

Exploring Standardized Patients' Perspectives on Working with Medical Students

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Background

Standardized Patients (SPs) play an essential role in every medical school in the United States today. Little is known about the reactions of SPs' to working with medical students. Even less is known about whether or how these interactions impact the SPs. A better understanding of the SP-medical student interaction could be useful for screening SPs, supporting SP professional identity formation, and bridging the SP and medical student cultures.

Purpose

Gain a better understanding of the unique perspective of SPs on working with medical students including the SPs' impact on students and the students' impacts on SPs.

Methods

Two researchers, without evaluative relationships with the SPs, conducted 2 one-hour focus group interviews (n=3;n=9) a semi-structured interview protocol. The focus groups were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Three researchers independently analyzed the transcripts to identify clusters of meaning and codes. Codes were grouped into categories and ultimately themes. Use of consensus and triangulation of researchers, prolonged engagement with the data, and presentation of direct quotes helped ensure credibility of the outcomes of this study. (Fig 1.)

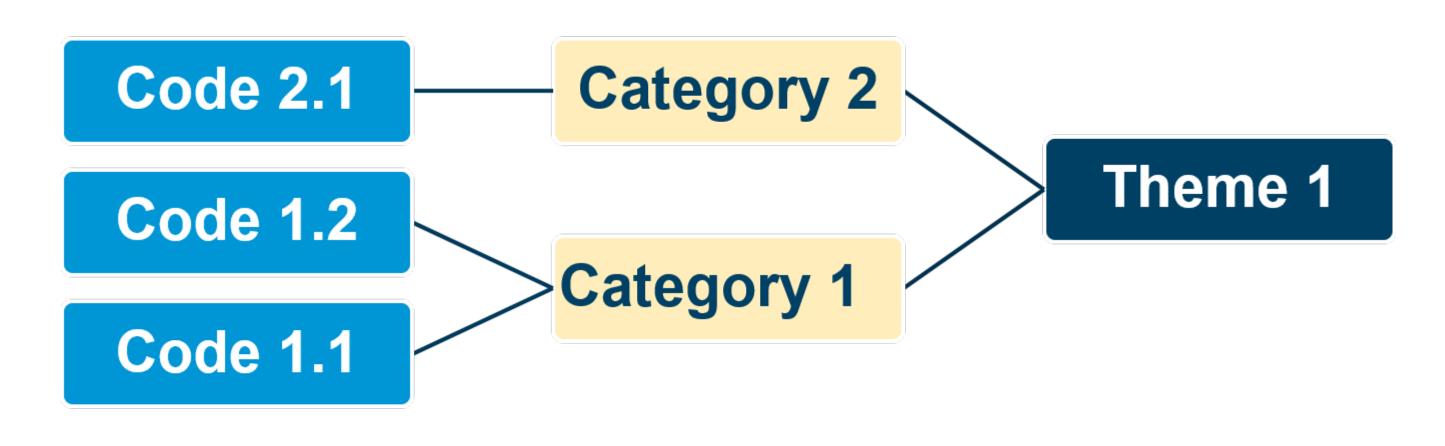


Figure 1: Data Collection Method and Hierarchy

Results

Analysis identified 4 themes:

- 1. SPs experienced a transformation of purpose and emergence of a new professional identity
- 2. SPs discovered personal meaning and benefit in their relationships with students
- 3. SPs shared their reactions to behaviors displayed by various medical students
- 4. SPs described how they moved between their simulated and real selves

Theme 1:
Transformation of purpose and emergence of new professional identity

"as an actor...[I needed]
something that was flexible and
kept me active in being
creative...then it kind of
became something different for
me...something where I
realized what I was doing was
meaningful and not just a gig"

"I was surprised by how much of a teacher you are ... I thought it was very much just going to the be role playing...a lot of the orientation is about giving feedback and I didn't even think we were the ones to give the feedback"

Theme 2:
Discovery of personal meaning and benefit in their relationships with students

"As actors I feel we benefit society indirectly...and [as SPs] this is a way we use our skills very directly to impact another human being becoming a person who is going to help maladies amongst the population."

"I have become a better patient when I actually go to see my doctor."

"Its all this biology, my wife is a biologist so sometimes I go I got this this case ... and she'll start asking me very technical questions...so it's helping my marriage."

Theme 3: Reactions to medical student behaviors

"I gained a new level of respect for them because of how much they know and how much they have to learn and with that respect I have higher standards in terms of what they should know."

"All of a sudden the student just laughs and breaks the scenario ... she goes 'I'm sorry you're really good' ... and laughs 2 more times. At feedback, the student was saying 'I'm sorry, I just know that it's fake so I can't really get into it.' It was upsetting to see her [the SP] being treated like that ... when we put so much of ourselves into it."

Discomfort:

Theme 4:
Moved between their simulated and real selves

"In the final visit I think we were both close to tears like I was grateful to him for the care and compassion that he had shown me."

"There were 3 students in the span of a day that I left ... feeling so empowered as a woman. [One student] said 'I just want to let you know you're in control of the relationship, it's your body and you also have a voice.' She left the room ... I feel so empowered as a woman. If I meet either one of the 3 of you in an office... I will jump for joy because I know that you actually care from start to finish."

Conclusion

- SPs experienced a professional identity formation process as a teacher and guide that paralleled that of students
- SPs began to view themselves as having a direct impact on society rather than an indirect impact as actors
- The SP perspective may help SP educators nurture this process, reinforce job meaningfulness, and increase recruitment and retention
- The SP perspective may be useful for acclimatizing SPs to the simulation process and to medical educators in training students

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