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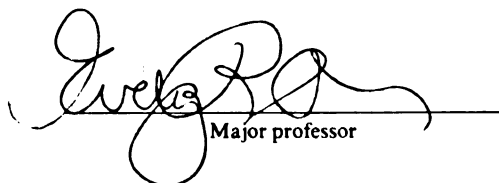
EXPLORING ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF PRACTICE:
LISTENING TO VOICES OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

presented by

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has been accepted towards fulfillment
of the requirements for

Ph.D. degree in School Psychology



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EXPLORING ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF PRACTICE:
LISTENING TO VOICES OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

VOLUME I

By

Nicole Dana Stahl

A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education (CEPSE)

1999

ABSTRACT

EXPLORING ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF PRACTICE: LISTENING TO VOICES OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

By

Nicole Dana Stahl

The purpose of this study was to explore ethical dimensions of school psychology and to address some limitations of our present understanding of school psychologists' ethical concerns and commitments. Historically, the topic of ethics in school psychology has been explored mainly through studies providing objective, quantified descriptors of ethical concerns, with minimal attention given to the active construal of ethical concerns and commitments by individual practitioners. Researchers such as Gilligan (1983) and Lyons (1982) have explored moral development, suggesting the presence of two moral voices—the *ethic of justice* and the *ethic of care*—that characterize people's understandings of moral and ethical concerns. Using the moral voices framework as a starting point for analysis and discussion, the goal of the present study was to provide a qualitative exploration of school psychologists' active constructions of ethical practice. This research was intended to build upon existing knowledge of school psychologists' understandings of ethical concerns and commitments characterizing their role.

The first section of the study, *Understanding the Silence*, outlined the limited manner through which school psychologists' moral concerns have been understood and represented. Socio-historical, systemic and political reasons for these limited perspectives and understandings were explored. Given the recent call for role expansion

and new legislation and socio-political climates, a more comprehensive understanding of ethics in practice is warranted.

The second section, *Breaking the Silence*, provided a thematic representation of the conversations of ten school psychologists who participated in semi-structured interviews. Five themes emerged from the interviews and were described: Ethical commitments reflected in role definitions; intersection of personal and professional commitments; construing ethical conflict as system versus individual tensions; construing ethical practice as a complex web of relationships; and the development and emergence of moral voice.

The third section, *Amplifying the Voices*, provided discussion of the active process that school psychologists engaged in as they construed their ethical commitments. The voice of justice was amplified and the voice of care suppressed in these discussions. Socio-historical, systemic and political reasons for the suppression of care—including financial barriers, role perceptions, justice focus in education, nature of training, and professional survival—were discussed. Results indicated that ethical concerns in school psychology must be contextualized to understand the moral voices that are heard. One place that school psychologists expressed both moral voices most freely was the role of child advocate. Data indicated that a clear justice/care dichotomy of the type described by Gilligan was insufficient for understanding the complex ethical commitments of school psychologists; rather, these concepts must be reconceptualized and situated within the unique contexts where school psychologists practice. Implications for research and practice, including recommendations for encouraging an ethic of care in schools and in school psychology practice, were asserted.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Without the love, prayers and support of many important people in my life, this work would never have been transformed from the thinking stage into written form. First, I thank my family and especially my parents, ***Ken and Gail Stahl***, to whom I am forever grateful for their Christian influence and for instilling within me the belief that nothing worthwhile in life is beyond my grasp. I owe special thanks to my sister, ***Kendra Stahl***, who spent many hours helping me transcribe the interviews, as well as listening to my triumphs and my frustrations. My future husband, ***Matthew McDonald***, provided unconditional support and encouragement through the later stages of this dissertation; I am confident that living through this process has prepared us well for married life!

My dissertation committee members—***Dr. Evelyn Oka*** (Chair), ***Dr. Linda Forrest***, ***Dr. Anna Neumann***, and ***Dr. Steven Weiland***—have spent many hours reading, advising, editing, and challenging me to push my thinking to the next level. For their generous gifts of time and critical reflection, I will forever be grateful.

Dr. Evelyn Oka, my graduate advisor, has in so many ways extended beyond her required role in my training. She has invested in me not only as a student and a school psychologist, but also as a person. With her intellect, integrity and standards of excellence, she has encouraged me to stretch my thinking and to grow as a person and a professional. As teacher, mentor, and friend, she has had a major influence in my life.

It is my ultimate goal that the honor for this work would be given to the ***Lord Jesus Christ***. May every person who reads this work somehow gain a clearer sense of the powerful, loving presence of my Savior, to whom I have dedicated my life and work.

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Chapter 1

Historical Context and Shifting Paradigms

Historically, the field of school psychology has been narrowly defined as the science and practice of assessing and placing students into appropriate educational programs based on standardized tests and other assessment data (Bardon, 1994; Fagan & Wise, 1994). This definition can be traced back to the earliest research investigating the school psychologist's role. Wallin (1914, as cited in Fagan & Wise, 1994) found that practitioners were not well-trained or well-equipped to provide a broad range of psychological services; rather, the role of "psychometrician" was considered appropriate and essential. This limited role has persisted through subsequent decades with school psychologists being largely restricted to the role of a "gatekeeper" of special education whose main function is to "test and place" students (Fagan & Wise, 1994).

