

DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES RELATED TO JOB SATISFACTION  
AND DISSATISFACTION AMONG SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN WISCONSIN

By

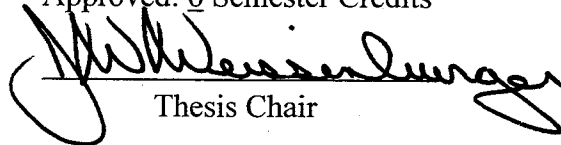
Scott S. Ford

A Research Paper

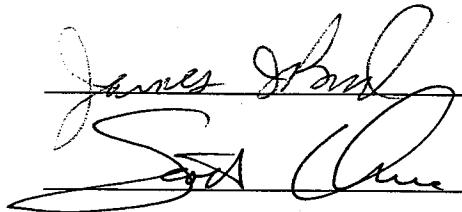
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ABSTRACT

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(Title)			
School Psychology	Jacalyn Weissenburger	December, 2004	62
(Graduate Major)	(Research Advisor)	(Month/Year)	(No. of Pages)
Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Fifth Edition			
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This research project compared four specific demographic or employment variables using a recognized job satisfaction questionnaire to determine any differences in job satisfaction among sample groups of Wisconsin school psychologists. Findings revealed no significant differences in the overall levels of job satisfaction regardless of gender or job characteristics. Some differences, however, were noted for various items of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) according to the variables investigated.

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## Chapter I

### Introduction

Job-related attrition, defined as “leaving a profession before retirement or not entering the profession at all following graduation,” seriously influences the ongoing shortage of practicing school psychologists in the United States (Lund & Reschly, 1998, p. 3). The extent to which attrition is a factor in the current shortage of school psychologists, however, remains unclear (Huebner, 1993).

Statistics indicate that the ongoing deficiency in the present number of school psychologists has created a stronger than usual job market for this particular field of education (Lund & Reschly, 1998). Unfortunately, new personnel can expect a higher than usual backlog of cases due to losses from attrition (Kaplan & Wishner, 1999). Although enrollment and graduate statistics for school psychology programs have remained stable since the late 1980s, increases in student-to-practitioner ratios have increased the demand for personnel in this profession. Thus, new applicants are needed to lessen the immediate caseloads of those currently employed (Lund & Reschly, 1998).

The specifics surrounding the occupational well-being of school psychologists currently employed within the nation’s public school systems are often misunderstood (Mills & Huebner, 1998). The occupation of the school psychologist is often beset by stress and emotional taxation for those involved in this educational career (Sandoval, 1993). Current changes in the profession, including demographic shifts in student populations, changing socioeconomic conditions, state and federal regulations, and various public school reforms have created additional responsibilities and time constraints for school psychologists (Kaplan & Wishner, 1999). These factors, coupled

with the lack of qualified personnel necessary for filling vacant positions paints a troublesome future for the profession of school psychology. However, a better understanding of the factors related to job satisfaction may provide the opportunity to improve the number of qualified school psychologists who remain in the profession.

Lund and Reschly (1998) indicate there likely would be no shortages of school psychologists if the schools employed every graduating student from a school psychology program. This has not been the case. A small percentage of school psychology graduates may choose not to enter the public school system. This is in spite of a significant loss of personnel from the profession anticipated through 2010 and abundant employment opportunities expected in the profession (Lund & Reschly, 1998).

Those candidates who do enter the schools as new practitioners typically display a pattern of job stability for at least five years before such factors as job dissatisfaction or advancement to other positions within education prompt them to pursue employment in other areas (Wilczenski, 1999). This implies that the period between the sixth to tenth year of employment is that most at risk for attrition, though the specific reasons for this remain obscure (Heubner, 1993).

According to Huebner (1993), many departing school psychologists report a lack of proper preparation for the problems they encounter in the profession. Whether or not forewarnings of this possibility prevent potential school psychology graduates from further pursuing practice in the public or private schools is unclear. A better understanding is required of the characteristics associated with individual personalities, and how these characteristics relate to sources of attrition-related stress on the job (Huebner, 1993).

Research examining the factors leading to attrition among school psychologists has been limited (Wilczenski, 1997). Information regarding the current sources of stress for school psychologists could offer new insight for graduate programs attempting to provide sufficient preparation for the occupation (Kaplan & Wishner, 1999). Although numerous stressors have been identified among practitioners, how these stressors affect each individual remains inconclusive (Wilczenski, 1997). To better understand attrition, the specific sources of stress for school psychologists must first be identified (Lund & Reschly, 1998).

Little is understood about environmental factors that may exacerbate the attrition rates of school psychologists in various regions of the country (Lund & Reschly, 1998). For example, previous research has been conducted to explore the possible differences between those working in metropolitan areas versus rural settings (Reschly & Connolly, 1990). According to Reschly and Connolly, a significant drawback to rural practice includes a lack of adequate testing materials and office staff to ease time burdens on rural school psychologists. Other issues in the rural areas include few immediate outlets for professional support, lower salaries, and difficulties dealing with the mistrust that many rural parents have about school psychologists (Reschly & Connolly, 1990).

Most of the schools in the United States have been classified as rural (Reschly & Connolly, 1990). This raises the question of whether or not large numbers of school psychologists who work in these areas are at greater risk for job-related stress and early attrition. Self-reported data taken from school psychologists in different areas of the country continue to generate speculation about the differences in job satisfaction between rural, suburban, and urban school psychologists (Huebner, 1993).

Gender is another factor that may affect job satisfaction statistics in the overall profession. As early as 1995, Wilson and Reschly (1995) reported that the ratio of female to male practitioners had risen significantly since the mid 1970s. Concerns have been expressed that the increasing numbers of women school psychologists may have a negative affect on the level of salary a school psychologist can expect to earn. Thus, the lower salaries may make the profession less appealing to men unless they are seeking doctoral accreditation (Wilson & Reschly, 1995).

Empirical studies conducted by Maslach and Jackson (1998) yielded three important variables related to burnout and eventual attrition among practicing school psychologists. These included emotional exhaustion, an increased sense of depersonalization, and a sense of reduced personal accomplishment. In addition, such factors as differing personality traits, specific working conditions, a lack of proper peer support, limited supervision, and unrealistic expectations by those unfamiliar with the specific purpose of the profession likely have contributed to the early departure of many newly arriving professionals (Kaplan & Wishner, 1999).

Investigating the entrance and exit data for the profession is necessary to determine such factors as employment statistics, the current composition of the profession (e.g., age, ethnicity and experience), district needs, and the quality of service provided to children in particular schools (Wilczenski, 1997). Further, it is imperative to identify the factors leading to poor job performance and attrition in school psychologists before they begin to negatively impact the children these professionals are intended to help (Huebner, 1993).

The purpose of this study is to examine the factors related to attrition and job satisfaction among school psychologists. If the factors can be identified, the needs of the profession may be addressed by implementing new school reforms or by making curricular adjustments within school psychology training programs.

To obtain more information about the factors related to the job satisfaction and attrition rates of school psychologists, a review of the literature and further research is needed. Four research objectives guided this study:

1. To determine whether or not differences exist between levels of job satisfaction by gender among Wisconsin school psychologists.
2. To determine whether or not factors related to job satisfaction differ between urban, suburban and rural school psychologists in Wisconsin.
3. To determine whether or not differences in job satisfaction exist among Wisconsin school psychologists working for a school district and those working as employees of a Cooperative Education Service Agency (CESA).
4. To determine whether job satisfaction is affected by the number of schools or districts that a Wisconsin school psychologist may serve.

#### Definition of Terms

**Burnout:** A term used to describe an emotional state often associated with service occupation personnel in which the individual begins to experience heightened levels of emotional exhaustion, a sense of growing depersonalization and an increased sense of reduced personal accomplishment (Sandoval, 1993).

**Discrete Time Hazard:** A conditioned probability that individuals will leave the profession of school psychology within a certain amount of time provided

their departure has not already occurred (usually most critical between the 6<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> year of employment in the field) (Wilczenski, 1997).

