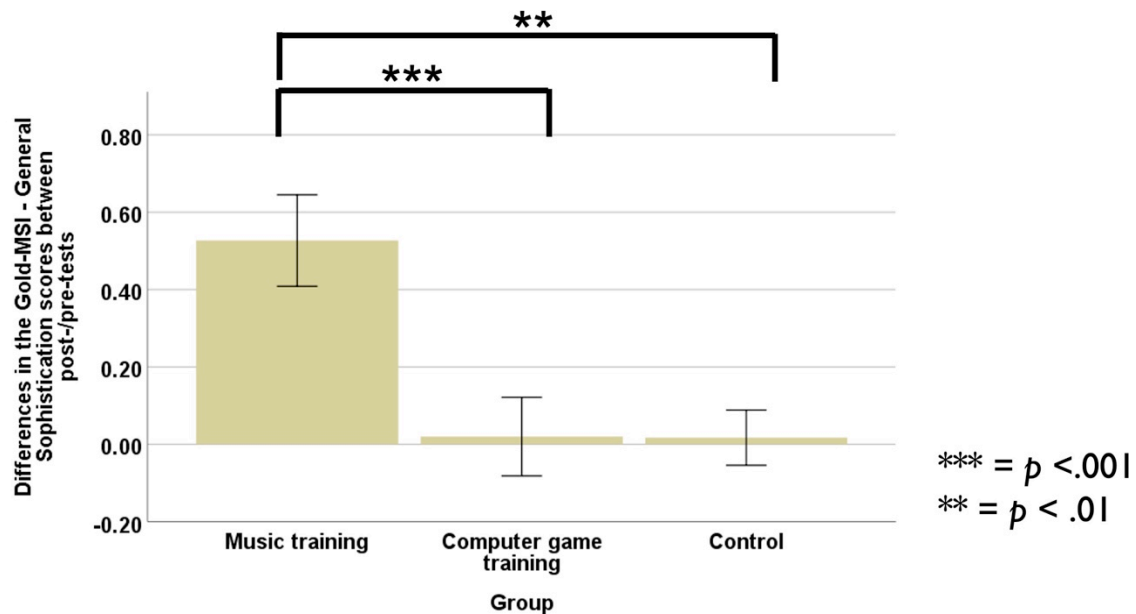
A correlational analysis was then conducted to examine whether the increase in musicality relates to the performance in music reading and listening as measured in the sequential matching tasks on visual musical perception (note, segment reading) and auditory musical perception (note, chord listening). It showed that the higher the increase in musicality, as measured by the General Sophistication Scores from Gold-MSI, the higher the increase in the ACC between the post-tests and pre-tests as shown in the visual perception of notes ($r(25) = .47$, $p = .02$) in the music training group (Figure 3).

Figure 3
The Correlational Between the Differences in the General Sophistication Scores From Gold-MSI and the Differences in the ACC of the Visual Musical Perception on Notes Between Post-tests and Pre-tests Observed in the Music Training Group

Similarly, the higher the increase in musicality, as measured by the General Sophistication Scores from Gold-MSI, the higher the increase in the ACC between the post-tests and pre-tests as shown in the auditory perception of notes ($r(25) = .42, p = .04$) in the music training group (Figure 4).

Figure 4
The Correlational Between the Differences in the General Sophistication Scores From Gold-MSI and the Differences in the ACC of the Auditory Musical Perception on Notes Between Post-tests and Pre-tests Observed in the Music Training Group
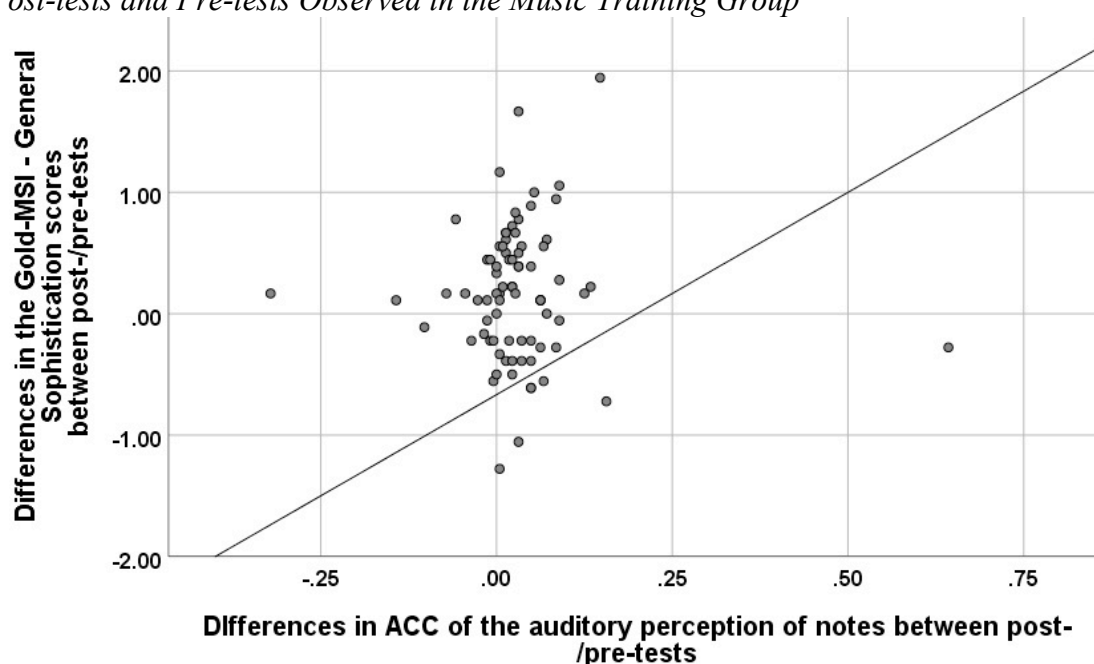
No similar correlations between the difference in musicality and the difference in the ACC between the post-tests and pre-tests were shown in segment reading ($r(25) = .29, p = .16$) and chord listening ($r(25) = .32, p = .13$) in the music training group. No significant correlations were observed between the difference in musicality and the difference in the ACC, RT between the post-tests and pre-tests in all sequential matching tasks on visual musical perception (note, segment reading) and auditory musical perception (note, chord listening) in the computer game training group and the control group.

Discussion

This study examines the development of visual and auditory musical perception along music learning trajectories during adulthood within a 10-week music training paradigm. Two main findings were observed.

First, musical skills may develop progressively with the visual and auditory perception of musical notes. This finding has been demonstrated by the higher the increase in musicality, the higher the increase in the ACC between the post-tests and pre-tests as shown in the visual and auditory perception of notes, but not segments and chords, in the music training group. The perception of complex musical elements, such as segments and chords, were not developed at the same pace as notes at the initial stage based on the very limited near-transfer effect observed.

Second, a 10-week music training paradigm may essentially develop musicality. This finding has been supported by the significant increase in musicality observed in the music training group between the post-tests and pre-tests, as compared to that of the computer game training group and control group. Nonetheless, it is interesting to note that no significant differences were observed in the sequential matching tasks on visual and auditory musical perception between the post-tests and pre-tests among the three groups. This discrepancy may suggest the possible differences between musicality based on a self-report and visual and auditory perception of musical elements at the behavioural level.

This study provides some insights to the effectiveness of a short-term music training on the development of musicality, and visual and auditory musical perception. This further demonstrates how music training enhances musicality and musical perception during adulthood, which may possibly due to the retained brain plasticity (Bosnyak et al., 2004). It supports further studies in examining brain plasticity in musical domains in adulthood. Further studies could also expand to examine brain plasticity in musical or non-musical domains among the older adults, and to explore if short-term music training could be an effective intervention to counteract cognitive decline during late adulthood.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study has shown that musical skills may develop progressively with the visual and auditory perception of musical notes. In addition, short-term music training may essentially develop musicality and musical perception during adulthood. This study may potentially support further studies in examining brain plasticity in musical domains in adulthood.

Acknowledgements

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An Exploration of Individuation, Mourning, and Self-Healing Processes in the Anime *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* Through Jungian Psychology and Narrative Analysis

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Abstract

This study explores how the Japanese anime *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* portrays the process of female individuation through a Jungian psychological lens (Jung, 1968), focusing on themes of mourning, loss, self-healing, and emotional reconnection. At the outset of the narrative, Frieren experiences the extinction of her elf tribe and the death of her human mentor, resulting in emotional detachment and repression—phenomena closely aligned with Jung's concept of the "shadow." Over time, through prolonged adventures and the formation of new bonds, Frieren confronts her suppressed grief, particularly following the death of her cherished companion Himmel, which initiates her self-exploratory journey. The analysis aligns the anime's narrative arc with Jung's individuation theory (Jung, 1968), Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning (Worden, 2009), and Murdock's Heroine's Journey model (Murdock, 1990). Frieren's process demonstrates how, through relational support and inner confrontation, she integrates both anima and animus elements, internalizes Himmel's virtues, and achieves a higher level of emotional wholeness. Utilizing Labov's narrative structure model (Labov, 1972), this study systematically interprets Frieren's psychological transformation. Findings reveal that anime narratives, especially those with profound emotional arcs, possess significant potential for psychological insight and therapeutic resonance. Through Frieren's journey, the research invites viewers to find meaning and resilience amid the inevitability of loss and change.

Keywords: Jungian psychology, individuation, heroine's journey, grief, narrative analysis

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Introduction: Research Motivation and Objectives

Research Motivation

In contemporary popular culture, hero narratives predominantly center around male protagonists. Especially in American comic adaptations such as the Marvel Cinematic Universe, iconic figures like Captain America, Iron Man, Spider-Man, and Thor exemplify traditional models of masculine heroism — utilizing physical prowess, technological innovation, or supernatural abilities to save the world. In contrast, female heroes remain relatively scarce and are often confined within stereotypical portrayals, either possessing extraordinary powers to rival male counterparts or fitting into archetypes such as the mystical sorceress rather than the archetypal warrior.

Against this cultural backdrop, the Japanese anime *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* presents a strikingly different perspective on heroism, particularly female heroism. Frieren, the protagonist, is not characterized by her capacity to dominate or conquer external enemies but rather by her profound journey of inner growth. As an immortal elf mage, Frieren's narrative revolves less around external battles and more around internal emotional awakening, self-reconciliation, and the rediscovery of human connection. Unlike conventional narratives that often showcase external feats as measures of heroism, Frieren's journey illustrates that true heroism lies in confronting one's inner voids, mourning, and eventual emotional integration.

Furthermore, this anime provides a vital case for examining how female individuation processes differ from male-oriented hero journeys. Traditional studies on hero narratives, particularly Joseph Campbell's *The Hero's Journey*, primarily depict a male-centric path of adventure, conquest, and self-assertion. Female development, however, often involves reconciling disconnection from inner feminine qualities and healing fractured identities. Maureen Murdock's (1990) *The Heroine's Journey* addresses this gap by proposing a different structure where the heroine must not merely replicate masculine paths but must navigate internal fragmentation, reconnection with the feminine, and self-healing. Frieren's story exemplifies this process vividly, offering a rich text for scholarly exploration.

This study thus aims to investigate *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* using narrative structure analysis, Jungian individuation theory, and Murdock's Heroine's Journey framework. By doing so, it seeks to address contemporary cultural concerns about the development of nuanced female hero characters and the representation of internal emotional journeys as heroic endeavors.

In Taiwan, researchers conducting narrative analysis often utilize the frameworks proposed by Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach, and Zilber (1998), namely holistic-content, holistic-form, categorical-content, and categorical-form analysis, with holistic-content being the most prevalent. Furthermore, following Paul Ricoeur's philosophy, analyzing narrative meaning requires a detour from linguistic structure to reflective interpretation and existential understanding. Narrative research must avoid merely subjective interpretations by carefully structuring semantic analysis followed by reflective engagement (Ricoeur, 1969/2008).

To deeply understand the emotional transformation embedded in anime narratives, it is essential to conduct a semantic-level structural analysis as a foundation, culminating in an ontological interpretation of character existence. Labov's (1972) narrative model provides a useful analytic framework for examining how storytellers organize experiences, construct

meaning, and reveal psychological processes through six structured elements: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda.

This methodological framework supports the present study's intention to reveal how the anime encapsulates Frieren's individuation, mourning, emotional re-integration, and eventual self-healing.