Nevertheless, school psychologists across the nation are increasingly being called upon by parents, school professionals and professional organizations to provide a wider range of services and functions (Cummings, 1996; Doll, 1996; Harrison, 1996). This expansion has resulted not only from within the field of school psychology, but also from theoretical, educational, legal, economic and socio-cultural reforms outside the field. First, within the field itself, many school psychologists continue to express the desire to utilize their skills in a broad spectrum of services, rejecting the limitations of traditional roles (Reschly & Wilson, 1995). School psychologists often believe that their broad spectrum of skills, knowledge and expertise are underutilized and even wasted when their functions are strictly limited to testing (Fagan & Wise, 1994). This desire is reflected in

the recent literature of the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) and the American Psychological Association (APA), most of which highlights nontraditional roles of school psychologists.

Second, theoretical perspectives have emerged in related disciplines (e.g., Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994; Henning-Stout, 1994; Munger, 1991) which focus on contextual and systemic influences on learning, development and behavior. Rather than conceptualizing, studying and understanding individuals in isolation, researchers and practitioners now recognize that an individual's development, thoughts, actions, and decisions cannot be understood apart from the dynamic contexts in which he or she functions. For school psychologists, this necessitates broadening their view and practices in assessment and intervention to include the various contexts in which children and families operate.

Third, the role of educational institutions in the lives of today's students and families has undergone significant change, due in part to the changing "face" of today's family. The circumstances facing families today—increasing poverty, dual-working families, single- and step-families—have introduced new and complex issues. Facing this complex web of changes, schools have found it necessary to expand beyond a strictly academic role to address many social, emotional and psychological needs of students (Munger, 1991). "Full-service schools" and collaborative multi-agency treatment approaches where the school is often the "hub" of comprehensive service delivery (Ascher, 1990; Knitzer, 1993) reflect this changing role of educational institutions. As school professionals, school psychologists must seek to establish their role within this newly defined institutional mission, with potential roles including serving as a member of

an interdisciplinary team, acting as coordinator of the cross-agency team, or serving as a university-based consultant (Reeder, Maccow, Shaw, Swerdlik, Horton & Foster, 1997).

Fourth, changes in the laws regulating special education have promoted inclusive education, challenging traditional segregated systems of special education and general education (Vaughn & Schumm, 1995; Yell, 1995). The passing of Public Law 94-142 in 1975 played a major role in the movement to educate children with disabilities in the general education environment in a manner that involves the least amount of restriction (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1994, 1999). Revised legislation, such as *The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments* of 1997 (P.L. 101-476), has mandated extensive parent and family involvement in educational assessment and broader-scale intervention. These reforms have resulted in the need for school psychological services that extend beyond narrow testing roles to include collaborative problem-solving, consultation, and intervention.

Fifth, within the field of mental health services, there is rising consumer awareness and accountability (Keith-Spiegel & Koocher, 1985). For example, it is increasingly common for parent and community advocacy groups to maintain active involvement in school programming and education-related political activities. Compared to the historical autonomy of educational institutions, parents and advocacy groups in today's society are more apt to ensure actively that school psychologists and other educational professionals are providing quality services according to ethical, legislative and educational best practice.

Finally, in the face of limited economic resources leading to financial cutbacks and downsizing, school psychologists find themselves in the position of having to prove

their “indispensability” (Harrison, 1996). To avoid eventual reduction or elimination of their role and to ensure professional survival in an institution where the budget drives many decisions, the school psychologist must be prepared to expand their repertoire of services to meet needs within the system.

Undoubtedly, these changes have significant implications for the roles and functions of school psychologists. As one school psychologist stated regarding the school psychologist’s changing role in the schools, “school psychologists must concern themselves equally with intellectual, social and emotional development if they are to promote health” (Sandoval, 1996, p. 6). As a result, some suggest that school psychologists should be equipped to provide an extensive spectrum of services including individual and group counseling (Pagliocca & Sandoval, 1995; Tharinger & Stafford, 1995), parent and teacher consultation (Newman, 1993; Scholten, 1993), family therapy (Hansen, Green & Kutner, 1989), intervention with at-risk infants (1995), design and implementation of staff inservices (Green, 1995), community intervention and education (Schensul, 1998), and crisis intervention (Poland, Pitcher & Lazarus 1995; Sandoval, 1997).