**Job-Related Attrition:** Leaving a profession before retirement or not entering the profession at all following graduation (Lund & Reschly, 1998).

**Job Satisfaction:** An emotional state whereby the individual both enjoys his or her occupation, experiences a sense of self growth and accomplishment in their work, and would choose that occupation again if given the opportunity.

**Job Stressors:** Those variables related to the three aspects of burnout and eventual attrition from the profession.

**Specialist-Level Certification:** A credential given to those who have completed sixty graduate-credit hours of training before beginning practice (Curtis, Walker, Hunley & Baker, 1999).

**Transactional:** A term used to describe attrition as a condition dependent upon both environmental and personal variables (Mills & Huebner, 1998).

**Five-Factor Model:** A model based on five personality styles including (a) neuroticism, (b) extraversion, (c) openness, (d) agreeability, and (e) conscientiousness (McCrae, et al., 1999).

**Interpersonal Skills:** The ability to listen well, participate with others in discussions, convey information effectively and work with others effectively at the individual, group and systems level (Dixon, 2002).

**Bem Sex-Role Inventory (BSRI):** A self-report method designed to measure individual levels of androgyny within an individual (Schuttenger & O'Dell, 1990).

**Self-Directed Search:** A self-report method designed to help individuals select the career environment best suited to their specific type of personality (Schuttenberg & O'Dell, 1990).

**Millon Index of Personality:** A self-report method designed to examine normal behavior based upon individual levels of motivation, different ways of thinking, and interpersonal behaviors (Dixon, 2002).

**Student-to-Practitioner Ratio:** A ratio based on the number of school psychologists to students within a given school or district.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

This literature review will examine past and present sources of research regarding the multiple variables associated with the job satisfaction, stress, and attrition rates of school psychologists. First, the employment statistics and attrition rates of school psychologists will be reviewed. Next, the personal characteristics of school psychologists and their relation to job satisfaction within the profession will be examined. Finally, any environmental factors thought to be related to the job satisfaction of school psychologists will be reviewed.

#### *Employment Statistics*

Significant changes regarding the employment statistics of school psychologists have occurred within the past decade. Because of this rapidly changing climate, the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) established a national database in 1992 to monitor employment trends. Surveys of employment conditions and job satisfaction are now conducted every five years. They involve samples of randomly selected NASP members in various demographic regions of the country (Curtis, Walker, Hunley & Baker, 1999). Although NASP initially surveyed individuals from its own five regions of membership, current surveys are now derived from the nine separate districts organized by the United States Census Bureau (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). The Census Bureau lists these nine regions as : (a) the Northeast Region, (b) the Mid-Atlantic Region, (c) the South Atlantic Region, (d) the East South Central Region, (e) the East North Central Region, (f) the West South Central Region, (g) the West North Central Region, (h) the Mountain Region, and (i) the Pacific Region.

Curtis and his colleagues emphasize that the information gathered from these surveys focus exclusively on NASP members. Since NASP members represent only 70% of all practicing school psychologists, the survey data may not accurately represent the employment characteristics of all school psychologists. This information, however, is invaluable in providing some basis from which to study regional differences that either contribute to the longevity of employment in school psychology or result in early attrition from the profession. The data obtained as a result of the NASP surveys include specific areas of employment and the amount of education achieved by school psychologists. They also report demographic information related to the gender, ethnicity, age, years of experience in the field of school psychology, and any prior experience within other areas of education for the respondents. The work location of practitioners is one specific area of interest (Curtis, et al., 1999).

The most frequently reported area of employment for most school psychologists is in suburban school districts. Urban areas represent the next most commonly reported areas of employment for this profession (Curtis, et al., 1999). Whether this indicates a preference among practitioners to work in more populated areas is unclear. However, statistics indicate that rural school systems serve 25.4 % of the nation's public school students in comparison to 33.5 % of the students being served by school districts located in urban or suburban areas (Sutten, 2002).

Curtis and associates (1999) estimate that greater than 44% of the practicing school psychologists work in suburban school districts, while roughly 30% work in urban school districts. Concerns over excessive student-to-practitioner ratios do not appear to be a factor in the decision to work in suburban, rural or urban districts. A majority of the

smaller districts offer far lower student to practitioner ratios than do their urban and suburban counterparts (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). Therefore, it may be more realistic to suggest that differences in these employment statistics are related to a preference on the part of practitioners to both reside and seek employment in more populated areas.

The dissimilarity of job responsibilities and job satisfaction between those school psychology practitioners who traditionally serve two or more school districts and those who serve as “in house” school psychologists for a single district also has been discussed (Proctor & Steadman, 2003, p. 239). Although formal statistical comparisons of job satisfaction between these two role descriptions have been limited to date, speculation exists to suggest that those practitioners working for a single district as in-house practitioners may experience greater job satisfaction than those practitioners who routinely distribute their time over multiple districts (Proctor & Steadman, 2003). Whether or not practice as an “in house” school psychologist relates to an improved sense of role recognition is unclear.

According to a report by Curtis, et. al., (1999), credentialing requirements represent an aspect of school psychology practice that has changed over the past three decades. A growing number of school psychologists working in the nation’s public schools have obtained specialist-level training. According to Curtis and colleagues, roughly 80% of those surveyed indicated that they had completed programs involving a minimum of sixty graduate hours of credit before entering the field. This represents a remarkable shift from survey results of the early 1970s. According to Curtis, et al., only 4% reported specialist-level training, while 12.7% of school psychologists with less than specialist-level training at the time of job entry continue to practice even though they

have chosen to not complete specialist-level training while employed. Non specialist-level practitioners may instead opt to complete additional credit requirements considered necessary to fulfill district and state continuing education requirements. As Curtis et. al., reported, an estimated 33% of the school psychologists polled during their 1999 survey indicated they completed thirty or more credit hours beyond the master's level through participation in ongoing training while employed.

Though often employed in private practice, or with projects related to research, doctoral-level practitioners also can be found at the public school level. Information gathered from a study conducted by Brown and associates (1998) indicated that doctoral-level practitioners earned in excess of \$10,000.00 more annually than nondoctoral practitioners, though their specific level of job satisfaction was not substantially greater than those of nondoctoral practitioners. In regard to job roles, doctoral-level practitioners reported a greater opportunity for consultation activities with parents and staff with less time spent on the traditional assessment duties conducted by nondoctoral practitioners (Brown et. al., 1998).

Changes in gender dominance within the profession also have been noted from recent statistical information (Curtis, et al., 1999). Once a predominantly male-dominated profession, the majority of school psychology practitioners (roughly 70%) are now women. Furthermore, a 25% increase in the number of female graduates from school psychology programs has occurred since the mid 1970s. At that time, women represented only 40% of the overall population of new graduate students from school psychology programs. Women currently represent roughly 80% of the graduate students in school psychology programs (Reschly, 2000). This increase in the number of women

entering the profession of school psychology may reflect similar increases in the number of women entering select other professions (Curtis, et al., 1999). Regardless, predictions indicate that women will continue to comprise the majority of practicing school psychologists beyond the next decade (Reschly, 2000).

Credentialing differences have also been found between male and female school psychologists. Although women represent the majority of practicing school psychologists at the specialist level, men continue to represent the majority of doctoral-level school psychologists (Curtis, et al., 1999). This trend also is changing, albeit gradually, as women may eventually overtake men in this aspect of the profession as well (Reschly, 2000). Wilson and Reschly (1995) speculate that male school psychologists are more likely to earn doctorates because women find it difficult to pursue higher educational goals due to family obligations. The increasing numbers of women in the profession may also have weakened its overall salary potential, making it less likely for men to pursue school psychology without a doctorate (Wilson & Reschly, 1995).

In contrast to differences by gender, ethnicity represents an employment factor in school psychology that has undergone minimum changes. Despite growing numbers of minority children in American public schools, Euro-American school psychologists continue to dominate the field. This demographic remains unchanged from previous decades despite modest increases in enrollment by minorities in school psychology programs over the past few years (Reschly, 2000).