Research Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:
1. To explore Frieren's individuation journey throughout the anime and analyze how her psychological growth reflects Jung's concept of self-realization.
   o Investigating how Frieren integrates her inner anima and animus through her experiences.
   o Analyzing how collective cultural consciousness influences her identity development, inner conflicts, breakthroughs, and reconciliation.
2. To examine the applicability of Murdock's *Heroine's Journey* model to Frieren's narrative and discuss how female roles in cultural narratives are evolving.
   o Mapping Frieren's growth stages against Murdock's ten-phase model.
   o Exploring how the heroine's psychological maturation and reintegration of feminine strength are depicted.
3. To analyze how Frieren's process of grief and healing aligns with Worden's Four Tasks of Mourning and enables the reconstruction of her inner self.
   o Using Worden's tasks as a theoretical scaffold to examine Frieren's mourning process after trauma.
   o Analyzing the journey from emotional collapse and disintegration to new meaning-making, relational re-connections, and psychological vitality restoration.

Literature Review

Jungian Psychology and the Process of Individuation

Carl Gustav Jung's analytical psychology centers on the concept of individuation — the psychological process of integrating the conscious and unconscious aspects of the psyche to achieve a unified and fully realized self. Jung (1968) proposed that individuals are often fragmented, with different facets of their inner world — such as the persona (the social mask), the shadow (the repressed unconscious parts), the anima (the feminine aspect in males), and the animus (the masculine aspect in females) — being split and unintegrated. The task of individuation is to confront these internal figures, reconcile their oppositions, and achieve psychological wholeness.

In the context of Frieren's journey, Jung's concept of the shadow is particularly pertinent. The shadow comprises emotions and desires that the conscious self finds unacceptable and thus represses. Frieren's initial emotional detachment and her cold indifference to human mortality reflect her unacknowledged grief and relational longing, forming a "shadow self" she must gradually confront and integrate.

Furthermore, Jung's constructs of anima and animus serve as vital frameworks for interpreting Frieren's internal development. Jung viewed the anima/animus not merely as

gendered figures but as bridges to the unconscious, facilitating emotional growth and creativity. In Frieren's story, the deceased hero Himmel represents a projection of animus energy — embodying courage, emotional warmth, and relational integrity — qualities Frieren must internalize to achieve her individuation.

Thus, Jungian psychology provides a profound foundation for analyzing Frieren's psychological transformation from isolation to relational integration, marking her individuation journey.

Murdock's Heroine's Journey

While Joseph Campbell's (1949) *Hero's Journey* has profoundly shaped the study of narrative structures, it predominantly reflects a masculine developmental arc: venturing outward, achieving heroic feats, and returning empowered. In contrast, Maureen Murdock (1990) proposed the *Heroine's Journey* to address the unique psychological path of women, emphasizing the inner struggle to reconcile feminine and masculine energies.

Murdock's model outlines ten stages:
1. Separation from the Feminine
2. Identification with the Masculine and Gathering of Allies
3. Road of Trials: Meeting Ogres and Dragons
4. Finding the Illusory Boon of Success
5. Awakening to Feelings of Spiritual Aridity: Death
6. Initiation and Descent to the Goddess
7. Urgent Yearning to Reconnect with the Feminine
8. Healing the Mother/Daughter Split
9. Healing the Wounded Masculine
10. Integration of Masculine and Feminine Energies

Unlike Campbell's model, which valorizes external conquest, Murdock's journey underscores inner emotional repair and identity reconciliation. For Frieren, her adventure is not merely about facing external enemies but about confronting emotional detachment, rekindling human connection, and embracing the vulnerability associated with love and loss.

Applying Murdock's framework to *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* illuminates how the heroine's psychological growth involves mourning, healing, and integrating both strength and sensitivity, illustrating a feminine path to wholeness.

Worden's Tasks of Grief

J. William Worden's (2009) *Tasks of Mourning* provide a systematic and dynamic framework for understanding the grieving process, emphasizing active engagement rather than passive endurance. Unlike models that conceptualize grief as a series of emotional stages to be endured passively, Worden posits that effective mourning demands conscious work from the bereaved, facilitating emotional healing and adaptive transformation. According to Worden (2009), healthy adaptation to loss involves the accomplishment of four critical tasks:
1. **Accepting the Reality of the Loss**:
   The first task involves confronting the undeniable truth that the loved one is no longer physically present. This acceptance extends beyond intellectual acknowledgment; it requires emotional internalization of the loss. Individuals often oscillate between

denial and acceptance during this phase, as the permanence of death is emotionally daunting. In *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End*, Frieren initially displays a rational acceptance of mortality due to her long lifespan, yet Himmel's death catalyzes a deeper emotional reckoning, highlighting the multidimensional nature of this task.

2. **Processing the Pain of Grief**
   The second task requires experiencing and working through the intense emotional pain rather than avoiding or numbing it. Grief involves a spectrum of feelings, including sadness, anger, guilt, and sometimes relief, depending on the relationship dynamics. Worden (2009) emphasizes that failure to process emotional pain can lead to pathological mourning, where unresolved grief manifests as depression or emotional numbness. For Frieren, the revisiting of past adventures, places, and shared memories with Himmel serves as a narrative vehicle for her gradual engagement with sorrow, illustrating her movement through this painful but necessary process.

3. **Adjusting to an Environment Without the Deceased**
   Beyond emotional processing, the bereaved must adapt to practical and relational changes. Worden (2009) identifies three levels of adjustment: external (changes in daily living), internal (alterations to the individual's self-concept), and spiritual (rethinking life values and beliefs). In the anime, Frieren's gradual formation of new bonds with Fern and Stark reflects her adaptation to a new social reality, where she must redefine her identity not as a passive survivor but as a mentor and guide, fulfilling external, internal, and spiritual adjustments simultaneously.

4. **Finding an Enduring Connection with the Deceased While Moving Forward**
   The final task involves creating a new relationship with the deceased — one based on memory and inner emotional presence — while continuing to live meaningfully. Rather than severing all ties to the departed, healthy mourning allows the bereaved to retain symbolic bonds while engaging actively with life. Frieren embodies this principle by internalizing Himmel's values of compassion and courage, allowing his spirit to live on through her actions without remaining trapped in paralyzing grief.

Frieren's psychological journey mirrors these stages closely. Initially, she suppresses her grief and treats death as an inevitable aspect of her long lifespan. However, Himmel's death catalyzes profound emotional turmoil, forcing her to actively mourn, reassess her relational world, and build new emotional connections with her apprentice Fern and warrior Stark.

Worden's framework thus serves as a valuable lens for analyzing how Frieren's narrative embodies the dynamic processes of grief, adaptation, and emotional reconstruction, ultimately leading to renewed vitality and deeper humanity.

Research Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative narrative analysis approach, primarily utilizing Labov's narrative structure model as the analytic framework, while integrating theoretical perspectives from Jungian psychology, Murdock's Heroine's Journey, and Worden's Tasks of Mourning.

The objective is to systematically analyze the protagonist Frieren's psychological development and emotional transformation within *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* by identifying narrative patterns, psychological milestones, and emotional evolution.

Narrative analysis is particularly suitable for this research because anime storytelling often involves complex temporal structures, flashbacks, and symbolic events, requiring an interpretative framework that accommodates both textual structure and emotional depth (Riessman, 1993).

The research process included the following steps:
1. **Text Selection**: The original *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* manga series and its anime adaptation were selected as primary data sources. Key scenes depicting emotional change, grief reactions, and relational development were identified for detailed analysis.
2. **Narrative Structuring**: Using Labov's six-step narrative model, critical events in Frieren's story were mapped into Abstract, Orientation, Complicating Action, Evaluation, Resolution, and Coda.
3. **Theoretical Interpretation**: Events and character developments were interpreted through the lenses of Jung's individuation process, Murdock's heroine development stages, and Worden's grief tasks, enabling a multilayered psychological and thematic analysis.
4. **Triangulation**: Collaborative coding between the first and second authors was employed to enhance the credibility and dependability of interpretations, minimizing individual bias.

Research Instruments

(1) Textual Data

- Primary Texts:
    - *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* manga (written by Kanehito Yamada, illustrated by Tsukasa Abe).
    - Anime adaptation produced by Madhouse studio.
- Analytical Frameworks:
    - Labov's Narrative Model: Structural analysis of storytelling (Labov, 1972).
    - Jungian Psychology: Concepts of shadow, anima/animus, individuation (Jung, 1968).
    - Murdock's Heroine's Journey: Ten-stage model of female psychological growth (Murdock, 1990).
    - Worden's Tasks of Mourning: Four-task model of grief processing (Worden, 2009).

(2) Application of Labov's Narrative Model

Table 1
Application of Labov's Narrative Model

Step	Definition	Application to Frieren
Abstract	Summarizing the story's essence	Frieren's long journey symbolizing emotional healing
Orientation	Setting the time, place, and character background	Post-Demon King era; Frieren as immortal elf mage
Complicating Action	Main events creating tension and development	Death of Himmel; Frieren's emotional awakening
Evaluation	Expressing the significance of the events	Recognizing the depth of human bonds and grief
Resolution	How the events are resolved	Rebuilding emotional connections through mentorship
Coda	Returning to the present and reflecting on change	Ongoing individuation journey integrating past and future

(3) Data Analysis Strategy

The data analysis for this study followed a multi-layered qualitative approach, integrating structural, thematic, and interpretative methods to comprehensively examine Frieren's psychological evolution.

- **Coding**: Story episodes were initially segmented and coded according to Labov's (1972) narrative model. Each significant narrative unit—defined by a clear beginning, emotional pivot, and resolution—was mapped onto Labov's six components (abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda), facilitating a systematic breakdown of Frieren's emotional and relational shifts across the series.
- **Thematic Analysis**: Following the initial coding, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns in Frieren's character development and emotional transformation. The interpretation was guided by constructs from Jungian psychology (Jung, 1968) — such as shadow integration and individuation — as well as Murdock's (1990) Heroine's Journey stages and Worden's (2009) Tasks of Mourning. Particular attention was given to themes of grief processing, relational reconnection, and internal feminine-masculine balance.
- **Interpretative Synthesis**: Finally, an integrative synthesis was performed, weaving together psychological interpretations and narrative structures to elucidate the stages of Frieren's inner growth. Rather than treating narrative elements and psychological constructs as separate layers, the analysis emphasized their interdependence, consistent with Ricoeur's (1969/2008) notion of the narrative arc as a hermeneutic bridge between lived experience and meaning-making.

This multilayered strategy ensured that both the structural flow of the story and the deep psychological transformations it represents were given analytical attention.

Trustworthiness and Rigor

To ensure the rigor and credibility of the qualitative findings, the study adhered to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness in naturalistic inquiry: credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability.

- Credibility: Achieved through prolonged engagement with the primary texts, involving multiple close readings of both the manga and anime adaptations to fully capture narrative nuances. Additionally, peer debriefing was employed, with the second author critically reviewing coding decisions, thematic interpretations, and theoretical alignments to minimize individual researcher bias (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).
- Dependability: Ensured through the consistent application of analytic frameworks across all narrative episodes. Each event or emotional shift was systematically analyzed using the same theoretical lenses (Labov, Jung, Murdock, Worden), enhancing methodological coherence and traceability.
- Confirmability: Maintained by anchoring interpretations firmly in textual evidence, with direct references to specific scenes, dialogues, and narrative structures. Analytic memos documenting interpretive reasoning were kept throughout the research process to provide an audit trail.
- Transferability: Although focused specifically on *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End*, the analytic strategy—combining narrative structure analysis with psychological frameworks—offers potential applicability to similar anime, manga, and fantasy narratives that explore themes of emotional maturation, grief, and individuation. Thus, the methodological design supports both depth and broader adaptability (Shenton, 2004).

Through this rigorous approach, the study ensured that interpretations were not idiosyncratic but reflected a credible, transparent, and transferable analysis of narrative and psychological development.

Research Quality

In qualitative research, ensuring the **trustworthiness** of findings is crucial. Following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) framework, this study emphasizes **credibility**, **dependability**, **confirmability**, and **transferability** to uphold research rigor.

Credibility

Credibility refers to the confidence in the truth of the data and interpretations. To enhance credibility in this study:

- **Prolonged Engagement**: The primary researcher engaged extensively with both the manga and anime versions of *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End*, enabling in-depth familiarity with character arcs and narrative nuances.
- **Triangulation**: The use of multiple theoretical frameworks (Jungian psychology, Murdock's Heroine's Journey, Worden's Tasks of Mourning, and Labov's narrative model) allowed for cross-validation of findings from different perspectives.
- **Peer Debriefing**: Collaborative analysis with the second author served as a peer review mechanism, minimizing researcher bias and enriching interpretation.

