

Students' perspectives on professional identity formation during an undergraduate program in health promotion and prevention in Switzerland

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Background

- The health promotion (HP) community advocates for capacity building and quality assurance of HP (IUHPE, 2021).
- Professional identity (PI) is of great relevance to these goals as persons who strongly identify with their profession better adopt their professional role; raising quality, competence, and common values within a professional group (Evetts, 2011).
- The theoretical framework is based on the Identity-Status-Model and the Social Identity Theory and therefore PI builds on personal and social aspects as well as on behavioral, motivational and cognitive dimensions (Mancini et al., 2015).
- A new undergraduate program in HP and prevention was established in Switzerland (2016) and is the subject of this study.

Research questions

1. How is the PI of HP undergraduate students formed during their undergraduate program?
2. Which promoting and inhibiting factors do the students indicate regarding their PI formation?

Methods

- Longitudinal qualitative study applying focus groups (see Table 1)
- The interview guide was based on the theoretical framework of PI formation
- Audio records were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2012)

Table 1: Sociodemographic data of focus groups participants

Timepoint of data collection	Study cohort (size)	Number of participants per focus group	Gender (female)	Age median (Min-Max)
1st Semester (2016/17)	2016/19 (45)	9	6	24 (21-38)
		11	10	21 (19-30)
		12	11	23 (20-28)
		12	10	23 (20-36)
	2017/20 (35)	5	4	24 (22-29)
6th Semester (2019/20)	2016/19 (41)	8	6	25 (22-29)
		8	7	24 (23-30)
		9	9	24 (22-40)
	2017/20 (28)	10	9	25 (23-31)
		9	8	25 (23-29)
		9	8	25 (22-30)

Results

Complex professional profile of HP practitioners:

- Difficult to capture by students at the beginning of the program
- Majority develop an in depth understanding of it (e.g., core principles of HP such as health equity, empowerment, participation) at the end

Practical experience within work placements helps students to grasp their future professional role

Low publicity of HP in Swiss society hinders PI formation (see Figure 1).

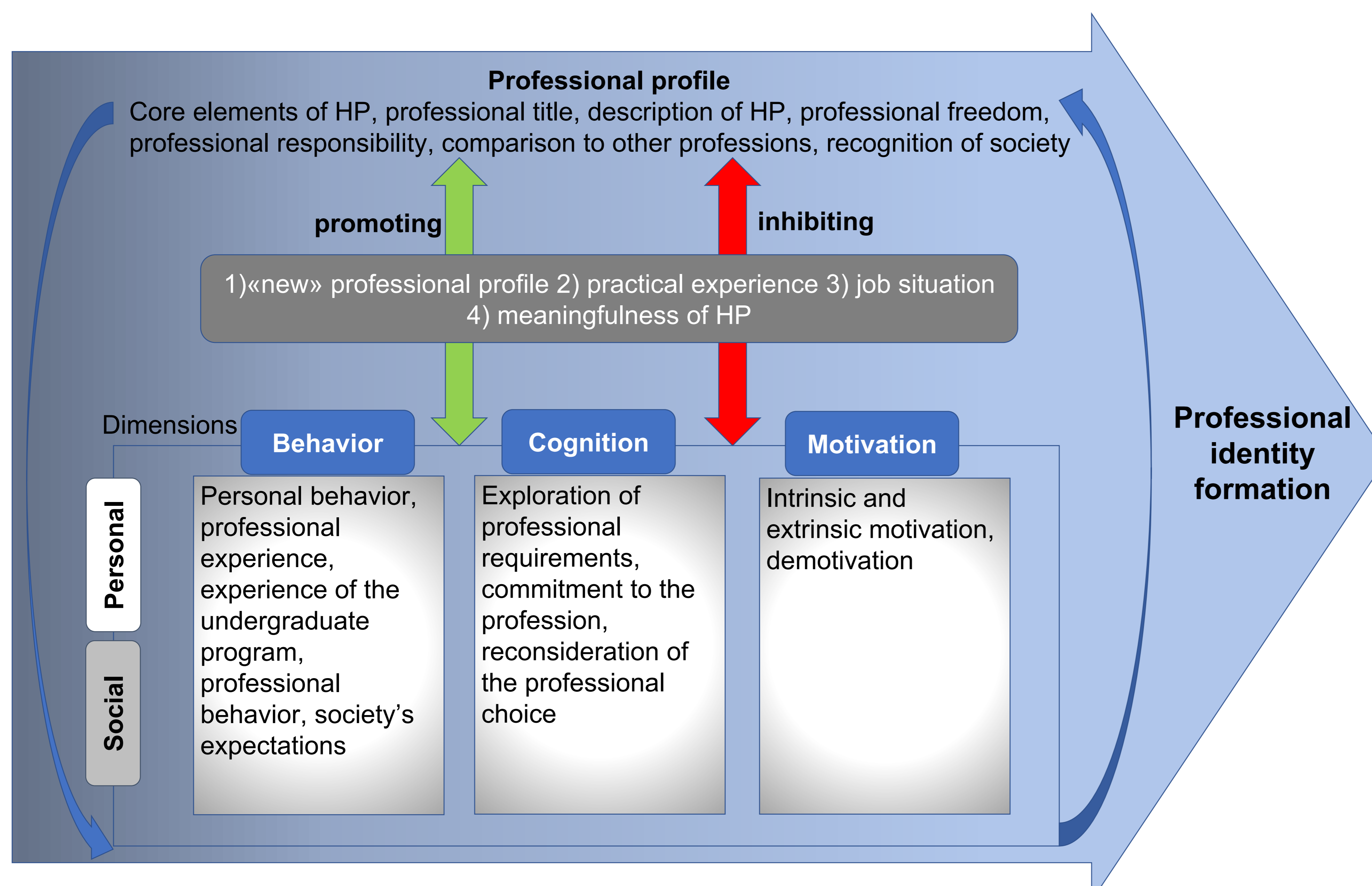


Figure 1: Model of PI formation of undergraduate students in HP in Switzerland

References:

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- Evetts, J. (2011). 'Sociological Analysis of Professionalism: Past, Present and Future', Comparative Sociology, 10(1), pp. 1–37. doi: 10.1163/156913310X522633
- Mancini, T. et al. (2015). 'Personal and social aspects of professional identity.', Journal of Vocational Behavior, 89, pp. 140–150. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2015.06.002.

Discussion

Support PI formation in HP within education:

- Find valid solutions to teach and learn the complexity of the professional profile of HP
- Ensure supervision of practical experience within education to reflect students' roles within HP

Raise visibility and capacity of HP in society:

- Universities must engage in capacity development of HP to ensure employability of graduates
- Specified HP has to be highlighted and not merely mainstreamed within public health and other professions