Minorities continue to comprise only 5.5% of the total number of school psychologists practicing in the United States (Curtis, et al., 1999). Reschly (2000) indicates that only one in ten of these practitioners are African American, and only a

slightly higher percentage of the school psychology populace (1.5%) is of Hispanic heritage. Further, only 10% of the total population of school psychologists, regardless of cultural heritage, is bilingual (Curtis, et al., 1999). The increasing numbers of minority applicants to school psychology programs is encouraging; however, predictions indicate that Euro-American practitioners will continue to represent the school psychologist majority well into the next decade (Reschly, 2000). Some would argue that a persistent lack of cultural awareness issues among school psychologists, despite efforts to create a greater understanding for diversity, will continue to substantiate the need for greater minority representation among school psychologists in the future (Palmer & Hughes, 1991).

According to Curtis et al. (1999), the current median age of practicing school psychologists appeared unrelated to education, gender or ethnicity. The median age of practicing school psychologists seems to have been influenced by the limited entry of new personnel into the profession. The current median age for school psychologists ranges from the early to mid forties, with an estimated 70% of practitioners grouped within this age range (Curtis, et al., 1999). Statistically, the age of school psychologists has steadily increased over the past two decades. Research indicates that those who filled badly needed positions following the development of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in the mid 1970s will soon be leaving the profession, thus increasing the demand for new school psychologists in the near future (Hosp & Reschly, 2002).

The length of service in the profession, as might be expected, also coincides with practitioner age (Curtis, et al., 1999). Among those school psychologists surveyed, roughly one in every three practitioners indicated they had been in the profession greater

than fifteen years. Roughly 14% of the practitioners surveyed reported being in the profession in excess of twenty years. In addition, those entering the field with prior teaching experience and those entering the field without prior experience in schools were approximately even (Curtis, et al., 1999).

### *Attrition*

To improve the quality of employment for school psychologists, variables related to burnout need to be understood. Those variables have been, therefore, most frequent focus of study (Wilczenski, 1997). This possibly relates to the logical assumption that the decision to leave a profession is not spontaneous, but based upon multiple factors over time.

Many appear to presume that burnout always precedes attrition. However, as Wilczenski (1997) stated, retirement is one type of job departure that contributes to the overall attrition rate of school psychologists. Furthermore, retirement can occur after a lifetime of fulfilling employment in the same occupation without job dissatisfaction or burnout. Sandoval (1993) described burnout as a continuous rather than dichotomous variable in that individuals can experience various subjective levels of burnout throughout their careers, and these levels may or may not result in attrition.

Wilczenski (1997) indicated that little or no research has been conducted to shed light on when factors of burnout result in attrition for school psychologists. Lacking a better understanding of attrition and the factors that influence attrition limits the ability to predict which school psychology candidates might be most prone to early departure. Current statistics indicate that the overall attrition rate for practicing school psychologists is 5% annually (Lund & Reschly, 1998). This would seem a modest estimate considering

48% of practitioners in a recent survey reported they planned to leave the profession within five years (Wilczenski, 1997).

In addition to those who decide to leave the profession early, there are those who do not choose to enter the schools or become school psychologists following graduation from school psychology programs. It appears that 10% of specialist-level graduates, and 50% of those with earned doctorates, choose to not seek employment in the schools. Another 10% of the overall population of school psychologists is employed in settings other than the schools (Lund & Reschly, 1998). According to Lund and Reschly (1998), the loss of qualified personnel, combined with the stagnate growth in the number of applicants to school psychology programs since the 1970s, adds to the present concern over attrition in the profession.

Lund and Reschly (1998) suggested that vacant positions for school psychologists are gradually declining nationally. This does not imply that qualified personnel are abundant or readily available where they are needed most. Wilczenski (1997) indicates that most new practitioners choosing to leave the profession often do so early. She cautions about the existence of a “discrete time hazard” referring to a “conditioned probability” that new applicants will leave the profession of school psychology within a specific time period provided their departure has not already occurred (Wilczenski, 1997, p. 7). The assumption here is if new applicants can overcome the adjustment typical during the early years of employment, they will likely remain in the profession (Wilczenski, 1997). Mills and Huebner (1998, p. 105) suggested that attrition is “transactional,” referring to its dependency on both environmental and personal variables.

A similar explanation has been used to describe how different effects of burnout may occur among school psychologists depending upon their particular work environments.

Since it is often difficult to conduct longitudinal studies with school psychologists who remain in and leave the profession, further research continues to be necessary to fully understand the various reasons for departure (Wilczenski, 1997). A lack of significant growth in the number of new applicants to school psychology programs and continued attrition due to increasing practitioner age and job dissatisfaction are expected to exacerbate the problem (Lund & Reschly, 1998).

#### *Personal Characteristics and Job Satisfaction*

Given the increasing concern over practitioner shortages in the profession of school psychology, job satisfaction continues to be of interest to researchers. A child's dependency on the men and women who serve as school psychologists makes it necessary for each practitioner to perform at his or her best. Job dissatisfaction can increase the likelihood that mistakes will result from a lack of interest in the overall work routine (Brown, Hohenshil & Brown, 1998). According to Huebner and Mills (1994), instances of client maltreatment and interpersonal problems with other educators are more frequent among those suffering from job dissatisfaction (Huebner & Mills, 1994).

Job satisfaction among school psychologists remained largely overlooked until 1982. At that time, survey research using the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (Brown, et al., 1998) was given to a national sample of NASP members to investigate employment satisfaction within the profession. Responses by 84% of the surveyed school psychologists indicated that they would choose to remain with the profession for at least another five years. The Brown study also indicated that most respondents maintained a

high level of job satisfaction (Brown, et al., 1998). Brown et al. pointed out, however, that significant changes have occurred in the profession since the early 1980s. They asserted that these changes have exacerbated the dissatisfaction of school psychologists during their early years of employment.

Misconceptions about job expectations may lead to role confusion and job dissatisfaction for new school psychologists. Survey research conducted by Huebner and Mills (1994) suggested that many new practitioners enter the profession of school psychology with the intention of immediately exercising their new skills to the fullest extent possible. They often come to realize that larger than expected caseloads and responsibilities can tax both their time and ability to cope (Huebner & Mills, 1994). New practitioners also may find their skills limited by administrative policies, with neither the added money nor personnel to implement their new ideas (Brown, et al., 1998).

The relation between job satisfaction and the personal characteristics of school psychologists has received attention in previous studies of burnout (Huebner & Mills, 1994). Gender and ethnicity are two of the demographic variables investigated in studies examining job satisfaction and burnout. Personality differences related to age and developmental considerations also have received attention (McCrae & Costa, 1999). However, Huebner and Mills (1994) conceded that research investigating job satisfaction and its relation to the personal characteristics of school psychologists was limited during the early to mid 1990s.

Few statistical differences have been found between male and female school psychologists in their perceptions of job satisfaction. Male and female practitioners were polled in a 1992 survey regarding the influence of gender on the practice of school

psychology (Wilson & Reschly, 1995). Roughly 77% of each gender stated that they were satisfied with their occupational choice. Male respondents indicated slightly higher satisfaction with promotional opportunities, while women reported greater levels of satisfaction with the teaming opportunities of the profession. Both genders indicated a similar desire to conduct fewer assessments in order to create more time for direct intervention with children (Wilson & Reschly, 1995).

A 1994 survey, conducted to reexamine data taken from a national 1984 study on job satisfaction among school psychologists, investigated differences in satisfaction according to age (Anderson, Hohenshil, & Brown, 1984). Age was correlated with job satisfaction among those school psychologists surveyed, with older school psychologists reporting higher levels of job satisfaction (Brown, et al., 1998). Whether or not the job satisfaction endorsed by these particular school psychologists was directly related to their work or to other factors (e.g., establishment of family, location, community involvement outside of work, etc.) was not clarified in this study.

Another issue related to the age of school psychologists is life experience and the environmental influences (global, historical) of different generations. These ecological, historical, and environmental events are believed to influence personality types throughout the lifespan (McRae, et al., 1999). McRae et al. (1999) asserted that important developmental changes occur in the adult personality until the age of thirty. These changes are heavily influenced by sociocultural events. McCrae and his colleagues argued that these events are less influential in changing the personalities of those thirty-one years old and older.