Dependability

Dependability emphasizes the consistency and replicability of research processes. This was ensured through:
- **Systematic Analytical Procedure**: Consistent application of Labov's narrative steps to all identified episodes.
- **Audit Trail**: Maintenance of detailed analytic memos documenting decision-making throughout the coding and interpretation phases.

Confirmability

Confirmability concerns the extent to which research findings are shaped by the participants or text rather than researcher biases. Strategies included:
- **Evidence-Based Interpretation**: All thematic claims were grounded in specific narrative scenes and direct textual evidence.
- **Collaborative Coding**: Dual analysis by both authors helped ensure interpretations were not idiosyncratic or overly subjective.

Transferability

Although this study focuses on a specific anime narrative, the analytic methodology — integrating narrative structure with psychological theories — can be adapted to analyze other cultural texts, particularly those exploring grief, growth, and individuation in popular media.

Research Ethics

As this study involves **textual analysis** rather than human participants, it inherently poses fewer ethical risks. Nevertheless, several ethical considerations guided the research process in accordance with the **American Psychological Association (APA, 2019)** guidelines.

Respect for Original Sources

Respect for intellectual property was strictly observed:
- All manga and anime materials were appropriately cited.
- The interpretations acknowledge the cultural and artistic intentions of the original creators.

Avoidance of Misinterpretation

To maintain academic integrity:
- Interpretations aimed to remain faithful to the narrative content and emotional dynamics portrayed in the anime, avoiding distortions or impositions of external biases.
- Reflective engagement was employed, drawing on Ricoeur's (1969/2008) hermeneutic philosophy, to approach the text respectfully and thoughtfully.

Cultural Sensitivity

Anime and manga are deeply embedded in Japanese cultural contexts. Throughout the analysis:

- Cultural nuances such as notions of time, interpersonal connection, and grieving practices were considered.
- The study avoided imposing Western-centric psychological frameworks inappropriately, instead using universal psychological theories as flexible interpretive tools.

Transparency

The entire analytic process — from text selection to theory application — was documented transparently to enable external scrutiny and replication if needed.

Research Results and Findings

Narrative Analysis Results

Drawing upon an integrative methodological approach, this study systematically traced Frieren's psychological evolution throughout *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* by combining Labov's (1972) six-step narrative model, Jungian analytical psychology (Jung, 1968), Murdock's (1990) Heroine's Journey, and Worden's (2009) Tasks of Mourning. Labov's framework provided the structural blueprint for segmenting and interpreting key narrative episodes, while Jung's theory of individuation and shadow integration offered insight into the protagonist's internal conflicts and gradual self-realization. Murdock's ten-stage heroine model contextualized Frieren's emotional descent and eventual reconciliation with both feminine and masculine energies, and Worden's tasks illuminated the adaptive mourning processes underlying her relational transformations.

The multi-theoretical analysis revealed that Frieren's development does not follow a linear trajectory but unfolds through a complex emotional cycle characterized by initial emotional suppression, subsequent grief awakening, progressive internal integration, and the rekindling of relational engagement.This cyclical pattern aligns with Ricoeur's (1969/2008) understanding of narrative identity as a recursive process of memory, reinterpretation, and reformation rather than a straightforward arc.

The following structured analysis presents a synthesis of narrative development and psychological interpretation, mapping Frieren's journey according to the intersecting lenses of narrative structure, individuation, mourning adaptation, and feminine psychological integration.

Table 2
Structured Analysis

Labov's Step	Frieren's Storyline	Worden's Grief Task	Murdock's Heroine Stage
Abstract	Frieren's journey is introduced through a flashback, depicting her adventures with human companions and foreshadowing her emotional evolution.	Task 1: Acceptance of the reality of loss	Stage 10: Integration of masculine and feminine energies
Orientation	Set in a post-Demon King world, Frieren faces the natural aging and death of her human comrades, contrasting her own longevity.	Task 1: Acceptance of the reality of loss	Stages 1–2: Separation from the feminine and identification with the masculine
Complicating Action	The death of Himmel triggers profound grief, confronting Frieren with emotions she had long suppressed.	Task 2: Processing the pain of grief	Stages 3–5: Road of trials, illusory success, and spiritual aridity
Evaluation	Through memories, regrets, and new relational bonds, Frieren reinterprets her past emotional detachment.	Task 2–3: Processing pain and adjusting to the environment without the deceased	Stages 6–8: Descent to the Goddess, yearning for reconnection, and healing the mother/daughter split
Resolution	Frieren builds new attachments, particularly with Fern and Stark, demonstrating renewed emotional openness and mentorship.	Task 3: Adjusting to an environment without the deceased	Stage 9: Healing the wounded masculine
Coda	Frieren reflects on her journey, carrying the influence of her past companions forward while continuing her path of individuation.	Task 4: Finding an enduring connection and moving forward	Final Integration: Full internal harmony

Source: Organized and analyzed by the researcher and co-researcher.

Thematic Findings

(1) Confronting Emotional Detachment: Awakening the Shadow

At the outset, Frieren presents a seemingly detached and stoic attitude toward human mortality, perceiving death as an inevitable consequence of her vastly extended lifespan. This emotional distance reflects the defense mechanism of emotional detachment, a common protective strategy against the vulnerability of loss. However, the death of Himmel—a trusted

and deeply influential companion—shatters this façade of detachment, forcing Frieren into an emotional reckoning she can no longer postpone.

According to Jung (1968), the activation of the shadow occurs when repressed and unconscious feelings surface into conscious awareness, demanding confrontation and eventual integration. Himmel's passing serves as a catalytic event, awakening Frieren's buried sorrow, guilt, and longing. This crucial turning point marks the beginning of her individuation journey, where healing necessitates embracing the painful emotional dimensions of her existence that she had long denied.

(2) Mourning and Meaning-Making

Following Himmel's death, Frieren's experiences closely align with the sequential tasks outlined in Worden's (2009) model of mourning:

- **Acceptance**: Frieren must move beyond cognitive acknowledgment to emotionally internalize the permanence of Himmel's absence. Initially, she exhibits intellectual acceptance but struggles with profound emotional realization.
- **Pain Processing**: Her visits to places intertwined with past adventures act as conduits for re-experiencing memories and emotions. Rather than suppressing grief, Frieren gradually allows these feelings to emerge, embodying Worden's emphasis on actively working through emotional pain.
- **Adjustment**: Developing mentorship bonds with Fern and collaborative relationships with Stark illustrates Frieren's effort to adapt to a new reality where her old companions no longer accompany her.
- **Connection**: Rather than remaining trapped in mourning, Frieren honors Himmel's memory by internalizing his compassion and values, letting them guide her future actions without imprisoning her in sorrow.

Through these progressive stages, Frieren demonstrates that mourning, when actively engaged, can serve as a transformational process, turning devastation into emotional resilience and meaning-making.

(3) Feminine Individuation Through Relational Bonds

Murdock's (1990) Heroine's Journey emphasizes that the heroine's growth involves more than achieving external success; it requires an inward reconnection with relational, emotional, and nurturing aspects often devalued in patriarchal heroic models. Frieren's evolving relationship with Fern encapsulates this movement toward feminine reintegration.

As Frieren transitions from a solitary figure to a mentor and protector, she re-engages with nurturing capacities, embracing vulnerability and emotional openness. Through caring for Fern, Frieren not only imparts magical knowledge but also confronts her own fears of attachment and loss. This relational healing process fulfills the later stages of Murdock's journey, where the heroine repairs fractured connections with the feminine and achieves internal balance between independence and intimacy.

(4) Memory as a Catalyst for Growth

In Frieren's narrative, memory functions not as a passive repository of the past but as an active catalyst for transformation. Flashbacks, particularly those highlighting Himmel's

compassion and subtle wisdom, recurrently surface, guiding Frieren toward deeper self-awareness.

Notably, Himmel's remark—"If you ever understand human feelings, let me know"—becomes a haunting refrain that propels Frieren to seek emotional comprehension. Each remembered interaction or shared moment acts as a bridge, connecting her past emotional voids to her present capacity for empathy and relational depth. Thus, memory in *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* operates dynamically, continually reshaping Frieren's emotional landscape and motivating ongoing individuation.

(5) Nonlinear Growth: Mourning and Individuation as Lifelong Journeys

Frieren's story resists traditional narrative closure. Unlike conventional heroic arcs that culminate in a definitive victory or endpoint, her psychological journey embodies the recursive, lifelong nature of individuation as described by Jung (1968). Her growth unfolds through repeated cycles of mourning, relational engagement, and meaning reformation, emphasizing that emotional healing is an ongoing, evolving endeavor rather than a finite achievement.

The anime poignantly illustrates that grief and personal growth are nonlinear; setbacks, relapses into sorrow, and renewed moments of connection coexist throughout Frieren's path. By portraying individuation as a fluid, lifetime-spanning process, *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End* challenges simplistic models of "overcoming grief," instead offering a vision of psychological maturation rooted in continual openness to vulnerability, loss, and renewal.

Conclusion: Research Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to expand the understanding and application of narrative structures, psychological frameworks, and emotional transformation as portrayed in anime and related cultural texts.

Expanding Narrative Analysis in Media Studies

Future research could apply similar methodologies — combining Labov's narrative model with psychological theories — to other anime, manga, and fantasy narratives that explore grief, emotional development, and psychological growth.
In particular:
- Comparative studies could examine different gendered hero narratives in anime, contrasting male and female individuation processes.
- Longitudinal studies could track character evolution across multi-season series to understand nonlinear patterns of mourning and identity reconstruction.

Additionally, incorporating Genette's (1980) narratology regarding narrative time manipulation (e.g., analepsis, prolepsis) could enrich the structural analysis, particularly in texts with frequent temporal shifts like *Frieren: Beyond Journey's End*.

Practical Applications in Animation and Screenwriting

For creators in animation and screenwriting fields:
- Emphasizing "memory–present–growth" cycles can deepen emotional engagement.

- Developing characters who evolve emotionally through grief and relational struggles, rather than solely through external conquest, can produce richer, more resonant storytelling.
- Visually distinguishing memories (e.g., color grading, music cues) from present-time narratives could enhance audiences' emotional immersion and understanding of internal character growth.

Storytelling that mirrors authentic mourning processes allows viewers to connect their own experiences of loss, adaptation, and healing with fictional narratives, thus enhancing narrative empathy.

Psychological and Educational Implications

In psychological counseling and education:
- Narrative therapy approaches could utilize fictional narratives like Frieren's to assist clients in externalizing grief experiences, reconstructing meaning, and recognizing ongoing self-integration.
- Educational programs might use anime narratives to teach adolescents about emotional processing, resilience, and the nature of lifelong personal growth, presenting grief and adaptation not as failures but as universal human experiences.
- Facilitated discussions around narratives such as Frieren's could promote emotional literacy and foster healthier grieving practices, especially among young audiences who often consume anime as a major cultural medium.

Enhancing Objectivity and Audience Perspective in Future Research

To reduce subjective bias in anime narrative studies:
- Audience reception analysis can be integrated, gathering qualitative data through interviews or surveys about viewers' interpretations of characters' emotional journeys.
- Corpus linguistics tools could be used to analyze language patterns in online fan discussions, identifying common themes regarding grief, loss, and growth.
- Triangulated research designs involving multiple researchers and data sources would enhance confirmability and robustness of interpretations.

Such expansions would ensure that future analyses do not merely reflect the researchers' personal readings but also encompass diverse audience engagements and broader cultural meanings.

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Promoting Waste Separation Behavior With Nudge Labels at a Local Government Office in Fukushima, Japan

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Abstract

To promote pro-environmental behavior, there is a growing trend of applying behavioral science approaches in public policy. This study aimed to improve waste separation rates in the offices of the Fukushima prefectural government by developing and testing nudge labels that incorporated simplification, reminder, and question-form message. Four departments in the building were selected for the experiment: two departments (one environmental and one non-environmental) were assigned to the intervention group where nudge labels were displayed, while the other two departments (one environmental and one non-environmental) served as the control group. The rate of plastic contamination in burnable waste was measured and compared between the groups. The results showed that the intervention group reduced the contamination rate by 6 percentage points, or approximately 38%, compared to the control group. Moreover, this reduction effect further increased two weeks after the intervention ended. These findings suggests that intuitive clarification of the rules, reminder and question-form message can enhance compliance with pro-environmental behavior.

Keywords: nudge, pro-environmental behavior, field experiment

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Introduction

Nudge theory, introduced by Thaler and Sunstein (2008), promotes voluntary behavioral change by accounting for cognitive limitations and designing choice architecture, not depending on regulative nor economic incentives. It has gained increasing attention in global public policy research (Takahashi et al., 2020; United Nations, 2021) and has been applied to various sectors in Japan, including environmental policy (Japan Nudge Unit, 2019).