Despite its appeal, there is some question as to whether this call for role expansion is confined to rhetoric or whether, in fact, the school psychologist’s role will expand beyond the traditional limits. In many ways, the role continues to be narrowly defined and perceived by students, parents, teachers, administrators, and other educational professionals, as well as by many school psychologists (Fagan & Wise, 1994). Empirical data continue to document that school psychologists spend more than half of their time in “traditional sorting activities,” despite their desire to perform a

broad range of functions (Reschly & Wilson, 1992). Nevertheless, despite the resistance of the traditional role to change, the rhetoric of expansion has in itself stimulated a great deal of enthusiasm among practitioners interested in utilizing their clinical skills in a broader way. In light of limited resources facing educational institutions today, many psychologists are embracing this expanded role as a way of making psychologists in the schools “indispensable” (Sandoval, 1996), thereby ensuring the future of their job and profession.

Many school psychologists agree that the expanding roles and functions available to them are exciting and embody the potential for new levels of efficacy in the lives of children and families, as well as greater personal and professional fulfillment for practitioners. However, there are unintended consequences of the proposed call for role expansion: A host of new and complex ethical challenges, responsibilities and conflicts. Rather than being responsible for the professional and ethical demands of the testing role alone, school psychologists increasingly find themselves needing to be aware of and incorporate into their practices a wide array of professional expectations, legislation, and ethical guidelines relating to multiple roles and functions. In the next section, I will articulate these infrequently discussed consequences, with particular emphasis on the implications of role expansion for school psychologists’ ethical responsibilities and obligations.

Framing Ethical Dimensions of Practice

School psychologists' roles have always worked within a network of relationships with others. They work with people in the varied roles of counselor, mentor, teacher, colleague, evaluator and consultant. This is true even when these relationships are based on assessment and testing. Role expansion will likely change both the *range* and the *nature* of relationships in which a school psychologist is involved. Whereas traditional roles may have been limited to assessment, school psychologists will have opportunities to fulfill intervention needs in the lives of children, families, school professionals, and communities (Cummings, 1996; Doll, 1996; Harrison, 1996). They also may be asked to collaborate with agencies outside of the school to design and implement comprehensive, multi-context treatment and intervention. These functions will demand skills, competencies and knowledge that differ from those utilized in an isolated testing role.

With shifting and developing relationships, new and different moral and ethical concerns are likely to emerge. With the increasing demand for varied services, school psychologists may be under pressure to provide a wider range of services than any one person is capable of providing. In the words of one psychologist, "it would probably take a super psychologist--not just a school psychologist--to do all of these things very well" (French, 1996, p. 17). One new ethical challenge might therefore arise if a school psychologist is placed in the position of providing services beyond his or her knowledge and expertise. Another ethical problem that has been aggravated by the changing role is that of clear identification of the client (Hansen, Green & Kutner, 1989): Is the primary client the student, the parent, or the school? What does a psychologist do when the needs

of the parent and child come into conflict with the needs and desires of school professionals? Where and with whom do school psychologists' commitments lie? With the potential for more complex social networks and commitments, psychologists may increasingly find themselves dealing with situations where the needs and demands of various relationships come into conflict, creating new ethical concerns and dilemmas. It may no longer be clear where school psychologists' moral and ethical commitments *should* and *do* lie. Clearly, school psychologists must navigate these shifting relationships and responsibilities to ensure that their services will benefit and not harm the client. Yet, virtually nothing is known about how school psychologists think about ethical concerns in relation to professional practice and roles.

Standards of Practice in School Psychology: Exploring Ethical Resources

In dealing with the ethical demands of their roles, school psychologists have a variety of possible resources available to them. Five of the major resources include ethical codes, graduate-level ethics training, research literature, consultation with colleagues, and relevant laws.

Ethical Codes. Within the field of psychology, professionals typically agree that the responsibility for professional ethical conduct rests with the individual practitioner (Eberlein, 1987, as cited in Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1999). Given that this responsibility lies with practitioners, the primary purpose of ethical codes is to outline professionals' obligations for protecting the public (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1999).

Practitioners typically adhere to ethical guidelines for the profession, such as the *Principles for Professional Ethics*, first adopted in 1974 and revised in 1984, 1992 and 1997, and the *Standards for the Provision of School Psychological Services*, developed by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 1974, 1984, 1992 & 1997). The NASP ethical guidelines address the following areas: Professional competence and training; maintaining competence; professional relationships and responsibilities to students, parents, school, community, related professions and other school psychologists; advocacy of the rights and welfare of the student/client; professional responsibilities in assessment and intervention; use of materials and technology; school-based research and evaluation; reporting data and conferencing results; and professional responsibilities in private practice settings (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1999).

In addition to the NASP ethical guidelines, doctoral-level school psychologists also abide by the ethical standards outlined in the *Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* (1992). The current version was preceded by the APA's *Ethical Standards of Psychologists*, first adopted in 1952 and revised eight times between 1958 and 1990. In addition to addressing concerns that may be specific to schools, the APA guidelines were developed for psychologists with training in diverse specialties who work in multiple settings (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1998). This differs from the NASP guidelines, which were designed specifically for school psychologists employed in public schools or in private practice settings (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1999). Both the NASP and APA guidelines provide general ethical principles--"aspirational goals to guide psychologists toward the highest ideals of psychology" (APA, 1992, Introduction)-and ethical standards--"enforceable rules for conduct as psychologists" (APA, 1992,

Introduction).