In the McCrae et al. study (1999), respondents of various age levels and from various cultures and various occupations were evaluated using the “Five Factor Model” (p. 467). The five factors were assessed through questionnaire items measuring an individual’s neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness and conscientiousness. Results indicated that older men and women (those above the age of thirty) rated themselves lower in the categories of openness and extroversion, but rated themselves higher in the categories of conscientiousness and agreeability than those below the age of thirty. Those age thirty or below rated themselves higher on the categories of extroversion and openness than did their older counterparts (McRae & Costa, 1999). McRae and Costa’s study may have implications for the field of school psychology, but no definitive research has been conducted to investigate the impact of these developmental factors and life experience on the job satisfaction of school psychologists.

Minimal information is available regarding the job satisfaction of practitioners in school psychology according to ethnicity. It has been speculated that ethnicity may not represent a significant factor in job satisfaction given that intrapersonal factors associated with one’s personality are likely to play a more significant role than those associated with race, gender or age (Sandoval, 1993). However, further investigation into the impact of ethnicity appears warranted.

Characteristics related to different personality types between school psychologists is an area of research gaining more attention. Previous research placed far greater emphasis on environmental issues regarding the profession and the ambiguity of role expectations among school psychologists as factors related to attrition (Huebner & Mills, 1994). Sandoval (1993) suggested that burnout was likely a subjective experience, and

one strongly influenced by differences between the personality types of practitioners (i.e., not just environmental factors). He further suggested that those suffering the effects of burnout and attrition often were those who are highly competitive, highly egocentric, and have lower levels of conscientiousness.

Mills and Huebner (1998) indicated that the personality characteristics of neuroticism and introversion contributed significantly to job dissatisfaction and burnout among school psychologists in their longitudinal study. Those respondents who described themselves as more introverted reported fewer positive life experiences than those who reported higher levels of extroversion (Mills & Huebner, 1998).

Sandoval (1993) suggested that neurotic individuals also reported lower levels of self-esteem and self-confidence. According to this author, neurotic individuals often were uncomfortable in situations requiring them to make important decisions on their own. Thus, neurotic school psychologists may react to stressful situations with overt hostility or by taking an entirely passive stance on issues requiring greater assertiveness (Huebner & Mills, 1994).

According to Sandoval (1993), school psychologists who exhibit greater flexibility in their responses to life stressors are less susceptible to eventual burnout. Research has shown that those considering themselves more extroverted than introverted appear to use a more effective range of coping skills when faced with complex problems (Huebner & Mills, 1994). Extroverted school psychologists also appear to demonstrate greater restraint when angered, and they promote positive thinking when involved in group situations (Mills & Huebner, 1994). Therefore, personality traits may relate to the type of employment one is best suited for as an individual.

Schuttenberg and O'Dell (1990) asserted that educators who most enjoy their jobs are likely those who maintain a general interest in social occupations (e.g., a general enjoyment derived from working with people). This hypothesis was derived in part by the work of John L. Holland, Ph.D. He observed that the most successful career choices are those described as an "extension of one's own personality into his or her career choice" (cited in Schuttenberg & O'Dell, 1990, p. 3).

Matching appropriate personality styles to the profession of school psychology may have merit. Whether or not the traditional graduate applicant interview can provide a sufficient means of identifying suitable personality characteristics is unclear. According to Dixon (2001), those with limited social skills can be overlooked in the application process and go on to receive training in school psychology programs. Although these students may become competent in the technical requirements of the profession, the question remains whether the lack of interpersonal skills will make them ineffective as practitioners and candidates for early job dissatisfaction (Dixon). Sandoval (1993) similarly argued the importance of evaluating personality traits for prospective school psychology students to prevent later employment problems due to limited interpersonal skills.

Dixon (2001) defined interpersonal skills as "the ability to listen well, participate in discussions, convey information, and work together with others at the individual, group and systems level" (p. 3). He suggested that the ability to work effectively with others represents one of the ten "core" values (domains) required in the profession, and one of the four most important to master as early as possible (Dixon, 2001, 3). Graduate-level school psychology trainers may find it difficult to change personality styles

Therefore, identifying those personality characteristics most frequently associated with ineffectiveness and early burnout in the profession is gaining momentum (Dixon, 2001).

Schuttenberg and O'Dell (1990) reported the results of the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1981) and the Self Directed Search (Holland, 1985) in a 1987 survey of teachers, school counselors and administrators. This research evaluated the relations between individual personality characteristics, sex-role perceptions, and job satisfaction among this sample group of educators from Ohio. School psychologists were associated in the article with all "school-counseling professionals" (Schuttenberg & O'Dell, 1990, p. 2). However, whether or not any school psychologists were among those in the counseling segment of the sample is unknown.

Results from the Schuttenberg and O'Dell study indicated that 95% of the educators in the sample derived "moderate to great" satisfaction from their work, with 55% reporting that they were greatly satisfied with their career choice (p. 9). Self-reported evidence of a social vocational orientation was most significant among the school-counseling profession in the sample, with 76% reporting that they derived their greatest job satisfaction from working with others (Schuttenberg & O'Dell, 1990).

Dixon (2001) reported using the Millon Index of Personality Styles (Millon, 1994) in a more recent study of personality characteristics and job satisfaction among school psychologists. This self-report questionnaire was designed to identify the personality characteristics of "normally functioning adults" (Dixon, 2001, p. 6). Dixon reported that his sample group was comprised of sixteen students in a school psychology-training program. This group was given the MIPS as part of a study regarding personality characteristics among its program applicants. The results indicated lower scores for

items associated with the less desirable traits and higher scores for those characteristics the applicants considered more favorable, indicating subjective bias. As a result, all of the applicants used in the sample produced responses indicative of those with personality types well suited for their chosen occupation (Dixon, 2001). Therefore, additional studies using inventories such as the MIPS are warranted.

Whether formal assessment of personality characteristics in school psychology applicants would prove beneficial to school psychology training programs and the overall profession remains unclear. Given the ongoing shortage of applicants at the present time, however, training programs are likely to remain cautious about using any technique that could further jeopardize enrollment figures (Dixon, 2001). Additional studies are needed to examine the relevance of personality characteristics, burnout and competency in the profession.

#### *Environmental Characteristics and Job Satisfaction*

School psychology is not a static occupation. Practitioner responsibilities often differ depending upon their geographic area of employment. These differences often reflect a particular state's policies regarding assessment and placement criteria for special education services. However, licensing and credentialing requirements for school psychologists per state are additional factors related to service, as is the type of training a practitioner received prior to employment. Further, student-to-practitioner ratios vary by region (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). Recent changes in the roles expected of school psychologists also have created ambiguous job responsibilities and time limitations in many districts (Fagan, 2002). These differences can affect the level of job satisfaction

experienced by school psychologists and the likelihood of burnout and possible attrition (Mills & Huebner, 1998).

Student-to-practitioner ratios continue to be an ongoing controversy in the profession of school psychology. Although the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) recommends ratios of not more than one thousand children per practitioner, this is not the case in most school districts (Lund & Reschly, 1998). Figures of greater than 2,000 to 1 are not uncommon. Improvements in student to practitioner ratios have been noted over the past three decades. According to Lund and Reschly (1998), ratios during the mid 1970s averaged 8,100 to 1, whereas student to practitioner averages in 1993 were reduced to 1,875 to 1. Ratios, however, are dependent upon where a practitioner chooses to work (Lund & Reschly, 1998).

Increasing caseloads coupled with backlogs created by attrition and the ongoing lack of new practitioner hiring appear to have created excessive assessment responsibilities for many school psychologists, which may be another factor in early departure (Kaplan & Wishner, 1999). Currently, one half of the average practitioner's time is devoted to special education assessment (Curtis, Hunley & Chesno-Grier, 2002). According to Kaplan and Wishner, job dissatisfaction is further compounded when practitioners are not allowed to implement the quality interventions their particular training may have emphasized due to time constraints and inflexible administrative policies (1999).