This study explores the application of nudge theory to encourage waste separation behavior among office workers, using a pilot intervention at the Fukushima Prefectural Government. While prior research has examined nudges in settings like public places such as courts, and factories (Government of Ontario, 2018; Wu & Paluck, 2021), studies in Japanese office environments remain limited. Given that drivers of pro-environmental behavior differ between households and workplaces (Myers & Souza, 2020), and that intention does not always translate to action (Oskamp et al., 1991), this study investigates the impact of nudge labels on workplace behavior.

Methodology

Waste separation involves sorting recyclables prior to disposal. Barriers include complex and inconsistent waste classification rules (Mueller, 2013) and the habitual nature of waste disposal, which often occurs with minimal cognitive effort (Bamberg, 2013). Therefore, interventions must clarify rules and heighten users' awareness during waste disposal. This study focuses specifically on improving separation behavior.

A pre-study audit of waste in a Fukushima government office revealed frequent contamination of burnable trash with plastic packaging. Based on these findings, a nudge label was designed to support better sorting behavior. Drawing from Ontario's Behavioral Insights Unit model (Government of Ontario, 2018), the label incorporated three behavioral design elements:

1. **Simplification**: Clear visual cues and minimal text, including intuitive icons and a red color scheme representing burnable waste.
2. **Reminder**: A prompt in question form -"Does it belong to burnable waste?" - to trigger reflection at the point of disposal.
3. **Social cue**: The question format also simulated social observation, leveraging the psychological effect of being watched (Latane, 1970).

Labels were placed prominently near bins within selected departments, with locations determined in coordination with department representatives to ensure maximum visibility along disposal routes.

Figure 1

Nudge Label With a Question Form of Message ("Does It Belong to Burnable Waste?") and Explanation of Common Contaminations With Three Icons

Figure 2

Images of the Posted Nudge Labels

Due to logistical constraints, a randomized controlled trial was not feasible; instead, a controlled experimental design was employed. Four departments within the Fukushima Prefectural Government—two environmentally focused and two not—were selected based on comparable conditions, including staff size, waste bin placement, and any special waste handling circumstances. One environmental and one non-environmental department were assigned to the intervention group (with nudge labels), while the remaining two served as the control group (no labels).

To evaluate behavioral change and its persistence, waste separation behavior was measured at three time points over a six-week period: baseline (Nov. 29 - Dec. 8, 2021), intervention (Dec. 9 - 24), and post-intervention (Dec. 25-Jan. 14, excluding Dec. 29 - Jan. 3).

Plastic contamination in burnable waste was measured by weighing full waste bags, isolating plastic materials for separate weighing, and reconfirming total weight after reassembly. Measurements were taken on December 8 (pre), December 23 (during), and January 12 (post). The weight of each waste bag was standardized at 44g.

Results

Variations in daily waste generation between groups may result from a range of contextual factors beyond the influence of the nudge intervention. To evaluate the comparability of

waste emissions, correlation analyses were conducted using data from Control Groups 1 and 2, both of which had an extended pre-intervention observation period. The correlation coefficient, which quantifies the strength and direction of a linear relationship between two variables, was employed to assess consistency in burnable waste emissions between these groups during the intervention phase.

As presented in Table 1, the overall correlation coefficient for burnable waste was notably high (r = 0.81). This strong correlation is partly attributable to consistently low waste volumes during holidays and a marked increase in burnable waste across all groups on December 28, the final business day of the year. When focusing exclusively on weekday data and excluding the December 28 anomaly, the correlation remained substantial (r = 0.67), suggesting a stable relationship in waste emission patterns between the control groups.

Table 1
Inter-group Correlation Coefficients for Refuse Emissions

Period	Correlation coefficient
Whole period	0.81
Weekly average (weekdays)	0.94
Weekly average (weekdays except December 28)	0.67

Figure 3 shows that the contamination rate by groups. Even though the control group exhibited a similar contamination rate compared to pre-intervention period, the intervention group demonstrated an average 6 percentage points decrease (approximately 38%) in contamination rate during the intervention period, with a continued decrease in the post-intervention period.

Figure 3
Percentage of Contaminated Plastic Waste in Burnable Waste
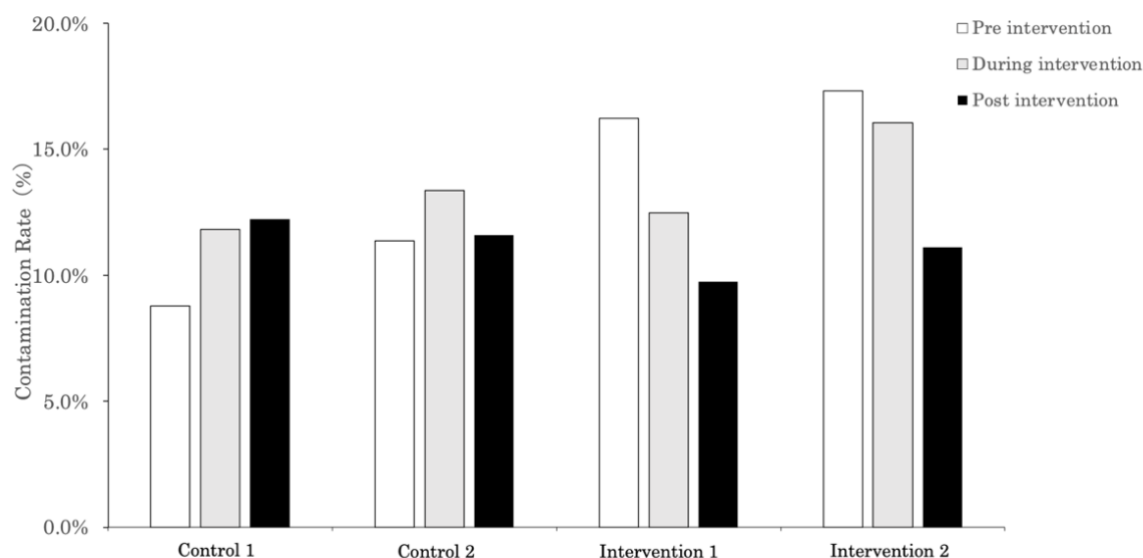
Discussion

The relatively strong correlation coefficient ($r = 0.67$) in average weekly waste emissions between groups indicates the presence of common underlying factors influencing waste generation across departments.

In terms of contamination rates, the intervention group demonstrated a continued decline both during and following the intervention period. This pattern suggests that appropriate waste sorting behaviors may have been internalized, potentially indicating the formation of new habits. Several factors are likely to have contributed to this sustained behavioral change. First, the intuitive visual design of the nudge labels effectively clarified waste sorting rules, enhancing cognitive accessibility. Second, the strategic placement of labels provided real-time prompts at the point of disposal, reinforcing rule adherence. Third, the use of a question-form message may have elicited a heightened sense of accountability, promoting voluntary compliance.

Moreover, the organizational setting may have influenced participants' behavior. In a professional environment, employees may experience greater social pressure to conform, motivated by reputational concerns or fear of negative evaluation for violating explicitly presented norms.

In terms of the cost-effectiveness of scaling up the intervention, the cost was low with each color- printed label costing approximately five yen. Additionally, since the labels were simply posted near waste bins, the required resources for the measure are minimal and can be widely deployed.

Conclusion

In this study we explored the application of Nudge theory to promote waste separation behavior at workplace in Japan. By posting nudge labels, we found that there is approximately 38 percent decrease in contamination rate in intervention groups. The results of this study may be applied in other government office buildings and administrative workplaces to improve waste separation behavior among office workers. The limitation of this research are as follows: a small sample size, the potential influence of confounding factors and the long-term sustainability of the improvement of waste separation behavior. Further research is needed to examine these issues.

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The Effect of Celebrity Worship on Psychological Well-being Among Early Adulthood Fandom: The Mediating Role of Social Identity, Escape of Stressors, and Purpose in Life

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Abstract

Research on well-being among early adult fandoms has grown significantly, highlighting the impact of popular culture on psychological development. This study investigates the effects of celebrity worship on the psychological well-being of 200 young adults who identify as members of celebrity fandoms in Bangkok, selected through convenience sampling. It examines the mediating roles of social identity, escape from stressors, and sense of purpose. Using validated psychometric scales, correlation analysis was conducted to evaluate relationships among variables, followed by structural equation modeling (SEM), which revealed significant positive effects of celebrity worship on psychological well-being. Social identity and sense of purpose emerged as key mediators, amplifying positive outcomes, while escape from stressors provided moderate support. These findings suggest that celebrity worship enhances well-being by fostering identity formation, purposeful engagement, and stress relief. This research contributes to social and cognitive psychology by offering practical insights into leveraging popular culture to promote mental health. The results provide a foundation for future research and interventions aimed at improving psychological well-being within this population.

Keywords: fandoms, celebrity worship, well-being

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Introduction

Mental health has become an increasingly prominent concern in both Thai and global contexts, with rising rates of stress, anxiety, and depression underscoring the need to identify factors that promote psychological well-being. Ryff (1989) conceptualizes psychological well-being as encompassing self-acceptance, purpose in life, autonomy, and positive relationships. Similarly, Diener (2009) defines it as an individual's overall evaluation of life satisfaction and emotional experiences. These frameworks highlight the significance of understanding how people cultivate happiness and resilience in everyday life.

In recent years, growing attention has been directed toward the role of fandom defined as a strong emotional investment in and identification with specific cultural phenomena such as celebrities, music, films, and fictional universes in influencing mental well-being. Once regarded merely as entertainment or even obsessive behavior, fandom is now increasingly recognized as a meaningful social and psychological activity. Fan communities often serve as sources of emotional support, identity formation, and shared purpose. As noted by McCutcheon et al. (2002), fan behavior varies in intensity and form, yet it frequently fulfills important emotional and social functions.

Participation in fandom may support psychological well-being through several mechanisms. It fosters connection, belonging, and emotional expression key components of mental health. Notably, emerging research indicates that three psychological factors may mediate this relationship: social identity, escape from stressors, and a sense of life purpose.

Social Identity refers to the sense of belonging individuals experience as members of a group. Within fan communities, shared interests and collective experiences foster interpersonal bonds that enhance self-esteem and reduce feelings of isolation. For Thai youth in particular, fandom may offer a space for self-expression and acceptance that extends beyond traditional societal norms and expectations.

Escape from Stressors involves the use of fandom as a psychological outlet to temporarily distance oneself from real-world pressures. Engaging with music, fictional narratives, or online fan activities can provide emotional comfort and relief. Although excessive escapism may lead to maladaptive outcomes, moderate and intentional engagement can serve as an effective coping mechanism for stress management.

Life Purpose reflects the perception that one's life has direction and meaning. For many fans, fandom offers more than momentary enjoyment it inspires creativity, influences personal and career goals, and fosters involvement in community-based initiatives. This is consistent with findings that a strong sense of purpose is a key contributor to psychological well-being.

Despite these promising developments, much of the existing research remains grounded in Western cultural contexts. There is limited understanding of how these psychological factors social identity, stress relief, and life purpose—interact to influence mental health in non-Western settings, such as Thailand. Additionally, few studies have examined these mediators collectively within a single, integrated framework.

This study aims to investigate the relationships among fan engagement, social identity, escape from stressors, and life purpose within the Thai context. By addressing these research gaps, the present study seeks to offer new insights into how fandom can function as a

meaningful and culturally relevant force for promoting psychological well-being in everyday life.

Research Objectives

To evaluate the validity of a causal relationship model on the well-being of early adult fans, with Social Identity, Escape from Stressors, and Life Purpose as mediating variables.

Method

Research Hypothesis

This study proposes that celebrity worship exerts both direct and indirect effects on psychological well-being among young adults. Specifically, the following hypotheses are formulated to examine the underlying psychological mechanisms:

- H1: Celebrity worship will have a significant direct effect on psychological well-being.
- H2: Social identity will mediate the relationship between celebrity worship and psychological well-being.
- H3: Escape from stressors will mediate the relationship between celebrity worship and psychological well-being.
- H4: Life purpose will mediate the relationship between celebrity worship and psychological well-being.

These hypotheses aim to investigate the potential pathways through which celebrity worship may influence psychological well-being, offering insights into both its beneficial and detrimental impacts.

Participants

The study was conducted with a sample of 200 young adults, aged 18 to 35 years, residing in Bangkok, Thailand. Participants were recruited through convenience sampling via online platforms and university networks. Inclusion criteria required that participants self-identify as fans or followers of at least one celebrity figure (e.g., actors, musicians, or social media influencers), ensuring that all respondents had prior experience with some form of celebrity worship. Demographic data, including age, gender, and educational background, were also collected to describe the sample and to control for potential confounding variables in subsequent analyses.