Additionally, both NASP and the APA provide standards for the delivery of school psychological services (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1998). Jacob-Timm and Hartshorne (1998) also noted that school psychologists should be familiar with the *Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing*, a document presented by a joint committee of the American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education (1985). This document provides guidelines for evaluating the technical psychometric features of tests and assessment processes. Additionally, a new edition of this set of standards has been approved by all three professional organizations in 1999 and will be published soon (Forrest, 1999). Finally, a third set of guidelines, focused solely on the practice of school psychology, has been developed by the International School Psychology Association (Oakland, Goldman & Bischoff, 1997). These three sets of standards, designed to provide guidance necessary to support ethical conduct in practice, represent valuable resources for school psychologists as they face the ethical challenges of daily practice.

Despite the availability of formal guidelines to support ethical reasoning and decision-making in psychological practice, these guides are insufficient, by their very nature, to provide concrete answers for every possible dilemma (Kitchener, 1984). On their face, ethical guidelines appear to provide a clear order and direction regarding how an ethical dilemma should be approached and resolved. Formal ethical guidelines are intended to provide a common standard of behavior that guides professionals in their daily work, in addition to containing aspirational levels of ethical behavior toward which the professional should strive (Meara, Schmidt & Day, 1996). However, in reality,

ethical guidelines possess inherent contradictions and gaps that can and often do result in ambiguity and even frustration for the professional who is faced with an ethical situation (Bersoff & Koeppel, 1993; Haas & Malouf, 1989). A written document, crafted by human hands and minds, could not possibly anticipate and address adequately the precise nature and circumstance of every possible ethical conflict. After all, “in many situations, more than one course of action is acceptable. In some situations, no course of action is completely satisfactory” (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1998, p. 5). Clearly, despite the availability of multiple sets of ethical guidelines, a school psychologist’s ethical conduct is comprised of much more than adherence to formal written guidelines.

Training. Graduate-level ethics training represents a second major resource available to school psychologists. This training often consists of both *classroom-based activities*, such as analyzing case incidents, role-playing difficult situations, and reviewing ethical codes, and *field-based activities*, centered on reasoning through actual ethical dilemmas under the supervision of certified school psychologists. Many researchers have suggested that ethical thinking and problem solving skills must be explicitly taught in graduate training programs (Bersoff, 1996; Haas, Malouf & Mayerson, 1986). Further, ethical education should be part of a “planned, multi-level approach that includes formal coursework along with supervised discussion of ethical issues in practica and internship settings” (Fine & Ulrich, 1988; Kitchener, 1986; as cited in Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1994). This training provides a crucial foundation from which school psychologists can draw as they begin and develop in their professional practice. Recognizing the essential nature of this resource, both the National Association

of School Psychologists and the American Psychological Association require formal graduate-level coursework in ethics as well as a field-based internship.

Historical approaches to teaching ethics were unsystematic, relying heavily on the supervised practices and internships. The effectiveness of these graduate-level university training practices in ethics has been brought into question (Nagle, 1987), backed by arguments of the need for explicit, systematic teaching of professional ethics. Part of the problem lies in the limited empirical data regarding the effectiveness of formal ethics training (Welfel, 1992). Several researchers (i.e., Nagle, 1987; Welfel, 1992) have argued for additional research to investigate methods of ethics training and their effectiveness in supporting ethical conduct. Researchers and practitioners agree that psychologists' formal preparedness in ethics and the inherent inadequacy of the codified resources available to them may not be sufficient to support ethical thinking and to guide the navigation of the complex ethical dimensions of practice. Neukrug and colleagues (1996), in their discussion of counselors' ethical decision-making, observed that, "perhaps ethical decision-making is a much more complex process than one might think, for the way a counselor selects and employs codes....surely must be inflected by all of the intrapsychic and environmental processes that are characteristic of a counselor's world" (p. 102). The definition of ethical conduct is not restricted to ethical codes but involves careful, reasoned decisions based on codes and standards, reasoning processes, and personal factors (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1999). In sum, it is clear that the ethical concerns inherent in the practice of school psychology are far more complex and multifaceted than can be represented or embodied in a formal code, model or training program.