Urban versus rural practice may be another factor related to the demographic differences and job satisfaction among school psychologists. Information regarding rural school psychology, however, remains limited. An increased need for qualified rural

practitioners has occurred since the mid 1980s, influencing a growing interest in the level of job satisfaction experienced by rural practitioners in various regions of the country (Reschly & Connolly, 1990). Reschly and Connolly (1990) indicated, in their survey of 605 randomly selected rural school psychologists, that a rural school psychologist's job satisfaction was generally lower than that of urban and suburban school psychologists in similar studies. The reasons for the job dissatisfaction ranged from having less desirable employment conditions (e.g., lack of testing materials and clerical staff, etc.) to limited supervision and lower salaries (Reschly & Connolly, 1990).

Morrisette (1997) asserted that culture shock often compounds the usual problems associated with getting started in a rural school. The culture shock results from being unfamiliar with the aspects associated with rural living. A school psychologist may experience isolation until he or she comes to feel accepted by a smaller, close-knit community. Another challenge of working in a rural setting is the potential difference in the way many rural students and their parents perceive any type of mental health service (e.g., the ethic of keeping emotional problems private and in the home, etc.) (Sutton, 2002).

According to Sutton (2002), many positive features are associated with rural practice for educators such as school psychologists. For example, rural areas can no longer be typified as primarily agricultural economies with lower educational standards. Sutton argues that many rural areas are now appealing to commuters working in larger cities whose education and socioeconomic levels are quite high. In addition, rural areas are often located in close proximity to smaller, nationally recognized colleges. Therefore,

a wider variety of cultural amenities are available to many of these rural community residents (Sutton, 2002).

Sutton (2002) reported other benefits to rural practice that are often overlooked. Rural schools frequently serve as the hub of the community for social functions beyond that of school-related events. In this respect, higher levels of community support can exist for the schools, and rural community officials or organizations often are readily approachable and appear empathetic of concerns related to educational issues and suggestions for improvement (Sutton, 2002). In addition, school psychologists in rural areas often are called upon to fulfill a wide range of services, including counseling. Many of these services may be prohibited in larger school districts with more bureaucratic structures. Rural school psychologists may also participate in more administrative decision-making than their urban counterparts (Reschly & Connolly, 1990).

A survey of school psychologists, conducted by Curtis et al. (2002), indicated that urban practitioners are not necessarily exposed to a greater variety of job responsibilities than rural school psychologists despite the services available in larger school districts. In addition, urban school psychologists may find less parental investment. Urban practitioners may receive less support from teachers and administrators, and they may be less likely than suburban school psychologists to conduct direct interventions with students referred for reasons other than special education placement (Curtis, et al., 2002).

Another concern associated with demographic differences is the school psychologist's training. Graduates from school psychology programs that offer a greater emphasis on counseling and behavioral assessments will likely look for positions that will

provide them with the opportunity to use these skills (Hosp & Reschly, 2002).

Furthermore, Hosp and Reschly (2002) stressed that many school psychology graduates often choose to remain in close proximity to the region where they received their training. Therefore, school systems in a certain region may come to expect that every applicant, regardless of where he or she attended college, will have skills similar to those trained within that region (Hosp & Reschly, 2002).

Salary also is a factor associated with job satisfaction among school psychologists. Lund and Reschly (1998) asserted that 90% of school psychologists are employed by regional agencies supported by state funding. Factors such as student enrollment, the availability of new personnel, general economic cycles, and salaries can vary significantly from region to region (Lund & Reschly, 1998).

Salary is not always related to higher student-to-practitioner ratios. A recent survey of school psychologists working within the nine separate census regions of the nation indicated that school psychologists with the lowest student-to-practitioner ratios received higher salaries (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). Higher salaries are more prevalent in the Northeast and the Mid-Atlantic regions of the country. Regions with the lowest salaries (the East South Central, the South Atlantic, and the West South Central) also reported the highest student-to-practitioner ratios among the nine census regions (Hosp & Reschly, 2002).

Population trends and demographics can play a significant role in the job satisfaction of school psychologists. Schools and regions reporting the greatest number of minority children often place a great deal of assessment responsibility on the school psychologists they hire (Hosp & Reschly, 2002). Assessment responsibilities can result in

limited opportunities for school psychologists to expand their role. Assessment duties may also represent one of the most significant reasons for early burnout and job departure among new school psychologists in these regions (Kaplan & Wishner, 1999).

## CHAPTER III

### *Method*

This chapter will describe the specific methodology used for the current study. A description of the measurement techniques and the sample subjects for the research project will be included.

### *Participants*

The sample group for this research consisted of 190 practicing public school psychologists from across the state of Wisconsin. The participants in the sample were from a list of current practitioners provided upon request by the state's Department of Public Instruction. The selection process involved a systematic process whereby every fifth individual from the list was chosen for the sample group. Following the random selection process, each of the 200 practitioners selected was provided with the necessary instrumentation for the research project by mail with the request that these materials be completed and returned.

Of the 400 questionnaires distributed over a total of four separate mailings, a total of 190 questionnaires were returned to the researcher. This resulted in a return rate for the project of 47.5%. Of the 190 questionnaires returned, 17 respondents did not return the demographic questionnaire along with the return of the MSQ questionnaire.

Demographic information specific to this research sample included the number of practitioners by gender in the sample and the number of sample participants employed in rural, suburban or urban settings. Also specific to the demographic information requested was the number of sample participants working for educational cooperatives and the number of schools each participant serves as part of his or her job role.

Gender composition for the sample consisted of 39% male respondents and 61% female respondents. The overall ethnicity of the sample included 98% Caucasian, less than 2% Hispanic, and less than 1% of those with cultural heritage other than Hispanic or Caucasian, but not specified. In addition to the 17 missing demographic forms, one individual from the 173 respondents did not provide an answer the ethnicity item. This resulted in 9.5% of the sample either intentionally, or inadvertently, not disclosing their cultural heritage. The median age for the sample group was 46 years for the males and 40 years for the females. The median number of years in the profession was slightly greater than 18 years for the males and slightly less than 12 years for the females (see Table 1 in Appendix C).

Each respondent was also asked to indicate the type of school district he or she serves and the number of schools served each week. For the purpose of this research, the school districts were defined as rural, suburban or urban. Twenty-two of the sample respondents either did not answer this question with a single specific answer or did not respond at all. Of the remaining 168 individuals in the sample, 27 males and 46 females reported working in rural school districts. Those working in suburban school districts included 24 male respondents, and 24 female respondents. Those reported as working in urban school district included 18 males and 29 females (see Table 1 in Appendix C). The sample group also was asked to indicate whether or not they worked for an educational cooperative, specifically, one of the twelve CESA district offices, across the state. Seventeen responses to this item were omitted due to the nonreturn of the demographic questionnaires. Of the 173 remaining respondents, only 15 reported working directly for

one of the twelve Wisconsin CESA offices, with the remaining 158 respondents hired directly by the school districts they served (see Table 1 in Appendix C).

Additional data, though not directly related to the research questions in this study, included the level of education achieved among the sample group. Of the 162 respondents completing this question, the majority, (i.e., 106 respondents) had completed a master's degree and 32 additional credits, but had not completed a specialist degree in school psychology. Twenty-nine of the 162 respondents had completed specialist-level training, while 15 respondents had completed their doctorate. Only three respondents indicated that they had only a master's degree without any additional credits attained beyond that level.

#### *Data Collection*

Each respondent received a packet of information. These packets contained two questionnaires, one pertaining to demographic information and the other to specific intrinsic items related to job satisfaction. In addition to the questionnaires, a cover letter was included in the packet to introduce the researcher and to explain the importance of the study being conducted. The cover letter emphasized a guarantee of confidentiality that individual responses to the questionnaires would remain anonymous. A pre-addressed return envelope was provided for mailing materials back to the researcher. The confidentiality of respondent identity was achieved using a coding system whereby each return envelope was stamped Business Reply Mail and preaddressed to the university. The researcher's last name and a coding number also were placed on the upper left-hand corner of the envelope along with a tracking number written on the bottom left corner.