Research Design

This study employed a quantitative survey design to investigate the hypothesized relationships among the key variables. A structured questionnaire was utilized to assess five main constructs: celebrity worship, social identity, escape from stressors, life purpose, and psychological well-being. Validated measurement scales from previous research were adapted and translated for use in the Thai context, ensuring both cultural relevance and measurement reliability.

Path analysis was employed as the primary method of statistical analysis, allowing for the examination of both direct and indirect effects within the proposed model. This approach was chosen to test the mediating roles of social identity, escape from stressors, and life purpose in

the relationship between celebrity worship and psychological well-being. Data analysis was conducted using statistical software, and model fit indices were reported to evaluate the adequacy of the hypothesized model.

This methodological design provides a comprehensive framework for understanding the influence of celebrity worship on psychological well-being, both directly and through its associated psychological mechanisms.

Results

The path analysis revealed several significant relationships among the variables. Celebrity worship was positively associated with social identity ($\beta = .56$, $p < .05$), escape from stressors ($\beta = .39$, $p < .05$), and life purpose ($\beta = .56$, $p < .05$). Among the mediators, social identity ($\beta = .27$, $p < .05$) and life purpose ($\beta = .24$, $p < .05$) showed significant positive effects on psychological well-being. However, escape from stressors did not have a significant effect on well-being ($\beta = .02$, n.s.). The direct effect of celebrity worship on well-being was non-significant ($\beta = .01$, n.s.), indicating full mediation through social identity and life purpose. These findings suggest that celebrity worship may enhance well-being indirectly by fostering social identity and a sense of life purpose.

Figure 1
Path Model Illustrating the Direct and Indirect Effects of Celebrity Worship on Psychological Well-being Through Social Identity, Escape From Stressors, and Life Purpose
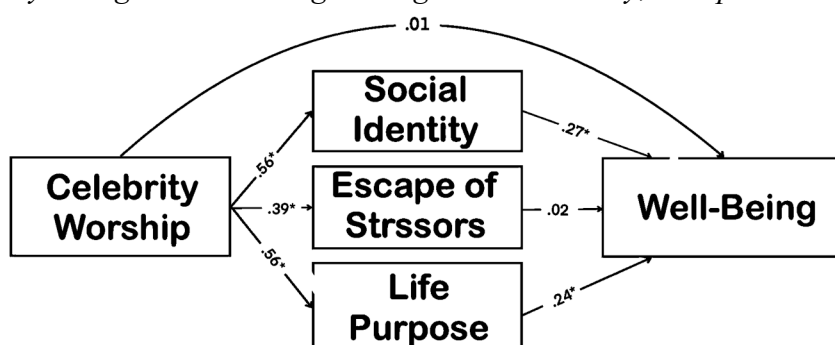
Discussion and Conclusion

This study examined the psychological mechanisms through which celebrity worship affects psychological well-being among Thai young adults, focusing on the mediating roles of social identity, escape from stressors, and life purpose. The results highlight that while celebrity worship alone does not have a direct impact on psychological well-being, it exerts significant indirect effects through specific psychological pathways particularly social identity and life purpose.

The Role of Social Identity

Social identity emerged as a significant positive predictor of psychological well-being ($\beta = .27$), supporting previous findings that emphasize the mental health benefits of belonging to social groups (Bizumic et al., 2009; Huo et al., 2010). Within fan communities, individuals often form strong interpersonal connections based on shared values, admiration, and goals. These connections foster a sense of belonging, which in turn enhances self-esteem, emotional

stability, and life satisfaction. Importantly, the results suggest that it is not the act of celebrity worship itself, but the strength of social affiliation within fandom communities that contributes positively to psychological health. In the Thai cultural context where collectivism and relational identity are prominent such group identification may be especially beneficial for young adults navigating personal and social development.

Life Purpose as a Key Mediator

Life purpose also played a significant mediating role ($\beta = .24$), underscoring the value of purposeful engagement in shaping mental well-being. Many fans derive meaning, inspiration, and motivation from their admiration of celebrities, which may influence personal aspirations, creativity, and even career direction. When this admiration aligns with an individual's values or life goals, it fosters a sense of direction and fulfillment. These findings are consistent with existing literature emphasizing that a strong sense of purpose enhances psychological resilience and promotes life satisfaction (Ryff, 1989). Fandom, in this case, functions not merely as a leisure activity but as a psychological resource that supports positive identity formation and long-term well-being.

Escape From Stressors

Contrary to common assumptions, escape from stressors did not significantly predict psychological well-being ($\beta = .02$), even though it was positively associated with celebrity worship. This challenges the view that parasocial relationships and media consumption provide reliable long-term coping strategies (Greenwood & Long, 2011; Maltby et al., 2004). While engaging in fan activities may offer temporary relief from stress, it does not appear to produce lasting psychological benefits. These findings suggest that escapism through celebrity admiration is insufficient as a coping mechanism and lacks the depth needed to address emotional well-being effectively. Instead, more meaningful forms of engagement such as building identity and cultivating life purpose emerge as more influential in supporting mental health.

Celebrity Worship and Well-being

Although the Pearson correlation revealed a significant positive association between celebrity worship and psychological well-being, the inclusion of mediating variables social identity, escape from stressors, and life purpose within the path analysis resulted in a non-significant direct effect ($\beta = .01$). This finding suggests that the observed relationship between celebrity worship and well-being is fully mediated by these psychological mechanisms. In other words, the positive influence of celebrity admiration on well-being operates indirectly, through its capacity to enhance social connectedness and foster a sense of purpose, rather than exerting a direct effect.

This result is consistent with previous literature (e.g., Reysen et al., 2017) which suggests that celebrity worship is not inherently beneficial or detrimental to psychological health. Rather, its impact depends on the psychological functions it serves. When celebrity engagement promotes meaningful social identification or aligns with an individual's personal values and life direction, it can contribute positively to emotional well-being. Conversely, passive admiration or engagement primarily as a form of escapism appears to yield limited psychological benefit. These findings underscore the importance of examining the underlying mechanisms through which celebrity worship influences mental health, particularly in

cultural contexts where fandom may serve as a key site for identity development and value formation.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

The results of this study offer relevant insights for developmental psychologists supporting young adults during the critical transition from adolescence to adulthood. During this life stage, individuals explore identity, seek purpose, and form deeper social affiliations—all areas directly influenced by the mechanisms identified in this research.

Use Fandom to Facilitate Identity Exploration

Developmental psychologists can incorporate discussions around celebrity worship and fan group involvement as a lens for understanding how early adults construct their identities. Engaging clients in reflecting on what attracts them to specific celebrities or fandoms can help uncover personal values, role models, and emerging self-concepts.

Support Purpose Development

As life purpose was found to significantly mediate the relationship between celebrity worship and well-being, psychologists should encourage clients to articulate long-term goals and reflect on how their interests (including fandom) align with those goals. Purpose-driven engagement such as fan-inspired creative work, advocacy, or career direction can be a powerful resource for promoting well-being.

Strengthen Social Identity Through Positive Peer Groups

Fandom communities often provide safe and affirming spaces for early adults who may feel disconnected from traditional institutions (e.g., family or university life). Psychologists can validate these group affiliations and encourage clients to explore how these communities fulfill social and emotional needs. Group-based interventions or peer support networks may also be leveraged to reinforce a sense of belonging.

Distinguish Between Adaptive and Maladaptive Escapism

Although escapism was linked to celebrity worship, it did not significantly impact well-being. Psychologists should explore whether clients are engaging in fandom as a form of healthy stress relief or as a means of avoiding real-life responsibilities. Interventions can focus on building emotional regulation skills that balance fantasy engagement with active problem-solving.

Culturally Attuned Interventions

For early adults in collectivist cultures such as Thailand, celebrity worship may serve as an avenue for individual expression within socially acceptable boundaries. Developmental psychologists should approach this phenomenon with cultural sensitivity, recognizing that fandom can function as a positive force in identity development, community affiliation, and life purpose formation.

Limitations and Future Research

While this study provides important insights into the relationship between celebrity worship and psychological well-being, it is essential to acknowledge several limitations. First, the study sample is limited to early adults residing in Bangkok, Thailand, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings to other cultural contexts or age groups. Given the significant role that culture and developmental stages play in shaping psychological experiences, it is crucial for future research to include a more diverse population. This would allow for a broader assessment of whether the relationships observed in this study hold across different sociocultural settings, age ranges, and life stages.

Additionally, this study employed a cross-sectional design, which does not provide insight into the long-term psychological effects of celebrity worship. Longitudinal research would be valuable in exploring the stability of these effects over time and how they may evolve as individuals age or undergo life transitions. Future research could also examine the differential impact of various types of fandom engagement such as passive versus active involvement to determine which forms of engagement are most beneficial for mental well-being.

Further, examining the different dimensions of celebrity worship, such as entertainment-social, intense-personal, and borderline-pathological orientations, could offer a deeper understanding of how varying levels of involvement in fandom relate to mental health outcomes. A more nuanced approach would help refine theoretical models and inform practical interventions designed to promote healthier, more constructive forms of fan engagement.

Acknowledgement

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Online Communities and Identity Exploration:
Insights From Gender-Diverse Youth in Canada

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Abstract

Social media platforms and online communities serve as valuable resources for gender-diverse youth (i.e., transgender, non-binary, and gender-questioning youth, hereafter, *TGDY*) to explore different identities and connect with supportive networks. Experimenting with various gender identities and expressions anonymously online can offer these youth a sense of safety, which is crucial for identity development and may encourage later disclosure to family and peers. However, online spaces also carry risks, such as cyberbullying, exposure to misinformation, and the potential for youth to be outed before they are ready. This study builds on existing research by exploring how TGDY navigate online gender experimentation and offline coming-out processes. As part of a larger project on factors influencing disclosure decisions, over 400 qualitative reports from TGDY attending a gender health clinic in British Columbia were reviewed, from which 25 were selected for in-depth analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted using a three-dimensional framework of function, intention, and intensity. Five key themes emerged: discovery, identity exploration, emotional refuges, rehearsal spaces, and mentorship and contribution. The findings reflect the advantages and challenges of online gender exploration previously identified in the literature. They offer insight into how social media platforms and online communities can both support and complicate identity development and coming-out experiences for TGDY youth in Canada. Conclusions emphasize the need for safe, supportive online spaces and stress the importance of online literacy education for both youth and their support networks.

Keywords: transgender youth, gender-diverse youth, gender identity, online identity exploration, social media, coming out

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Introduction

Gender-diverse youth, including transgender, non-binary, and gender-questioning adolescents (hereafter, TGDY), face unique challenges in exploring and affirming their identities. These challenges include bullying, social exclusion, and a lack of institutional and familial support, all of which contribute to significant mental health disparities (e.g., Veale et al., 2017; Wittlin et al., 2023). In recent years, research on how TGDY use online spaces has expanded considerably. Much of this work highlights the role of the internet and social media in shaping gender identity development, and well as the benefits and risks associated with online gender exploration (e.g., Austin et al., 2020; Bates et al., 2020; Berger et al., 2022; Cipolletta et al., 2017; Craig et al., 2015, 2021; Herrmann, Bindt, et al., 2024; McInroy et al., 2019; McInroy & Craig, 2015; Selkie et al., 2020).

Online social media platforms such as Instagram, Tumblr, Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, and Discord can provide TGDY with opportunities to explore gender expression, access information about gender identity and transition, and connect with supportive peers regardless of geographic location (Berger et al., 2022; Craig et al., 2021; McInroy et al., 2019). TGDY report experimenting with different names, pronouns, and digital representations online as they come to understand their gender identity (e.g., Bates et al., 2020; Fox & Ralston, 2016; Herrmann, Bindt, et al., 2024). The relative anonymity and customizable privacy settings of online spaces allow youth strategically manage disclosure of their identities (Fox & Ralston, 2016; McConnell et al., 2017), and offer a buffer from rejection, bullying, and other risks tied to being visibly gender-diverse offline (Berger et al., 2022; McInroy & Craig, 2015). Online spaces can also facilitate offline coming out processes and social transitions for TGDY, with many reporting coming out online prior to coming out in everyday life (Herrmann, Bindt, et al., 2024). The ability to explore and connect with peers online has been linked to improved mental health outcomes for TGDY and is especially valuable for youth who do not feel safe or affirmed in their offline environments (Austin et al., 2020; McInroy, 2020; McInroy et al., 2019).

