Validation of a motivation survey tool for pharmacy students: Exploring a link to professional identity development

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Introduction: Self-determination theory (SDT), which describes a continuum of motivation regulators, is proposed as an appropriate framework to study pharmacy student motivation. The aim was to develop a Pharmacy Motivation Scale (Pharm-S) to determine motivation regulators in undergraduate students and explore a possible link to professional identity development.

Methods: The Pharm-S was adapted from the SDT-based, Sports Motivation Scale (SMS-II), and administered to undergraduate students in an Australian pharmacy course. Convergent validity was assessed by conducting a correlation analysis between the Pharm-S and MacLeod Clark Professional Identity Scale (MCPIS-9).

Results: Face, content and construct validity were established for the Pharm-S through the analysis of 327 survey responses. Factor analysis extracted four of the six theoretical subscales as proposed by SDT (variance explained: 65.7%). Support for the SDT structure was confirmed by high factor loadings in each of the subscales and acceptable reliability coefficients. Subscale correlations revealed a simplex pattern, supporting the presence of a motivation continuum, as described by SDT. A moderate positive correlation (0.64) between Pharm-S responses and the validated professional identity instrument, MCPIS-9, indicated a possible link between levels of motivation and professional identity.

Discussion: and conclusions: Content and structural validity and internal consistency of the Pharm-S confirmed the reliability of the Pharm-S as a valid tool to assess motivational regulators. Pharm-S and the MCPIS-9 were positively correlated, lending support to a link between motivation and professional identity. This suggests a potential role for the Pharm-S as a valid tool to measure pharmacy student professional identity development.
In their review of professional identity development in higher education, Trede et al. reported a lack of understanding of professional identity formation (PIF) and consequently there were few recommended approaches for facilitating its incorporation into health education. The review also stated that universities needed to consider the role for professional identity development in existing curricula. The American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy Council of Deans (AACP-COD) established the Taskforce on Professional Identity Formation, releasing a definition for PIF in 2014 as being “…the transformative process of identifying and internalizing the ways of being and relating within a professional role.” A professional identity formation task force was established by the University of Texas in 2011, with multiple objectives around the definition, teaching and assessment of professional identity. They identified six domains and 30 sub-domains in their development of a PIF framework. Dall’Alba’s research into the development of the professional, explained that the journey towards becoming a professional is an individual one, with the aim being to develop the ability to “think, act and feel like a professional”. Researchers in medical education in the US have supported this view and stated that a primary goal should be the development of a professional identity. Cruess et al. have proposed a revision of Miller’s pyramid of clinical competence, placing identity at the apex, highlighting the importance of both cognitive and affective development in identity formation. Cruess et al. have also called for research into approaches that gauge professional identity development, alongside the traditional markers for professional conduct.

In the search for an appropriate framework from which to approach professional identity development, this study proposes that self-determination theory (SDT) may serve as a basis for a tool to monitor professional identity development. SDT (an organismic dialectical theory) developed by psychologists Ryan and Deci in the 1980s, is a long established and well regarded theory that has been applied widely in the areas of education, parenting, health care and many other disciplines. It is a theory of human motivation that describes a continuum of six motivation regulators ranging from least motivated (amotivation) to highly motivated (intrinsic motivation). Extrinsic motivation completes the continuum between amotivation and intrinsic motivation and is characterized by regulation which is governed by external factors such as monetary reward or the threat of punishment. In this class the individual identifies with the inherent behaviors and integrates them with their sense of self. Importantly, SDT describes a relationship between motivation for an activity and individual internalization of that activity, or incorporation into one’s sense of self. For example, the transition from amotivation through to intrinsic motivation occurs through a process involving internalization and integration, where the activity or pursuit becomes part of the individual’s identity:

According to SDT, these different motivations reflect differing degrees to which the value and regulation of the requested behavior have been internalized and integrated. Internalization refers to people’s “taking in” a value or regulation, and integration refers to the further transformation of that regulation into their own so that, subsequently, it will emanate from their sense of self.

SDT explains that high levels of motivation are seen in individuals who are supported in three main areas; competence, relatedness, and autonomy. The role of SDT in professional development may be particularly relevant, as the same elements that nurture human motivation, could also be considered as core characteristics of the practicing professional.

A collaboration between the creators of SDT and psychologists in Canada resulted in the development of the sports motivation scale (SMS). This instrument examines motivation regulators present in athletes in various sporting disciplines. It consisted of 18

![Fig. 1. The Self-determination continuum by Deci &Ryan.](image-url)
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