The tracking number provided a means of recording which respondent returned questionnaires.

A total of four mailings were involved with this research. The first mailing involved the initial circulation of 200 questionnaires to the sample group in October of 2003. This initial mailing failed to include the demographic questionnaire prepared by the UW-Stout. A second mailing involved sending the overlooked demographic questionnaires to those who responded to the initial mailing. A letter of explanation was also sent. Due to a lack of sufficient response to the first and second mailings, a third mailing was conducted. This involved the selection of another random group of practitioners from the DPI list, and the mailing of another 200 MSQ questionnaires along with the demographic questionnaires. A fourth mailing later followed the third, and was used to circulate a reminder card to those from the second sample group who failed to respond. This reminder card offered the chance for one respondent to be included on a random drawing for a fifty-dollar gift certificate to Amazon.com.

### *Instrumentation*

The survey research conducted for this study involved two types of questionnaires. A demographic survey prepared by the UW-Stout School Psychology Program was used to gather information pertinent to each respondent. This questionnaire included specific items related to gender, ethnicity, education, number of years in the profession of school psychology, specific job responsibilities, and information related to the location of the respondents employing school or schools. Each respondent was also asked to identify whether he or she worked in multiple districts as an employee of educational cooperative (e.g., one of the 12 Wisconsin CESA offices) or was employed

as an “in house” school psychologist with one particular school district. In addition, the demographic questionnaire asked each respondent to rate the *amount of time* he or she *actually devoted* to certain job-related activities and *would prefer to devote* to the same activities. The activities referred to tasks that a school psychologist might be responsible for during a typical workday.

The Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) also was circulated to the sample group. The University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, designed the MSQ as part of its Work Adjustment Project initiated in 1957 (Bolton, 1986). This project helped bring about the Minnesota Theory of Work Adjustment that proposed the existence of a direct and positive correlation between the subjective “expectations” an employee may have about his or her job role upon entering a profession and the “work attitude” he or she will develop depending upon whether or not such expectations are met (Bolton, 1986, p. 255). The MSQ was designed to measure job satisfaction as it relates to the specific work-related duties of each respondent, and the level of overall satisfaction the respondent experiences from his or her job. Two versions of the instrument have been developed. The long version of the MSQ involves 100 items scored on a five-item Likert scale ranging from very dissatisfied very satisfied. Specific items include questions related to satisfaction with supervision, the differentiation of specific duties on the job, and whether or not a respondent may be achieving a sense of achievement and self-satisfaction from his or her job role. The administration time for the long form is roughly fifteen to twenty minutes. The short form of the MSQ involves 20 items also scored on a five-item Likert scale.

The short form of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ) was circulated to the sample group. The short version was chosen over the longer version of the MSQ due to ease of completion. Overall job satisfaction was then determined by comparing the various duties each respondent might perform during his or her workday and the reported gratification endorsed by the respondent related to these duties.

### *Data Analysis*

The current study addressed four research questions pertaining to job satisfaction or dissatisfaction among Wisconsin school psychologists. Due to the exploratory nature of the research and the descriptive nature of the data involved, a broad probability value of .05 was adopted to determine statistical significance among the data sets. Two types of data analysis were then used to compare information generated by the intrinsic and extrinsic items of the MSQ.

Research questions One and Three compared two variables and used an independent *t* test to determine whether or not any differences were evident at a *p* value of .05. Research questions Two and Four compared three or more variables. The use of an analysis of variance (ANOVA) was adopted to determine whether or not differences existed between these variables at a *p* value of .05.

### *Significance of Research*

Data regarding the various demographic variables among Wisconsin school psychologists that contribute to, or hamper, greater longevity in the profession is limited. Factors such as gender, level of education, and student-to-practitioner ratios have been examined at the national level through samplings of various demographic regions across the United States. These factors, however, remain limited in regard to specific state-by-

state information. Similarly, there is a current deficiency of information to suggest that “in house” school psychologists serving a single school district have greater job satisfaction than those serving two or more districts as employees of an educational cooperative.

Information regarding the effect that various demographic influences have on the longevity of Wisconsin school psychologists can provide updated and useful information for school psychology programs in the training of future practitioners. Such information may also be useful to employers of school psychologists hoping to retain qualified individuals over a longer period of time.

## CHAPTER FOUR

This chapter will discuss the four research questions used in this research. Each question will be introduced along with data addressing the research questions pertaining to job satisfaction among Wisconsin school psychologists.

*Question One*

The first question addressed the effect of gender on job satisfaction among school psychologists in Wisconsin. Findings indicate that female and male school psychologists did not differ significantly in their respective levels of intrinsic ( $t(177) = 1.64, p = .22$ ), extrinsic, ( $t(177) = 0.10, p = .24$ ), or general ( $t(172) = 0.75, p = .59$ ) job satisfaction (see Table 2 in Appendix C).

Individual items of statistical significance from the MSQ indicated that females were more likely to be satisfied with their ability to do things that don't go against their conscience ( $t(182) = 2.51, p = .01$ ) and the chance to do something that makes use of their abilities ( $t(182) = 2.44, p = .02$ ) on the job. Results of the individual responses to the demographic questionnaire also indicated that females are more likely than men to devote additional time to counseling ( $t(162) = 2.19, p = .10$ ). Men, in contrast, were more likely to devote more time to consultation activities ( $t(98) = 2.40, p = .05$ ).

*Question Two*

The second question addressed whether or not job satisfaction differs between Wisconsin school psychologists working in urban versus suburban versus rural school districts. Findings indicate that school psychologists from the research sample did not differ significantly in their levels of intrinsic ( $F(2, 155) = .29, p = .75$ ), extrinsic ( $F(2, 155) = .43, p = .65$ ), and general ( $F(2, 151) = .68, p = .50$ ) job satisfaction depending on

whether they work for an urban, suburban or rural school district (see Table 3 in Appendix C).

A comparison of individual MSQ items between groups indicated that satisfaction with pay in comparison to the amount of work performed differed ( $F(2, 159) = 3.27, p = .04$ ), as was the chance to try one's own method for doing the job ( $F(2, 159) = 3.71, p = .02$ ). Urban practitioners appeared to indicate the greatest level of job satisfaction related to their pay and the amount of work expected for their respective salaries, while rural school psychologists indicated greater levels of job satisfaction related to the chance to try their own method of doing their job. The groups also differed significantly on demographic items pertaining to preferred time spent on paperwork ( $F(2, 156) = 4.07, p = .02$ ) and time devoted to team meetings ( $F(2, 157) = 3.58, p = .03$ ). Suburban school psychologists indicated they preferred to spend more time on paperwork, while rural school psychologists indicated they were more likely to participate in team meetings (see Table 7 in Appendix C).

### *Question Three*

The third research question addressed proposed differences in job satisfaction between school psychologists working for an educational cooperative, such as Wisconsin's twelve CESA offices, and those working as "in house" school psychologists employed by a single school district. Findings indicate that job satisfaction did not differ significantly between the two groups as indicated by extrinsic ( $t(161) = .100, p = .31$ ), intrinsic, ( $t(161) = .228, p = .70$ ), and general ( $t(157) = .131, p = .62$ ) measures of job satisfaction (see Table 4 in Appendix C). A review of individual items from the MSQ

also indicated no statistically significant differences between the two sample groups by item.

#### *Question Four*

The fourth research question addressed differences in job satisfaction as it is affected by the number of schools served during a typical work week. Findings indicated that intrinsic ( $F(3, 154) = .863, p = .46$ ), extrinsic ( $F(3, 154) = 1.65, p = .18$ ), and general ( $F(3, 150) = 1.54, p = .21$ ) measures of job satisfaction did not differ significantly between the groups (see Table 5 in Appendix C).