Despite these benefits, social media use also poses risks. For adolescents in general, research has found a complex relationship between social media use and mental health outcomes, with population-based studies and meta-analyses (e.g., Sala et al., 2024; Statistics Canada, 2023) reporting both positive effects (e.g., increased social connection, access to identity-affirming communities) and negative outcomes (e.g., heightened anxiety, depressive symptoms, and disrupted sleep). For TGDY, additional risks include transphobic cyberbullying, exposure to misinformation about gender identity, and the potential for unintended disclosure or "outing" before an individual is prepared to come out offline (Berger et al., 2022; Hanckel et al., 2019; Herrmann, Barkmann, et al., 2024; Selkie et al., 2020). Thus, it is important that educators, clinicians, and caregivers working with TGDY are prepared to engage in informed, supportive conversations about online identity exploration and digital safety.

While existing research has documented preferences and patterns of online platform use among broader sexual and gender minority youth populations (e.g., Berger et al., 2022; McInroy et al., 2019), relatively few have focused specifically on how TGDY use different platforms for identity exploration and how this may facilitate offline coming-out processes. Moreover, most of this research has been conducted with U.S.-based samples, with more recent contributions emerging from European contexts (e.g., Herrmann, Barkmann, et al., 2024; Hermann, Bindt, 2024). Studies which included Canadian participants were often part of broader U.S.-Canada-based research and did not focus specifically on the experiences of

TGDY (e.g., Craig et al., 2021; McInroy et al., 2019). As such, there remains scope for qualitative research that more directly attends to the online experiences of TGDY situated within the Canadian context.

This study aimed to address this gap by analyzing the qualitative accounts from TGDY between the ages of 10 to 23 who attended a gender health clinic in British Columbia, Canada. By examining how these youth use social media platforms and online communities, this research offers insight into online identity exploration within the Canadian context.

Methods

The present study was derived from a broader research project that involved the review of de-identified diagnostic assessment reports, which included in-depth interviews with youth and their guardians as part of the Gender Health Assessment (GHA) services for TGDY provided at an outpatient mental health clinic in Metro Vancouver, British Columbia. Assessments conducted between 2014 and 2024 (n = 400) were reviewed by three research assistants to identify cases meeting the inclusion criteria: reported use of online or digital platforms as part of gender exploration. The 2014-2024 timeframe was chosen to capture cases assessed under the updated Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) criteria for Gender Dysphoria and to reflect contemporary clinical practices. A consistent pattern of digital engagement emerged within a subset of these data which became the focus of the present study. Data analysis continued until thematic saturation was reached, resulting in a final dataset of 25 cases. Clients ranged in age from 10 to 23 years (M = 15.8, Mdn = 16.0) and identified as 16 female-to-male (FTM), 7 male-to-female (MTF), and 2 non-binary (NB).

This study used deductive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within a qualitative framework to guide the interpretation of the 25 transcripts. This approach facilitated exploration of themes related to delayed disclosure of gender incongruence and the role of online communities in gender exploration. The analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2020) six-phase process: data familiarization, systematic coding, generating initial themes, developing and reviewing themes, refining and naming themes, and final write-up. Semantic coding was used to capture rich descriptions of client experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The collaborative coding process, supported by a codebook and memo writing, allowed for the identification of overarching themes and subthemes, as well as determining data saturation (Saunders et al., 2023) within the sample. Broader themes were contextualized by these subthemes and further refined through iterative review. This iterative review process contributed to the trustworthiness and rigour (Guba & Lincoln, 1989) of the study by ensuring comprehensive and consistent interpretation of the data that reflected the lived experiences of clients.

Results

The initial round of coding produced three broad descriptive themes. These included the platforms used (e.g., TikTok, Tumblr, Instagram, Discord, Reddit), motivations for online engagement (such as identity exploration, seeking representation, or preparing to come out), and the role of online spaces as safe havens or sources of peer support. Other salient subthemes captured challenges such as gatekeeping, misinformation, and transphobia, as well as the emotional intensity of online participation, particularly for those without affirming offline support.

Through iterative analysis, these themes were synthesized through three overarching dimensions of digital engagement: function, intention, and intensity. Function referred to the role online spaces serve in a youth's life, such as providing anonymity, connection, information, emotional support, or a platform for advocacy. Intention captured the motivations behind digital engagement, including identity exploration, preparation for disclosure, or supporting others. Intensity reflected the depth, frequency, and emotional investment in online interactions, which was found to fluctuate in relation to offline support and developmental readiness. Function served as an umbrella dimension under which five central themes were produced: (a) *discovery* (b) *identity exploration*, (c) *emotional refuge*, (d) *rehearsal spaces*, and (e) *mentorship and contribution*. These functions were then shaped by the youth's underlying intentions and marked by variations in emotional and behavioural intensity.

Discovery

A foundational function of online spaces in this study was their role in introducing TGDY to language, narratives, and identities that reflected their lived experiences. Participants described moments of gender identity recognition that were precipitated or clarified through exposure to gender-fluid and diverse language, personal narratives of other transgender individuals, and representations encountered online. These discoveries were often marked by a shift from vague discomfort to a more articulate sense of self.

Some participants described stumbling across gender-related content that resonated unexpectedly. Client #25 (age 13, FTM) shared that he had come across clips about transgender people online but recalled, "I did not know what it was until later." Similarly, client #9 (age 13, FTM) learned the term "transgender" through online exposure. He remembered being surprised, first to learn that "there was such a thing," and then to realize "there were other people feeling similarly to him and that he was not alone."

Client #19 (age 19, MTF) also encountered transgender-related content by accident around age 12. At first, her reaction was shaped by negative portrayals: "I thought transgender people were weird," she admitted, explaining that early exposure to transphobic comments led her to believe "it must be bad, and I did not think it was me." Despite the negativity, these early, low-intensity encounters laid the groundwork for her later self-recognition.

Others described more intentional exposure to transgender or gender diverse content. Client #2 (age 18, NB) recalled a moment of clarity after learning new terminology: "I learned [through online engagement] what non-binary meant, and I was so relieved because it fit." Client #23 (age 14, FTM) began researching to validate his feelings: "I wanted to see if transgender people were real. I was confused at first, but it started to make sense. It matched how I felt. I was happy because I could put words to how I felt, who I am, but I was very nervous about how other people would treat me."

For Client #19 (age 18, FTM), discovery came through watching creators on platforms like YouTube. He shared, "I wanted to find out why I felt this way, what were the causes, but I could not find an explanation."

Initial Exploration

Online spaces were also found to be environments for experimentation, where TGDY could begin to explore aspects of their identity before contemplating offline disclosure. This function was characterized by low-risk, self-directed exploration, with exposure to peer models, and a growing sense of social safety.

Several participants described starting their exploration through research or personal reflection. Client #1 (age 21, MTF) recalled, "At about 10 years old, I started doing research on gender identity to understand what I was feeling." Similarly, Client #24 (age 19, MTF) said, "I wanted to learn more about transgender people and myself because I wanted to be sure."

For others, experimentation happened more subtly through creative expression. Client #5 (age 15, FTM) described the moment he saw himself in a new light: "My character was a boy for the first time. It just felt more like me." Similarly, Client #18 (age 23, NB) shared: "I changed how I talked a little in voice chats. It wasn't planned, I just felt more comfortable sounding like that there."

Emotional Refuges

Online spaces provided many TGDY with emotional refuges from their offline environments. TGDY experienced affirmation, understanding, and support which was often absent elsewhere in their lives. Moreover, these youth reported feeling seen, heard, and valued during formative stages of their gender identity development.

Client #14 (age 20, MTF) expressed the deep contrast between their online and offline experiences, sharing, "Online is the only place I can be myself. I delete my browser history every time." Another, client #21 (age 14, FTM), reflected on the relief and joy he felt in online spaces: "I was very happy being myself online. That's me. I felt relieved because there are people who exist out there like me."

For client #20 (age 16, FTM), discovering others with similar experiences was both surprising and affirming. "I was surprised there were people like me," he said, recalling how that realization helped him understand himself and feel validated. Similarly, client #10 (age 12, MTF) described the emotional impact of connecting with others online: "It felt great. I can relate to the people there and I was not alone. There were people like me out there."

Rehearsal Spaces

Online spaces also functioned as rehearsal spaces where TGDY could practice expressing their gender identity before disclosing it in offline settings. While similar to identity exploration, this use of digital spaces was marked by a specific intention to disclose and often accompanied by an increase in online activity as well as a strong emotional drive to "get it right" before facing the potential risks of real-world expression.

Many participants described using social media or messaging platforms to try out names, pronouns, and narratives. For instance, client #15 (age 15, FTM) shared that changing his Discord name to his chosen name "helped [him] see if [he] was ready to use it in real life."

Similarly, client #17 (age 20, MTF) explained that she used a different name on Discord before telling anyone offline because "it helped [her] get used to it."

Client #13 (age 17, FTM) described experimenting with different pronouns on a private Tumblr blog "to see what felt right before asking friends to use them." Client #7 (age 15, FTM) recalled reading Reddit posts about how others came out to his parents, noting that it "helped [him] know what to expect."

For some, these online rehearsals led to carefully considered offline disclosures. Client #8 (age 13, FTM) shared that he first came out to his best friend because he knew that friend would understand. "I had already read so many stories like mine online," he said, "and that helped me realize I wasn't alone."

Mentorship and Contribution

As TGDY matured in their identity journeys, many returned to online spaces to guide, mentor, or advocate for others. The function of online spaces became integrative and reciprocal. The intention was no longer self-focused, but community-oriented and driven by a desire to create safer, more inclusive environments for others. The intensity of online engagement was generally lower for this function, as participants no longer relied on these spaces for personal affirmation but engaged more selectively and purposefully.

Client #3 (age 17, MTF) reflected on this evolution: "When I first started questioning, I just lurked on forums. Now, I try to help younger people who are where I was five years ago." Similarly, client #18 (age 23, NB) shared how they use their platform for advocacy: "I use my Instagram to share trans-related news and help others find gender-affirming healthcare."

Others took on more hands-on support roles. Client #4 (age 16, MTF) shared about her online persona, "[she] was really nice. She was there for anyone…helping and supporting. For a long time, she was a huge part of the online trans-community."

Discussion

Our findings largely align with previous research indicating that online spaces play a formative role in supporting the gender identity development of transgender and gender-diverse youth (TGDY). The three-dimensional framework of function, intention, and intensity applied in this study offered a novel perspective for documenting the evolving and dynamic role of online spaces in the lives of TGDY within a qualitative research design.

Consistent with prior studies, participants in this research described their initial encounters with transgender and gender-diverse-related content online as pivotal moments for self-understanding (e.g., Bates et al., 2020; Craig et al., 2015; McInroy et al., 2019). The theme of *discovery* captured how many TGDY stumbled upon representations and language that resonated with their internal experiences, leading to moments of recognition that alleviated feelings of confusion and isolation. This finding supports the body of literature suggesting that access to affirming narratives and terminology can have a transformative effect on youth who may lack representation in offline settings (e.g., Cipolletta et al., 2017; Fox & Ralston, 2016; McInroy, 2020).

The function of *identity exploration* was similarly grounded in the accessibility and relative safety of online spaces. TGDY used platforms like Tumblr, Discord, and Reddit to experiment with names, pronouns, and expressions of gender without the immediate risks often associated with offline disclosure (e.g., Bates et al., 2020; Hanckel et al., 2019).

Online spaces also played a compensatory function as *emotional refuges* for TGDY experiencing familial rejection or social marginalization. These findings echo previous research which has found that online communities often provide important sources of belonging for TGDY (e.g., Austin et al., 2020; Cipolletta et al., 2017; Craig et al., 2017; Herrmann, Bindt, et al., 2024; McInroy, 2020). The emotional intensity attached to these spaces was particularly pronounced for participants lacking affirming offline networks, which suggests that the social-emotional impact of online engagement cannot be separated from the broader ecological context of support or lack thereof (e.g., Katz-Wise et al., 2017).

The theme of *rehearsal spaces* extends previous research on how TGDY used online spaces as preparatory environments to practice coming out, refine their narratives, and gain confidence (e.g., McInroy et al., 2019).

Finally, the theme of *mentorship and contribution* represented a shift in function and intention, from self-focused needs to community-oriented engagement. As youth matured, many returned to online spaces not out of necessity, but with a sense of responsibility to support others. This reflects the potential of online communities to support intergenerational solidarity within marginalized populations (e.g., Craig et al., 2021; Selkie et al., 2020).