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Research Literature. As will be discussed in a later section of this proposal, empirical research on the ethical facets of school psychology is extremely limited. Nevertheless, there is a substantial body of work in the fields of clinical psychology and counseling psychology that can provide direction to school practitioners as they face ethical situations and attempt to determine best practice. The school psychology literature addresses a broad spectrum of topics. To illustrate, the following list includes only a sampling of the topics addressed within the school psychology literature with the past five years: Multicultural assessment and intervention (Baker & Good, 1995; Reid, 1995), temperament (Carey, 1998; Rothbart & Jones, 1998; Teglasi, 1998), mental health problem prevention (Eidle, Truscott, Meyers & Boyd, 1998), interventions for students with learning problems (Fleischner & Manheimer, 1997; Skinner & Berninger, 1997; Skinner, Logan, Robinson & Robinson, 1997) and behavioral problems (Stage & Quiroz, 1997), consultation (Erchul, Covington, Hughes & Meyers, 1995; Gutkin, 1993; Sheridan & Steck, 1995), use of computer technology in classrooms (McCullough, 1995), suicide assessment and intervention (Reynolds & Mazza, 1999), risk assessment (Stoiber & Kalafat, 1998), and community violence prevention (Schensul, 1998).

Nevertheless, compared to the breadth of topics addressed in school psychology literature, research that overtly addresses the ethical facets of practice are limited. Abeles (1992) addressed ethical responsibilities involved when parents request that psychologists disclose test items, a situation commonly encountered by school psychologists. While he was not limiting his discussion to school psychologists, he described this ethical dilemma that commonly occurs in assessment practice. Another issue addressed in the literature has involved balancing professional intervention against a child's autonomy or freedom

of choice (Barnett, 1987). In this discussion, Barnett asserted that school psychology training programs needed to emphasize the discussion and consideration of children's rights. Further, he argued that programs also needed to devote more time and attention to addressing the ethical concerns and issues in practice.

In his discussion of school psychologists' participation in psychopharmacological interventions with children, DeMers (1994) suggested that this expanded role would raise ethical issues including record keeping, training for competent practice, confidentiality, relationships with physicians and other professionals, and welfare of the client. He raises concern about the potential negative consequences of advocating for this expanded role, particularly given historical efforts of school psychologists to differentiate their specialty and to establish themselves as legitimate psychological professionals.

Jacob-Timm is one of the main researchers who has addressed ethical issues in school psychology in both research and practice. In one article (Jacob-Timm, 1996), she addresses the controversial use of aversive behavioral techniques with students having autism, suggesting that this intervention is associated with several ethical issues such as students' rights to treatment, school psychologists' ethical obligation to *beneficence* (responsible caring) in their work with clients, and the obligation of helping professionals to respect the dignity of all human beings. Also relevant to this issue are the ethical principles of respecting client and self-determination. In examinations of the ethical issues surrounding computer-assisted assessment (Jacob & Brantley, 1987, 1989; Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1999), Jacob-Timm and colleagues raised concerns about the validity of computer-assisted assessment, the interpretation of computer-based test results, the storage of data, and the computer-generation of written reports. Others have

examined administrative pressures to act unethically and the consequences of this type of pressure for practicing school psychologists (Jann & Hyman, 1991; Jann, Hyman & Reinhardt, 1992).

Most recently, Jacob-Timm (1999) conducted a survey of practicing school psychologist to identify the frequency of ethical conflict and the types of ethical problems, what she terms ethical “tugs,” that they encounter in practice. Results indicated that the most common ethical tugs were present in situations involving competing ethical principles, conflicts between ethics and legal mandates, dual roles of school employee and pupil advocate, conflicting interests of multiple clients, and poor educational practices. In short, while there is some literature that addresses ethical issues in school psychology practice, it is limited relative to the spectrum of areas in which the school psychologist is expected to have knowledge and expertise.

Peer Consultation. Another resource available to school psychologists as they encounter and reason through ethical concerns is their professional colleagues. As members of multi-disciplinary teams, school psychologists typically have several potential consultants available to them (Maher & Pfeiffer, 1983; Shaw & Swerdick, 1995). School psychologists may consult with other school psychologists to evaluate and reason through ethically and legally challenging situations. Also, as members of multi-disciplinary teams, school psychologists may consult with other professionals whose training may be slightly different and who may be able to offer a different perspective. Both within-discipline and cross-disciplinary consultation are resources that are critical to ethical practice.

Legal Guidelines. Ethical standards are often equated with legal mandates. Yet, legal and ethical resources sometimes present conflicting guidance, leaving the professional to decide the appropriate course of action. Nevertheless, laws and legal guidance can be an important source of information in light of ethical conflicts in educational practice. School psychologists have access to a large body of laws and legal precedents that can assist them as they deal with ethical issues in practice. This is particularly true given the multiplicity of laws that regulate education, especially in regard to special education. Three basic sources of law include the United States Constitution, statutes and regulations, and case law. The Constitution has established the foundation for many decisions related to public school education, including children's right to equal educational opportunities, student rights in the school setting, due process rights, privacy rights, and church-state-school relationships (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1998). Second, statutory law and regulations have had a strong influence on public school education, particularly in two areas: Funding of programs and anti-discrimination legislation. Examples of statutes include the *Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990* (ADA, P.L. 101-336), legislation regarding nondiscrimination on the basis of disability; the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 1990* (P.L. 101-476), a series of federal statutes that were amended in 1997 and that address the education of children with handicaps; the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974* (a part of P.L. 89-750), a statute designed to ensure schools' adherence to strict confidential record-keeping practices; and *The Rehabilitation Act of 1973* (P.L. 93-112; regulations implementing Section 504 appear at 34 C.F.R., Part 104, 1996), civil rights legislation

that prohibits state and school officials from discriminating on the basis of race, color, nationality, sex, or handicapping condition.