Significant differences were noted for specific MSQ items between the groups according to the number of schools served. Those working for three or more schools reported lower levels of job satisfaction in their responses to the working conditions ( $F(3, 158) = 2.83, p = .04$ ) and the chance to do different things from time to time ( $F(3, 158) = 3.56, p = .02$ ). Differences between the groups also occurred on items pertaining to time devoted to counseling ( $F(3, 156) = 3.31, p = .02$ ), preferred time spent on consultation ( $F(3, 156) = 3.91, p = .01$ ), and the number of evaluations conducted last year ( $F(3, 158) = 5.98, p = .01$ ). Length of time in their present job also appeared to be a factor affected by the number of schools served ( $F(3, 163) = 3.49, p = .017$ ) (see Table 8 in Appendix C).

## CHAPTER FIVE

### *Discussion*

The primary intent of this research project was to determine whether or not job satisfaction among Wisconsin school psychologists is affected by gender or employment variables. Previous studies have relied upon samplings randomly selected from among the five regions of NASP membership across the United States. These former studies identified numerous factors suspected to contribute to a reduction of job satisfaction; and possibly, early attrition from the profession.

Results of this study reveal that gender and the employment variables investigated did not have an impact on measures of general job satisfaction among the school psychologists participating in the study. Although there were significant score differences noted between the groups on some of the individual items from the MSQ, these items did not impact the overall intrinsic, extrinsic or general levels of job satisfaction endorsed by the participants. More specific findings and their related implications to the practice of school psychology in Wisconsin are addressed in the following sections according to their respective research question.

### *Research Question One: Gender and Job Satisfaction*

The first question addressed the descriptive variable of gender. The question asked whether significant differences in job satisfaction exist between male and female school psychologists in Wisconsin. Consistent with the previous study by Wilson and Reschly (1995), no significant differences in general levels of job satisfaction between the genders were noted in the current study. However, differences according to gender were found on some of the individual MSQ items. Female school psychologists appeared

to be more satisfied with the opportunity to perform job duties consistent with their conscience. Further, the female practitioners appeared to be more satisfied with the way the job gives them the chance to do something that makes use of their abilities.

The demographic data from this study also supports findings from studies conducted by Wilson and Reschly (1995) and Curtis and associates (1999) indicating that a gradual increase in the number of female school psychologists has occurred since the mid 1970s. The majority of the participants in the sample recruited for this project were female. Further, consistent with other studies by Wilson and Reschly (1995) and Brown (1998), the level of education achieved by the male school psychologists was higher than that of the female practitioners. Data from the current study indicated that a greater number of males from the sample (i.e., 13%) had earned doctorates in comparison to the females (i.e., 6%).

#### *Question Two: School Location and Job Satisfaction*

The second question addressed the descriptive variable of school location and whether job satisfaction was affected by employment in rural, suburban or urban schools. Consistent with several previous studies (Curtis, Walker et al., 1999; Kaplan & Wishner, 1999; Reschly & Connolly, 1995), no significant differences in the intrinsic, extrinsic or general levels of job satisfaction were noted regardless of where the practitioners were employed. Significant score differences were noted between the groups on some of the individual items from the MSQ related to specific job duties and the level of satisfaction generated from performing these duties. Consistent with a previous research study (Curtis et al., 2002), school psychologists working in less populated areas (such as rural school locations) appeared to derive greater satisfaction from the chance to be more autonomous

on the job. However, urban school psychologists were more likely to be satisfied with their pay and the amount of work they performed.

*Question Three: Traditional Versus In-house Employment*

The third question addressed job satisfaction between practitioners working as school psychologists employed by the Cooperative Educational Service Agency (CESA) system in Wisconsin and those working as “in house” school psychologists for a particular school district. Interestingly, the percentage of the current study’s sample group indicating employment by seven of the twelve Wisconsin CESA offices across the state was small (i.e., 8%) in comparison to the portion of the sample indicating direct employment by school districts (i.e., 83%).

Results of the current study appear to contradict the findings of a research project conducted by Proctor and Steadman (2003), suggesting that “in house” school psychologists reported a greater level of job satisfaction and perceived themselves as more effective than those serving two or more schools, a typical feature of working for an educational cooperative. In contrast, the current study indicated no significant differences in perceived job satisfaction between the CESA group and those directly employed by their respective school districts.

Dissimilarities also were noted between previous and the current study in regard to specific items. As indicated by the Proctor and Steadman study (2003), opportunities for job diversity, caseload management, integration into school activities, and the familiarity of the school psychologist to the students and staff were endorsed as positive employment features by “in house” school psychologists. Similarly, no statistically

significant differences by item were found between the “in house” school psychologists and those employed by CESA in this research.

*Question Four: Number of Schools Served*

The third question addressed job satisfaction for practitioners working in various numbers of schools. Previous research related to the number of school served each week is limited. However, studies related to student-to-practitioner ratios have been conducted in the past. For example, results of several previous studies (Curtis et. al., 1999; Curtis et. al., 2002; Hosp & Reschly, 2002; Huebner, 1993; Kaplan & Wishner, 1999; Proctor & Steadman, 2003) have investigated job satisfaction as it relates to caseload and the number of students regularly served by a single school psychologist. These studies have generally concluded that a negative correlation exists between higher student-to-practitioner ratios and job satisfaction.

No significant differences in overall job satisfaction were noted in the current study in regard to the number of schools a school psychologist serves each week. An analysis of the extrinsic, intrinsic and overall levels of job satisfaction reported by the four responding groups (those serving one school, two schools, three schools, and four or more schools) resulted in no significant differences between the groups.

Significant group differences occurred on the following MSQ items: working conditions and the chance to do something different from time to time. Interestingly, school psychologists working in a single school did not necessarily indicate higher levels of satisfaction with the working conditions. Results suggested that school psychologists assigned to two or four schools may be more satisfied with the working conditions than those serving one or four buildings. However, school psychologists serving one or two

schools appeared more satisfied with the diversification of their job duties compared to those serving three or more buildings.

### *Limitations*

Several limitations restrict generalizing the results of this study to school psychologists as a whole, and these require further discussion. First, since the research was restricted to school psychologists in Wisconsin, the results may not be generalizable to school psychologists in other states. Another limitation of the study was that 9% of the overall sample did not return their demographic questionnaires. Including this missing data may have altered the overall results of the study. Further, the majority of the sample participants (i.e., 98%) were Caucasian. Thus, the sample responses generated may not be characteristic of nonwhite practitioners. Last, the overall research group was small. Thus, the results make it difficult to conclude with any certainty that the sample group's responses are a valid representation of the job satisfaction experienced by Wisconsin school psychologists as a whole.

Other limitations of the study include using the short form of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire. The longer version utilizes 100 questions involving a similar five-item Likert response format. The greater number of items on the longer version would have added to the validity of the study. Although the MSQ continues to be one of the two job satisfaction questionnaires most widely used for this type of research, the age of the questionnaire is a concern. The date of its initial introduction suggests that the validity studies underlying the MSQ's development may not be generalizable to current work environments. However, ongoing studies concerning its consistency with other facet measures of job satisfaction continue to be favorable.

The 20 items of the MSQ short form, like its longer version, involve facet measures of job satisfaction. Facet measures analyze overall job satisfaction by an individual's responses to the various facets or duties performed on that job and the level of satisfaction derived from these duties. Such measures may not represent global job satisfaction for school psychologists.

### *Implications for Practice*

Three implications for practice appear evident in this research. First, school psychologists appear to be impacted by the number of schools served. This research indicates the number of schools served appears to impact a school psychologist's perceptions related to specific job-related facets, such as working conditions and the chance to do something different from time to time. School administrators need to be mindful of these variables if they seek to retain their school psychologists.

Serving several schools may result in limited exposure to staff and students. Therefore, the school psychologist may not feel a true part of the school district he or she serves, thus impacting the type of service delivery. If school administrators want their school psychologists to perform ongoing tasks such as counseling or consultative services, for example, they may need to consider how the number of schools served may impede the delivery of these activities.

### *Implications for Research*

Results of this study suggest the need for additional research in the area of job satisfaction among school psychologists. First, the questions presented addressed only four demographic factors that may affect job satisfaction among Wisconsin school psychologists. Additional factors, such as the amount of salary per area, chances for

advancement in their particular location, and the availability of adequate clerical services were not specifically measured in the current research project. Thus, other variables may be found that contribute to job satisfaction and attrition in the field.