This study also demonstrated how the function of online spaces can evolve over time. *Discovery* and *initial exploration* encompassed many early interactions, while later use became more intentional and outward facing, as demonstrated by *rehearsal spaces* and *mentorship and contribution*. There was also a noted shift between passive exposure to active engagement which reflect developmental theories of identity formation that describe movement from internal questioning to external expression (Arnett, 2000; Erikson, 1968). The intention behind engagement also shifted as TGDY aged. Older youth in this study retrospectively described their younger selves as primarily seeking understanding and safety, while describing recent or current use as preparation for real-life transitions and, eventually, to support others (e.g., Craig et al., 2021).

Conclusion

The present study utilized thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) within a qualitative framework to analyze the retrospective accounts of 25 transgender and gender-diverse youth (TGDY) living in Canada who reported engaging in online spaces during critical phases of their gender identity development. Findings were consistent with previous research which has described the central role of online spaces in the identity development of TGDY. This study extended previous research by applying the function, intention, and intensity framework for interpreting its five themes: (a) *discovery* (b) *identity exploration*, (c) *emotional refuge*, (d) *rehearsal spaces*, and (e) *mentorship and contribution*.

While this study provides valuable insights into the online experiences of TGDY in Canada, several limitations should be noted. The sample was drawn from youth receiving care at an outpatient mental health clinic, many of whom reported some degree of familial support. Therefore, findings may not fully capture the experiences of TGDY who are entirely

disconnected from formal systems of care or who face higher levels of familial rejection. Additionally, this study was led by a clinician involved in the participants' care. This dual role may have introduced unintended bias despite preventative efforts. Finally, this study utilized archival and retrospective data, which may have been subject to recall bias and may not fully capture the evolving nature of the TGDY's experiences over time.

Nonetheless, the implications of the themes discussed in this study are significant. Online communities should be recognized as legitimate and meaningful sites for identity development and mental health support for TGDY. Rather than approaching online engagement with suspicion or concern, caregivers, clinicians, and educators can support TGDY in navigating these spaces safely and constructively. Future research should continue to investigate how TGDY engage with online spaces within specific contexts, such as intersecting racial, cultural, or geographic identities.

Acknowledgements

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Results of a Study on the Relationship Between Gender and Psychological Well-being

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Abstract

In the study of the six factors that determine psychological well-being, 47 participants (40.8%) reported poor psychological well-being. However, 30 people (26%) reported average psychological well-being, and the remaining 38 people (33%) reported good psychological well-being. For Environmental Mastery, 40 people (34.7%) reported poor psychological well-being, while 32 (27.8%) reported average psychological well-being, and the remaining participants experienced good psychological well-being. Regarding Personal Development, 41 people (35.6%) reported poor psychological well-being, with 32 (27.8%) reporting average well-being. In terms of positive Relationships with Others, 52 people (45.2%) reported poor psychological well-being, while 41 (35.6%) reported good psychological well-being. Concerning life Purpose, 56 people (48.7%) reported poor, 19 (16.5%) reported average, and the remaining 40 (34.7%) reported good well-being. For Self-Acceptance, 55 people (47.8%) reported poor, 20 (17.4%) reported average, and 40 (34.8%) reported good well-being. When determining the relationship between psychological well-being factors by gender, men's autonomy is positively related to life purpose, while women's autonomy and environmental control are positively related to self-acceptance. Additionally, environmental control is positively related to life purpose in men, and personal development is positively linked to environmental control. Positive communication indicates a positive relationship with life's purpose, which in turn is positively related to personal development.

Keywords: psychological, well-being, student

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Introduction

Mongolia ranks 96th in the "World Happiness Index" with an average score of 4.9 for the period 2013-2019. Psychological well-being is an important indicator in determining the happiness index. Psychological well-being is a difficult concept to define precisely and even more difficult to measure (Thomas, 2009). There are two traditional approaches to defining psychological well-being. These include concepts such as happiness, high levels of positive affect, low levels of negative affect, and life satisfaction.

American mind researcher Carol Riff's "Soul" legal good nice situation is not directly related to "happiness" but is "a byproduct of a life well lived" (Ryff & Singer, 1998). The theory of "Psychological Well-Being," a concept in positive psychology, is related to quality of life factors. Psychological well-being is the ability to overcome obstacles in life and to demonstrate observable growth and development when achieving goals (Asadi, 2017).

Nowadays, most researchers have come to recognize well-being as a multidimensional construct (Dodge et al., 2012). One of the first classic works on the definition of well-being is Bradburn's study of psychological well-being. His research focused on the distinction between positive and negative affect. According to him, "a person's psychological well-being is proportional to the extent to which positive affect exceeds negative affect. Conversely, if negative affect exceeds positive affect, psychological well-being is lower" (Bradburn, 1969). "Subjective well-being consists of three interrelated factors: life satisfaction, pleasant affect, and unpleasant affect. Affect refers to pleasant and unpleasant moods and emotions, while life satisfaction refers to the cognitive perception of being satisfied with one's life" (Diener & Suh, 1997). Subjective well-being is defined as a person's cognitive evaluation of their own life (Diener et al., 2002).

Mongolia is a country with a relatively young population. As of 2019, about 160,000 students are studying in our country's universities (National Statistical Office of Mongolia, 2020). The rapid changes taking place in the country's society, economy, culture, environment, and information technology sectors are having a strong impact on today's children and youth. As higher education and acquiring a profession have become an indispensable requirement in today's society, many young people are enrolling in universities. As a result, the economic burden of paying university tuition, housing, and other expenses poses a great burden on parents and families, while living independently, studying, developing as individuals, and completing school are major life challenges for students and youth.

In this way, it is no exaggeration to say that the student's learning process is an important life transition period for the family and the individual, and how successful this period is depends on the future of the individual and the family. Often, students are faced with psychological well-being related to studies, finances, daily workload, personal responsibilities, living environment, health, and family issues.

How a graduate student successfully navigates this critical life transition for both the family and the individual can have a profound impact on the future of the individual and the family. During a session on "Mental Health of Graduate Students" at the 2023 American Physiology Summit, many students reported that the challenges they face during their graduate studies are contributing to their mental health crisis.

Our research aimed to determine the psychological well-being of the participants to The study examined whether there are gender differences in psychological well-being, which was categorized into six factors: autonomy, environmental control, personal development, positive relationships with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. In conducting the study, Karol The survey was conducted on students who agreed to participate in the survey, which was developed by Riff and was specifically designed to assess psychological well-being. The survey collected 84 questionnaires in 6 groups.

Objectives

To identify some factors that affect students' psychological well-being.
1. To identify some factors that influence psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental management, personal development, positive relationships with others, life goals, and self-acceptance
2. To determine whether there is a gender relationship in psychological well-being

Methodology

The study was conducted between March 26, 2024, and April 6, 2024, using a specially prepared questionnaire to determine psychological well-being developed by Carol Rieff. The study used a questionnaire consisting of 84 questions in 6 groups and 6 factors: (a) Independence, (b) Environmental Management, (c) Personal Development, (d) Positive Communication, (e) Life Purpose, and (f) Self-Acceptance, and consent was obtained through an informed consent form. Each factor has 14 questions. The questions consist of negative and positive forms. The Independence factor measures decisiveness, independence, and event management. The Environmental Management factor measures the ability to manage and navigate complex situations. The Personal Development factor measures the need to recognize one's own potential. The positive communication factor measures the ability to love, trust, and form close relationships with others. The purpose of life factor measures a person's sense of purpose and direction. Finally, the self-acceptance factor measures a positive attitude toward oneself.

Some factors that affect psychological well-being in students The study examined the relationship between the two and involved 115 students aged 22-24 who participated in the study. The results were analyzed.

Table 1
Age of the Survey Participants

Age	Percentage
22	5.2
23	49.6
24	45.2
Total	100.0

Of the 115 students who participated in the study, 29.6%, or 34, were male, and 70.4%, or 81, were female. The majority were female students, while a small percentage were male students.

The psychological well-being of all study participants was assessed using 6 groups of indicators: Autonomy for men 52 ± 9.3, for women 55.0 ± 9.6, Environmental Mastery for men 54 ± 9.7, for women 55.1 ± 9, Personal development for men 55.2 ± 8.9, for women 57.1 ± 11, Positive relationships for men 57 ± 20.8, for women 54.7 ± 10.2, Life goals 54.8 ± 8.8, for women 54.8 ± 10.5, Self-acceptance for men 53.5 ± 9.1, for women 54.2 ± 9.7. From this, it can be seen that the average of the above indicators is 54.4 ± 11.1 for men and 55.2 ± 10 for women, which means that there is no significant difference in psychological well-being. It can be considered that they are at the same level.

Each of the six psychological well-being factors has 14 questions, and the mean value is between 54.5 and 56.5. The standard deviation is 8.8 and 9.7. The study's minimum value is 14.00, and the maximum is 76.00.

Table 2
Results of Statistical Analysis of the Reliability of Each Factor of "Psychological Well-being"

Factors that contribute to psychological well-being	Reliability	
	Cronbach's alpha	Number of questions
Autonomy	0.903	14
Environmental Mastery	0.900	14
Personal Growth	0.909	14
Positive Relations With Others	0.934	14
Purpose in Life	0.911	14
Self-acceptance	0.904	14

The reliability of each factor of the research method is high for 6 factors (a > 0.6). This means that the results will be the same when the survey is repeated with each factor. Each factor consists of a total of 14 questions, and the total number of questions is 84.

Table 3
The Reliability of Psychological Well-being

Cronbach's alpha	Number of questions
.943	84

However, the 14 questions of each factor can be separated and used separately for other studies. The 84-item "Psychological Well-Being Scale" survey conducted on Mongolian-language graduate students at the Etugen University was 0.943, which is very high. This result indicates that the results meet the requirement of being consistent when the survey is repeated with a total of 84 questionnaires.

Table 4
Relationship Between Psychological Well-being Factors by Gender (Male)

Gender	Indicators		Autonomy	Environmental Mastery	Personal Growth	Positive Relations With Others	Purpose in Life	Self-acceptance
Male	**Autonomy**	Dependence	1	.850 **	.865 **	.631 **	.892 **	.793 **
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	Environmental Mastery	Dependence	.850 **	1	.875 **	.648 **	.901 **	.795 **
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	Personal Growth	Dependence	.865 **	.875 **	1	.666 **	.918 **	.837 **
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	Positive Relations With Others	Dependence	.631 **	.648 **	.666 **	1	.671 **	.471 **
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	Purpose in Life	Dependence	.892 **	.901 **	.918 **	.671 **	1	.860 **
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	Self-acceptance	Dependence	.793 **	.795 **	.837 **	.471 **	.860 **	1
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01

When analyzing the relationship between psychological well-being factors by gender, it was found that autonomy is strongly positively related to life purpose in men. Environmental control is positively related to life purpose. Personal Growth is strongly positively related to environmental control. Positive relationships are positively related to life purpose. Life purpose is positively related to personal development. Self-acceptance is positively related to life purpose.

In conclusion, psychological well-being factors are positively related to life purpose.

Table 5
*Relationship Between Psychological Well-being Factors by Gender (Female)*

Gender	Indicators		Autonomy	Environmental management	Personal development	Positive communi-cation	Life purpose	Self-acceptance
Woman	**Autonomy**	Dependence	1	.786 **	.656 **	.756 **	.671 **	.801 **
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
		Total	33	33	33	33	33	33
	Environmental Mastery	Dependence	.786 **	1	.757 **	.747 **	.701 **	.803 **
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	Personal Growth	Dependence	.656 **	.757 **	1	.642 **	.614 **	.707 **
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	Positive Relations With Others	Dependence	.756 **	.747 **	.642 **	1	.624 **	.838 **
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	Purpose in Life	Dependence	.671 **	.701 **	.614 **	.624 **	1	.615 **
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
	Self-acceptance	Dependence	.801 **	.803 **	.707 **	.838 **	.615 **	1
		P value	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01

When analyzing the relationship between psychological well-being factors by gender, it was found that autonomy and environmental control were strongly positively correlated with self-acceptance in women. Personal development was positively correlated with environmental control. Positive relationships were positively correlated with self-acceptance. Purpose in life

was positively correlated with environmental control. Self-acceptance had a stronger positive correlation with positive relationships.