Finally, the third source of legal authority consists of case law, laws that emerge from court decisions. Examples of cases with implications for school psychologists include *Larry P. v. Riles* (1984), a case related to whether intelligence tests are racially and culturally biased; *Board of Education v. Rowley* (1982), a suit addressing what it means to provide an “appropriate” public education; and *Board of Education, Sacramento City Unified School District vs. Holland* (1992; on appeal, *Sacramento City School District vs. Rachel H.*, 1994), a case addressing inclusion and placement in the least restrictive environment (Rothstein, 1995). Clearly, school psychological practice involves a complex legal dimension that must be considered in making sound ethical decisions.

The recent passage of the IDEA Amendments of 1997 (PL 105-17) represents a powerful influence on the future of special education and of school psychological services. Major changes in this new legislation consist of the increased participation of parents and students in every aspect of special education, decreased regulation of the nature and extensiveness of three-year re-evaluations, and stricter regulations for dealing with disability-related behavior problems and resulting school suspensions and expulsions. These legal changes will affect the nature of the school psychologists’ role and will introduce new ethical challenges to educational professionals. For example, the greater involvement of parents in all facets of the evaluation process will increase the potential for conflicting opinions between parents, teachers, and administration. School psychologists, who work closely with all these individuals, will be challenged to assist in

resolving these differences in the best interest of children.

Defining Ethics and Morality

Prior to investigating empirically *ethics* and *morals* in the professional practice of school psychology, the definitions of these complex terms must be explored. Within the literature, there is little agreement on the distinct definitions of these terms, how they relate to one another, and how they translate into everyday concerns. Nevertheless, because this study is focused on professional ethics, it is necessary to articulate briefly the controversy and to explicate my present use of these terms. In this way, readers of this research will understand the ways that I used the terms as I designed and conducted the study and as I interpreted results. Clear definition of these terms as I have used them is necessary to facilitate the contextualization of the results of this study within the body of existing research on ethics and morals.

The task of clearly defining and distinguishing the concepts of *morality* and *ethics* is a complex one that has occupied philosophers, scholars and practitioners throughout history. Often, these words are used interchangeably. This is evident, for example, in the manner that Carol Gilligan terms the *ethic of care* as a *moral voice*, neglecting to make a clear distinction between these two concepts. However, although these terms are inherently related, many argue that there are important distinctions to be made. According to Martin (1995), *ethics* is the “philosophical study of moral values” involving four important components: 1) Clarification of important moral ideas and issues; 2) Critical assessment of moral claims, 3) Development of a comprehensive vision of moral

concerns and how they relate to our everyday lives; and 4) Moral guidance about what we should aspire to be, how we should relate to people and how we should seek to meet these goals (pp. 7-8).

Morality, according to others, is concerned with perspectives of right and proper conduct (Meara, Schmidt & Day, 1996). Addressing morality, Socrates stated, “We are addressing no small matter, but how we ought to live” (as cited by Rachels, 1993, p. 1). According to Rachels (1993), the minimum conception of morality is “the effort to guide one’s conduct by reason—that is, to do what there are the best reasons for doing—while giving equal weight to the interests of each individual who will be affected by one’s conduct” (p. 13). *Morals* are sometimes viewed as “more important, fundamental, universal, rational and objective” (Solomon, 1984, p. 6-7, as cited in Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1994, p. 2).

When ethical principles are applied to life contexts and relationships, the term *applied ethics* is frequently utilized. Martin (1995) defines applied ethics as “the activity of clarifying, organizing, and occasionally refining moral ideas with the goal of enriching moral experience and judgement” (p. 8). More specifically, when speaking of moral and ethical concerns in relation to a professional context, the term *applied professional ethics* is often employed. Applied professional ethics in the field of school psychology have been defined as “the application of broad ethical principles and specific rules to the problems that arise in professional practice....a combination of ethical principles and rules, ranging from more basic rules to rules of professional etiquette, that guide the conduct of the practitioner in his or her professional interactions with others” (Jacob-Timm & Hartshorne, 1999, p. 2).

When considering this debate over definitions, the context within which ethics are being examined must be considered. School psychologists are uniquely positioned within the school system as they face ethical challenges. Thus, their ethical thinking and action must not be conceptualized as isolated from their context; rather, focus must rest on “the process by which a moral agent determines how most effectively to instantiate a particular virtue within the confines of the current unique circumstances” (Punzo, 1996, p. 10). The major question, in Punzo’s words, should be the following: “How are moral actions tailored to the changing complexities of social reality?” (1996, p. 10). To maintain this focus, the emphasis in the present study will be placed upon how ethics are applied in professional practice of school psychology. In the present research, I will not make a sharp distinction between *ethics* and *morality*, and subjects will be allowed to use these terms interchangeably.