Second, factors beyond demographics and employment variables also may contribute to job satisfaction as it relates to the practice of school psychology in the state. The prospect of whether or not job satisfaction relates to a particular personality type has been investigated (Sandoval, 1993) and continues to receive attention by other researchers (Dixon, 2001). Since school psychology is a service occupation, the ability to work well with people (especially children) is a consideration that needs to be addressed. For example, those applying to school psychology programs who demonstrate noticeable introversion may not find it comfortable to deal with others on a routine basis as part of their long-term occupational goals.

Third, the ability of a prospective school psychology student to handle adverse situations with people and periodic stress may be a factor in whether or not an individual will eventually leave the profession of school psychology following employment. Like many service professions involving the general public, the ability to work with difficult people is often a necessary skill, and one that may not receive enough attention in graduate programs.

### *Summary*

The purpose of this study was to compare four specific demographic variables with items from a recognized job satisfaction questionnaire in order to determine any differences in job satisfaction among sample groups of Wisconsin school psychologists. These four variables included gender, school location, employing agency, and number of

schools served. Participants included a sample group of 190 school psychologists selected at random from a list of current practitioners provided by the state's Department of Public Instruction. The sample participants completed both a demographic questionnaire and the short form of the Minnesota Satisfaction Questionnaire (MSQ).

Findings revealed no significant differences in the intrinsic, extrinsic or overall levels of job satisfaction regardless of gender or specific school location. Some group differences were noted for various items of the MSQ per demographic or employment variable. However, the item differences did not affect the overall levels of job satisfaction assessed in the research project.

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APPENDIX A

Cover Letter and Informed Consent



APPENDIX B

Follow-Up Post Card

Dear School Psychologist:

A few weeks ago, we wrote to ask you to complete a survey about the job satisfaction of school psychologists. To the best of our knowledge, we have not received a response from you. We realize you may not have had time to complete the survey before now. We would appreciate it if you would take the time today to help us.

While your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, we hope you will choose to participate. By responding to the 10-minute survey, you continue to be eligible for a **\$50.00 gift certificate** from amazon.com. If you choose not to participate, please indicate such on the survey and return it to avoid follow-up requests.

Thank you in advance for your help. Please email us at [weissenburgj@uwstout.edu](mailto:weissenburgj@uwstout.edu) if you need another copy of the survey.

Sincerely,

Jacalyn W. Weissenburger, Ph.D., School Psychology Program Director  
University of Wisconsin-Stout

## APPENDIX C

## Tables

Table 1

Sample Group

	Male	Female
	<i>n</i> = 71	<i>n</i> = 102
Median Yrs as School Psych	18	12
Full Time Employed	88.7%	86.3%
Part Time Employed	11.3%	13.7%
Doctorate Education	12.7%	5.9%
Ed.S. Degree	11.3%	20.6%
30 + Credits beyond Masters	70.4%	65.7%
12 + Credits Beyond Masters	1.4%	6.9%
Masters	2.8%	1.0%
ABD	1.4%	.0%

Table 1 Continued

	Male	Female
	<i>n</i> = 71	<i>n</i> = 102
Working for CESA	8.5%	8.8%
Direct Employment By a District	91.5%	91.2%
Rural Employment	38.0%	45.5%
Suburban Employment	33.8%	23.8%
Urban Employment	25.4%	28.7%
Rural + Suburban Employment Combined	1.4%	2.0%
Combination of Rural, Suburban Urban Employed	1.4%	.0%

Table 2

*Differences by Gender*

Variable	Male <i>n</i> = 71		Female <i>n</i> = 102	
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Intrinsic Job Satisfaction	48.68	6.45	50.10	5.02
Extrinsic Job Satisfaction	20.24	4.43	20.30	3.91
General Job Satisfaction	76.51	10.68	77.65	9.22

Table 3

*Differences by Location*

Variable	Rural <i>n</i> = 73		Suburban <i>n</i> = 48		Urban <i>n</i> = 47	
	M	<i>SD</i>	M	<i>SD</i>	M	<i>SD</i>
Intrinsic Job Satisfaction	50.10	5.16	49.72	6.00	49.70	6.15
Extrinsic Job Satisfaction	20.47	3.96	20.80	3.97	20.00	4.41
General Job Satisfaction	78.14	9.30	78.06	10.00	76.05	10.45

Table 4

*CESA versus In House Employment*

Variable	CESA <i>n</i> = 15		In House <i>n</i> = 158	
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>
Intrinsic Job Satisfaction	49.21	5.12	49.58	5.75
Extrinsic Job Satisfaction	20.20	4.13	20.31	4.12
General Job Satisfaction	76.92	10.04	77.28	9.90

Table 5

*Multiple Schools Served*

Variable	1 School <i>n</i> = 43		2 Schools <i>n</i> = 54		3 Schools <i>n</i> = 35		4+ Schools <i>n</i> = 35	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Intrinsic Job Satisfaction	49.60	6.60	50.38	5.37	48.43	4.87	49.41	4.01
Extrinsic Job Satisfaction	20.50	4.27	21.05	3.44	19.13	4.17	19.95	4.10
General Job Satisfaction	77.00	10.49	79.16	9.04	74.64	9.21	77.27	7.77

Table 6

*Female versus Male School Psychologists*

Variable	Male <i>n</i> = 71		Female <i>n</i> = 102		<i>df</i>	<i>t</i> value
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>		
Time Devoted: Counseling	6.67	7.61	10.05	10.92	162	2.19*
Time Preferred: Consultation	20.27	11.92	16.39	7.04	161	2.61*
Ability to Do Things Not Against Conscience	3.93	.91	4.25	.78	182	2.51*
Chance to Make Use of Abilities	4.10	.89	4.32	.80	182	2.44*

*Note.* Only statistically significant variables listed.

\* $p < .05$ , two tailed. \*\* $p < .01$ , two tailed

Table 7

*Differences by Location*

Variable value	Rural <i>n</i> = 73		Suburban <i>n</i> = 47		Urban <i>n</i> = 48		<i>df</i>	<i>F</i>
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>		
Time Preferred Paperwork	10.65	6.85	12.07	8.31	8.00	5.26	2	4.07*
Time Devoted Team Meetings	17.78	8.37	14.46	6.08	14.80	7.07	2	3.58*
Pay and Amount of Work I Do	3.14	1.12	3.49	1.18	3.65	.99	2	3.28*
Chance to Try My Own Method of Doing the Job	4.38	.64	4.00	.95	4.09	.84	2	3.70*

*Note.* Only statistically significant variables are listed.

\**p* < .05, two tailed. \*\**p* < .01, two tailed.

Table 8

*Differences by Number of Schools*

Variable	1 School <i>n</i> = 43		2 Schools <i>n</i> = 54		3 Schools <i>n</i> = 35		4+ Schools <i>n</i> = 35		<i>df</i>	<i>F</i> value
	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>	Mean	<i>SD</i>		
Working Conditions	3.81	.958	4.11	.61	3.59	1.10	4.03	.83	3	2.83*
Chance to do Diff. Things Time to Time	4.42	.76	4.47	.75	3.91	1.23	4.09	.87	3	3.56*
Length of Time in Present Job	8.30	6.75	8.99	7.44	13.85	10.18	11.37	9.78	3	3.49*
Number of Evals Last Year	48.88	29.23	57.66	28.94	70.66	29.72	75.85	36.56	3	5.98**
Time Devoted To Consultation	11.23	6.62	12.76	8.96	9.55	5.68	7.76	4.38	3	3.91**
Time Devoted to Counseling	12.72	10.67	7.94	8.43	7.36	7.61	6.62	11.59	3	3.31*
Time Devoted To Driving	.60	1.42	1.54	1.90	2.45	3.41	3.21	2.76	3	8.56**

*Note.* Only statistically significant variables are listed.

\**p* < .05, two tailed. \*\**p* < .01, two tailed.