Figure 1

Level of Psychological Well-being
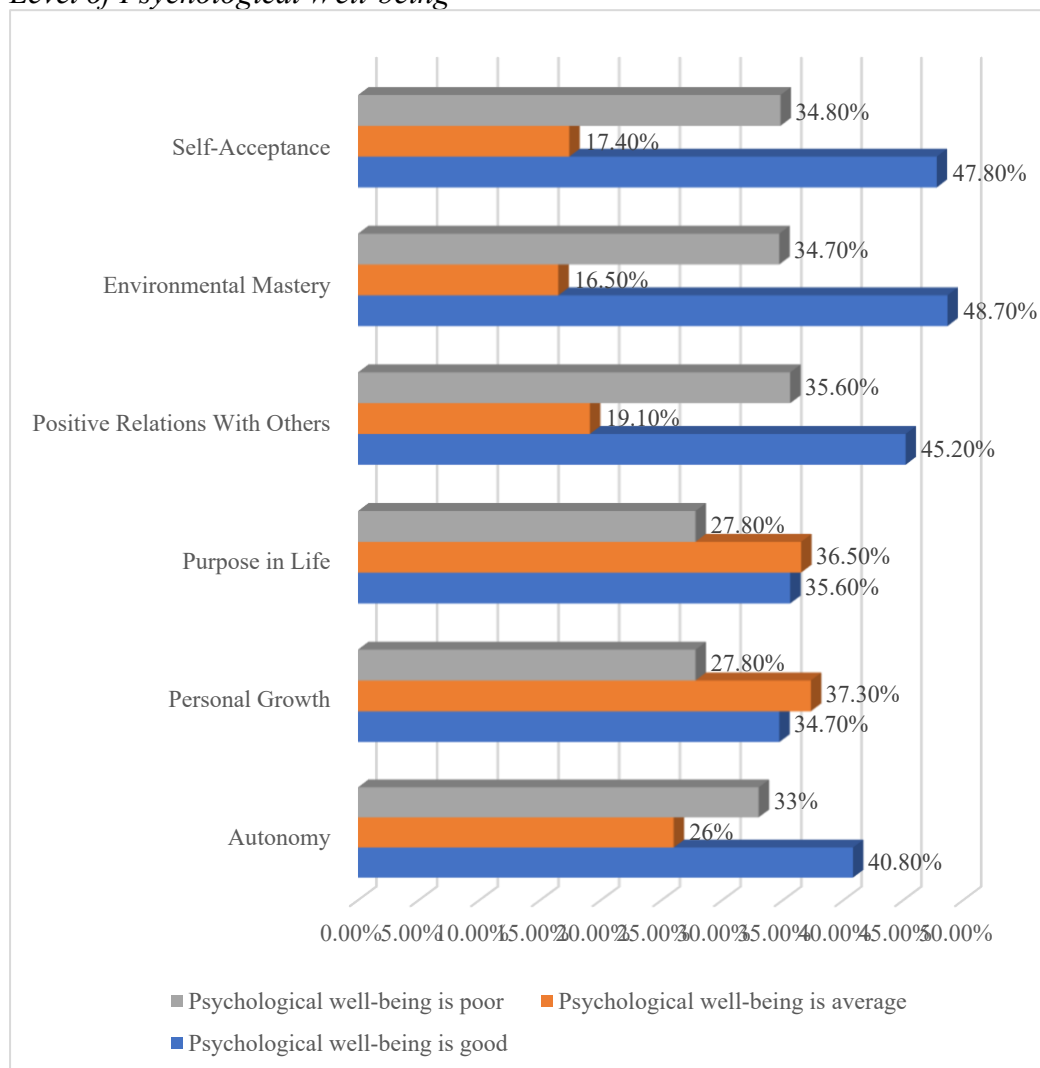
Of the 6 factors that determine psychological well-being, 47 people (40.8%) said that their psychological well-being was poor. However, 30 people (26%) said that their psychological well-being was average, and the remaining 38 people (33%) said that their psychological well-being was good. Environmental Mastery40 people (34.7%) said that their psychological well-being was poor, 43 people (37.3%) said that their psychological well-being was average, and 32 people (27.8%) said that their psychological well-being was good. Personal development 41 people (35.6%) said that their psychological well-being was poor, 42 people (36.5%) said that their psychological well-being was average, and the remaining 32 people (27.8%) said that their psychological well-being was good. Positive relationships with others: 52 people (45.2%) said that their psychological well-being was poor, 22 people (19.1%) said that their psychological well-being was average, and the remaining 41 people (35.6%) said that their psychological well-being was good. Life purpose: 56 people (48.7%) are poor, 19 people (16.5%) are average, and the remaining 40 people (34.7%) are good. Self-acceptance: 55 people (47.8%) are poor, 20 people (17.4%) are average, and 40 people (34.8%) have good psychological well-being.

The results showed that 42.4% of the total survey participants had below-average or poor psychological well-being. 25.4% had average psychological well-being, and the remaining 32.2% had good psychological well-being.

Conclusion

1. When examining the relationship between the six factors of psychological well-being: autonomy, environmental management, personal development, positive relationships with others, life goals, and self-acceptance, all of them are positively correlated. The psychological well-being level of 42.4% of the total graduate students surveyed was below average, which may be due to the stress of studying and the fear of graduation due to final exams and taking a new step in life.
2. There are no significant differences in the gender distribution of psychological well-being.

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Attachment and Adolescents' Mental Health

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Abstract

This study examines the link between attachment styles and mental health outcomes among Iranian adolescents. The research aims to evaluate the relationship between parental attachment and mental health in Iranian adolescents. The research methodology involves a cross-sectional survey of 300 Iranian teenagers aged 14 to 18. Participants completed the adolescent version of the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale and Beck Youth Inventories (BYI), a self-report measure that assesses symptoms of depression, anxiety, anger, disruptive behaviour, and self-concept in adolescents aged 7 to 18 years. The findings indicate that insecure attachment patterns, particularly anxious attachment, are associated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among Iranian adolescents. In contrast, secure attachment is linked to better mental health outcomes, including lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. These findings suggest that the connections between attachment styles and mental health are consistent across cultures, highlighting the universality of attachment theory. The implications of these findings for promoting positive mental health outcomes in Iranian teenagers are also discussed.

Keywords: parental attachment, mental health, adolescents, attachment style questionnaire

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Introduction

Attachment theory, developed by John Bowlby, has been instrumental in understanding the impact of early relationships on individuals' emotional development and mental health outcomes. The quality of attachment formed with primary caregivers during infancy and childhood is believed to shape individuals' internal working models and influence their relationships and psychological well-being throughout life (Bowlby, 1969). While attachment theory has primarily focused on early childhood experiences, research has increasingly recognized the importance of attachment in adolescence and beyond (Allen et al., 2004).

Adolescence is a critical period characterized by significant cognitive, emotional, and social changes, making it a crucial stage for exploring the impact of attachment on mental health outcomes (Allen et al., 2004). Understanding the relationship between attachment styles and mental health during adolescence is essential for promoting positive development and well-being among young individuals. In the context of Iran, a country with its unique cultural norms and values, exploring the association between attachment styles and mental health among adolescents becomes particularly relevant.

Literature Review

Attachment theory posits that individuals develop attachment styles based on their early relationships, which can impact their emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, and mental health outcomes (Bowlby, 1973). The primary attachment styles identified in research are secure, anxious, and avoidant, with each style influencing individuals' responses to stress and emotional challenges (Ainsworth et al., 1978).

Research has consistently shown that secure attachment is associated with positive mental health outcomes, including lower levels of anxiety, depression, and stress (Sroufe, 2005). In contrast, insecure attachment patterns, such as anxious attachment characterized by fears of abandonment and rejection, have been linked to higher levels of psychological distress and emotional instability (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). Additionally, avoidant attachment, marked by emotional distance and a reluctance to seek support, has been associated with difficulties in regulating emotions and forming close relationships (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991).

Studies examining the relationship between attachment styles and mental health outcomes among adolescents have yielded consistent findings across diverse cultural contexts. Research has shown that insecure attachment patterns in adolescence are associated with heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and stress, while secure attachment is linked to better emotional regulation and psychological well-being (Allen et al., 2004). The universality of these findings highlights the relevance of attachment theory in understanding adolescents' mental health across different cultural backgrounds.

In the context of Iran, a collectivistic society with strong family values, attachment dynamics may play a crucial role in shaping adolescents' mental health outcomes. Iranian adolescents' attachment styles, particularly their relationships with parents and caregivers, are likely to influence their emotional well-being and social functioning. Understanding the association between attachment styles and mental health among Iranian teenagers can

provide valuable insights for developing culturally sensitive interventions to support their psychological well-being.

This literature review sets the stage for the present study, which aims to explore the link between attachment styles and mental health outcomes among Iranian adolescents, with a specific focus on parental attachment and its implications for adolescents' well-being.

Methodology

Participants

The study included 300 Iranian adolescents aged 14 to 18, recruited from schools across various regions in Iran. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and their parents or legal guardians before their involvement in the study. The sample size was determined to ensure an adequate representation of Iranian teenagers within the specified age range.

Measures

1. Experiences in Close Relationships Scale – Adolescent Version: Participants completed the adolescent version of the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale, a self-report measure designed to assess attachment styles in adolescents. The scale consists of items that capture individuals' feelings and behaviors in close relationships, allowing for the classification of attachment styles into secure, anxious, and avoidant categories.
2. Beck Youth Inventories (BYI): The Beck Youth Inventories were utilized to evaluate various mental health outcomes in adolescents aged 7 to 18 years. The BYI includes subscales for depression, anxiety, anger, disruptive behavior, and self-concept, providing a comprehensive assessment of adolescents' psychological well-being.

Procedure

Data collection was conducted over a period of two months in collaboration with school authorities and teachers. Participants completed the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale – Adolescent Version and the Beck Youth Inventories in a classroom setting under the supervision of trained researchers. Clear instructions were provided to ensure accurate and consistent responses from all participants.

Data Analysis

Statistical analysis was performed using appropriate software, such as SPSS, to examine the relationship between attachment styles and mental health outcomes among Iranian adolescents. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize participants' demographic characteristics and attachment style distributions. Correlational analyses were conducted to explore the associations between attachment patterns (secure, anxious, avoidant) and mental health indicators (depression, anxiety, anger, disruptive behavior, self-concept). Regression analyses may have been employed to further investigate the predictive power of attachment styles on mental health outcomes, controlling for relevant demographic variables.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge potential limitations of the study, such as the reliance on self-report measures, which may be subject to response bias. The cross-sectional design of the survey limits the ability to establish causal relationships between attachment styles and mental health outcomes. Additionally, the generalizability of the findings may be constrained by the specific sample of Iranian adolescents included in the study. Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs and larger, more diverse samples to enhance the robustness and applicability of the results.

Results

The results of the study revealed significant associations between attachment styles and mental health outcomes among Iranian adolescents. Analysis of the data indicated that insecure attachment patterns, particularly anxious attachment, were correlated with higher levels of depression, anxiety, and stress in the participants. Adolescents who exhibited anxious attachment tendencies reported greater emotional distress and psychological symptoms compared to those with secure attachment styles. Conversely, individuals with secure attachment were found to have lower levels of depression, anxiety, and stress, indicating better mental health outcomes. Specifically, the correlation analyses showed a positive relationship between anxious attachment and symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress, highlighting the detrimental impact of insecure attachment patterns on adolescents' mental well-being. In contrast, secure attachment was negatively correlated with these mental health indicators, suggesting a protective effect against emotional difficulties and psychological distress.

Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of the study underscore the importance of attachment styles in shaping adolescents' mental health outcomes, with implications for intervention and support strategies in promoting positive well-being among Iranian teenagers. The results align with existing literature on attachment theory, emphasizing the significance of secure attachment in fostering emotional resilience and psychological health in adolescence. The observed link between anxious attachment and heightened levels of depression, anxiety, and stress highlights the need for targeted interventions to address insecure attachment patterns among Iranian adolescents. Strategies aimed at enhancing secure attachment relationships between adolescents and their parents or caregivers may prove beneficial in mitigating the negative impact of anxious attachment on mental health outcomes. Furthermore, the universal relevance of attachment theory across cultures was evident in the study's findings, suggesting that the connections between attachment styles and mental health are consistent regardless of cultural background. This underscores the importance of considering attachment dynamics in understanding adolescents' emotional well-being and designing culturally sensitive interventions to support their mental health needs. Moving forward, future research could explore the longitudinal effects of attachment styles on mental health outcomes in Iranian adolescents, allowing for a deeper understanding of the developmental trajectories and long-term implications of attachment patterns. Additionally, intervention studies focusing on promoting secure attachments and enhancing adolescents' emotional regulation skills could be valuable in fostering positive mental health outcomes in this population. Overall, the study contributes to the growing body of literature on attachment theory and mental health in adolescence, emphasizing the critical role of attachment styles in shaping adolescents'

emotional well-being and highlighting avenues for intervention and support to promote positive mental health outcomes among Iranian teenagers.

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