Another important definitional concern that must be addressed is that of the nature of professional ethics. Often, discussions of ethics are limited to discussion of conflict; however, this rests on the assumption that ethics involves inherent conflict and only applies when disagreement or problems arise. The emphasis in the present study is to understand participants’ thinking about and handling of ethical *issues* and is not limited to the examination of ethical *conflict*. Arguably, ethics are integrally intertwined in every decision, thought and action in a human being’s personal and professional life. Thus, every conceivable thought and action made by people has inherent ethical and moral dimensions. Yet, it is often only when ethical dilemmas arise that the question of “What is ethical and what it not?” is brought to the forefront of thinking and discussion.

Kitchener (1984) has defined an ethical dilemma as “a problem for which no course of

[illegible]

action seems satisfactory. The dilemma exists because there are good, but contradictory, ethical reasons to take conflicting and incompatible courses of action” (p. 43).

Kitchener’s conception of *ethical dilemma* provides a useful perspective in this study for exploring school psychologists’ thinking about ethical issues in professional practice. Ethical dilemmas are a good starting point for beginning to understand professionals’ thoughts related to ethics. Nevertheless, this study is aimed at understanding broader conceptions of ethics as a potentially integral issue throughout all aspects of practice.

Statement of the Problem: Limited Understanding of Ethics in the Field

Despite the importance and centrality of applied ethics in the practice of school psychology, the factors that influence ethical thinking and behavior have been a grossly understudied topic within the field. The literature that does exist has been limited largely to identifying the *types* of dilemmas that school psychologists face, revealing the *frequency* with which they are faced with such dilemmas, and discussing the *implications* of ethical decisions for the changing role of the school psychologist. As previously discussed, examples of such studies have included disclosing test items to parents (Abeles, 1992), balancing professional intervention against a child’s autonomy or freedom of choice (Barnett, 1987), participation in psychopharmacological interventions with children (DeMers, 1994), school psychological consultation (Scholten, 1993), the use of aversive techniques with students having autism (Jacob-Timm, 1996), and computer-assisted assessment (Jacob & Brantley, 1989). This work represents important contributions to our understanding of the ethical implications of discrete issues within the

field by providing us with a framework and order. However, it has done so largely without acknowledging and investigating the central role of the individual practitioner in actively making sense of ethical concerns and responsibilities.

A New Approach to Understanding Ethics in School Psychology

Ethics in school psychology have been examined largely from an objective position focused on quantifying, cataloguing, and describing rather than explaining the nature of subjective meaning-making with which individual practitioners encounter daily professional life. The question of how school psychologists actively make sense of evolving professional roles and responsibilities, namely of the ethical facets of their role and commitments, is the question that drives the present inquiry.

Articulating Ethical Practice as Moral Voice

Historically, explorations of human ethics and morality have been firmly rooted in the work of Kohlberg, who posited a cognitive-developmental approach to moral reasoning. To Kohlberg, moral thinking and development were closely tied to individuals' understandings of their role and responsibility in promoting justice in society. As Kohlberg originally wrote, "I assumed that the core of morality and moral development....was a matter of rights and duties or prescriptions (Kohlberg, 1982, p. 225). According to Kohlberg (1981; 1984), humans progress through invariant and hierarchical stages of moral development as they develop greater cognitive understanding

of society and social roles and responsibilities. The lowest stage of moral reasoning involves behavior based on punishment and obedience to social rules. The final stage of moral reasoning involves holding to a universal ethical principle of total justice and fairness. For Kohlberg, what is moral is universal and is organized around justice and fairness. Thus, one's morality depends upon the level of understanding and application of principles of justice within society.

Within existing school psychological ethics literature, the topic of ethics is approached largely from a traditional Kohlbergian framework that positions moral development as closely tied to the professional's role and sense of responsibility in promoting justice in society's educational institutions. For example, Barnett (1987) speaks of the need to balance the responsibility of children's rights and autonomy against professional intervention. Similarly, DeMers (1994), in discussing the legal and ethical issues in school psychologists' participation in psychopharmacological intervention, focuses on the need to balance these activities against the rights of children, families and the psychology profession at large. The language of both of these analyses reflects a conception of ethics as an issue of *justice* which focuses largely on fairness and balance of rights. One major consequence of this justice perspective is that the individual practitioner has been treated and understood largely as "a disengaged observer of moral action" (Punzo, 1996). In other words, ethics have been understood and conceptualized largely as somehow separate from the individual and from the overall practice of school psychology. A second consequence is that morality and ethics, congruent with Kohlberg's approach, have been defined in an extremely limited, isolated manner as objective, consistent across people and setting, and representable apart from an

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individual's conception of practice, professional role, and personal background.

