Validating a Psychology as a Helping Profession Scale

Amy H. Gervasio, Craig A. Wendorf, Natalie F. Yoder, Michelle M. Smith, & Cassandra VanBerkel

University of Wisconsin - Stevens Point
Department of Psychology

ABSTRACT

We developed a Psychology as a Helping Profession (PHP) scale. Two major factors were personal growth/helping skills and helping society; these were only mildly correlated with Friedrich's (1996) Psychology as Science scale. Psychology majors were more likely to endorse psychology as a helping profession and as a science than non-majors. The results of this study can be useful in departmental assessment in order to better serve the needs and interests of students.

METHOD

Participants were 380 students (252 females; 128 males) at a Mid-western public university. The students were enrolled in a range of psychology courses: 189 students enrolled in an introductory psychology course and 191 students enrolled in various upper level psychology courses.

The 15-item PHP (see Table 1) was developed by an expert panel using scales on psychology majors characteristics (e.g. Gallucci, 1997) and popular notions of mental health practice. Utilizing this study can be useful in departmental assessment in order to better serve the needs and interests of students.

INTRODUCTION

Although 76,000 baccalaureate degrees in psychology are awarded every year (Kuther & Morgan, 2007), the reasons for choosing psychology are unclear (Breen & Lindsay 2001). A desire to help others, as opposed to engaging in a scientific enterprise, may be a strong component of students’ motivation for psychology.

Whereas Friedrich (1996) has developed and validated a scale measuring endorsement of Psychology as Science (PAS), there is no equivalent scale measuring endorsement of psychology as a helping profession. Because many students and professionals consider this aspect of psychology important, we sought to develop and validate a Psychology as a Helping Profession (PHP) scale against the PAS.

RESULTS

Principal Components Analysis (with a Promax rotation) of PHP and career items revealed four factors (see Table 1). Factor 1 involved personal growth and helping skills. Factor 2 involved applied work to help society. Factors three and four each had two items reflecting aspects of careers and research aspects of therapy. Factors 1 and 2 were combined to form the PHP because they were conceptually related and together had good internal consistency (Cronbach’s alpha = .820).

A MANOVA indicated significant differences in PAS and PHP scores (which were mildly correlated, $r = .279$) across 4 levels of students (non-majors, those contemplating being majors, general psychology majors, and human services emphasis majors), $F(6,684) = 3.078, p = 006$. Univariate tests are presented in Table 2.
DISCUSSION

Overall, there is a general increase in the endorsement of psychology as a helping profession and as a science as students progress from undeclared to psychology majors. Non-majors endorsed psychology as a science less than all other groups. Psychology majors were more likely to endorse psychology as a helping profession than non-majors.

Contrary to our expectations, the two orientations (PAS and PHP) were not antithetical. In fact, human services emphasis psychology majors showed the highest levels of endorsement of psychology as a science, perhaps because our program emphasizes the importance of utilizing research in refining clinical and counseling practice.

These findings are useful for psychology departments who, as a part of departmental assessment, wish to understand the attitudes of their students. Thus, psychology programs can capitalize on the finding that over time students come to consider psychology a “science of helping.”

REFERENCES


Comments, questions, or inquiries should be directed to:

Amy H. Gervasio
Associate Professor of Psychology
2001 4th Avenue
University of Wisconsin – Stevens Point
Stevens Point, WI, 54481
Email: agervasi@uwsp.edu