In contrast to Kohlberg's ideas, *constructivism* views individuals as having an active role in the creation of their reality (Guba & Lincoln, 1989; Henning-Stout, 1994; Piaget, 1965). According to Robert Kegan (1982), "the fundamental activity of 'human being' is making meaning" (p. 53). Thus, people holding the same professional title or encountering the same situation will construe these situations differently and attach different meaning and significance to the phenomena (Henning-Stout, 1994; Lincoln and Guba, 1985; Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1987). The way an individual makes sense of a situation will impact how he or she behaves in reaction to the situation. Stated succinctly, "the way we make sense of the world determines the way we act within it" (Henning-Stout, 1994, p. 194). This theoretical perspective differs markedly from that of Kohlberg, who posited a much narrower, isolated view of ethical thinking where the individual was separate from an abstract and cognitive moral decision-making process.

The focal role of the individual person and his or her perspective in ethical concerns is by no means a new idea. The question finds its roots in the ideas of early philosophers such as Aristotle and Aquinas, who espoused the belief that morality and selfhood are intimately intertwined (Punzo, 1996). Such thinking has found new birth in the psychological field with researchers interested in questions of the relationships between individual identity and morality (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986; Damon & Hart, 1992; Gilligan, 1982, 1990; Lyons, 1983, 1990). These recent theorists have asserted that ethical concerns are inextricably intertwined in human relationships in both professional and personal contexts. This thinking has emerged largely from feminist literature examining the nature of women's thinking, knowing and relating (Belenky et

al., 1986; Gilligan et al., 1990; Lyons, 1990). Lyons (1990) emphasized both the inextricable nature of moral and ethical concerns in human relationships, as well as the centrality of individual meaning-making:

...for relationships are linked to moral imperatives, to concerns about good and evil, right and wrong...Questions of value are implied in human relationships. But, if morality arises in the relations between people, it most centrally implies a self and involves a question of interpretation: How do individuals see and construct their own understanding of relational problems? What are the moral concerns that emerge in their relationships with others—the questions of right or wrong? (p. 31).

As Gilligan and her colleagues pointed out, even Piaget recognized this relationship when he asserted that “apart from our relations with others, there can be no moral necessity” (1932, as cited in Lyons, 1990, p. 31). Such a theoretical perspective—consistent with constructivist theory—emphasizes the need to examine and understand how individuals make sense of the ethical concerns that are inherent in their professional roles and relationships. After all, as stated by Henning-Stout (1994), “.....the way humans make sense of the world depends on the way they perceive and describe their perceptions....we are all engaged in constructing our best individual and collective understandings of our experiences” (p. 29).

Researchers, including Gilligan (1990), Lyons (1990) and Belenky and colleagues (1986), who have criticized traditional approaches to understanding ethics, suggest that

individuals do not think about and make sense of morality in a uniform way. Rather, in coming to understanding morality, one must make a distinction between different ethics, what some have termed *moral voices*, or *moral frames*. According to Gilligan (1982), research has identified at least two different frameworks or *voices* whereby individuals make sense of and speak about ethics and morality. One moral frame is reflected in the work of Kohlberg, represented as an *ethic of justice*. Kohlberg viewed the self as separate and distinct from the moral domain. Within this frame, morality is defined as justice and is based upon such issues as fair treatment, broadly contractual rules, and individual rights that govern behavior. Within an ethic of justice, relationships are based on a contract of fairness and equality. Traditionally, it is this standard against which moral thinking and development have been judged—that issues of morality be handled and defined “impersonally, impartially and fairly” (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 8).

Nevertheless, an additional *moral voice* stems from a definition of morality as based on responsiveness to others. This frame has been termed the *ethic of care* (Gilligan, 1977, 1982; Lyons, 1982, 1983), or the ethic of *response*, and is based on the idea that self, relationships and ways of thinking are interconnected to ideas about morality and ethics (Lyons, 1990). In contrast with the ethic of justice, which is organized around a morality of justice and rights, Gilligan’s *ethic of care* is organized around a morality of responsibility and care (Belenky et al., 1987). Gilligan argued that in the development of an ethic of care, three levels and two transition periods are apparent in development (1977). The first level is characterized by an orientation to individual survival, where issues of the survival of the self are central, and where moral considerations are based on the needs of self. Individuals, as they develop, transition

from selfishness to responsibility and connection to others. The second level involves concern for others as reflected in self-sacrifice and the need for approval. In transitioning to the third and final level, individuals gain a greater sense of responsibility for care to themselves and to others simultaneously. Finally, the ethic of care culminates in a universal obligation, the morality of nonviolence (Gilligan, 1977). According to Gilligan, morality involves a concrete connection between people that exists prior to formal knowledge about right and wrong (Blum, 1992). The ethic of care orientation centers on the responsibility one has in maintaining care and responsiveness, while minimizing harm, within relationships with other people.

This theoretical distinction between ethical orientations has stimulated an impressive body of research validating the existence of these two *moral voices* as individuals think about and make sense of morality in their lives (Gilligan, 1982; 1990; Lyons, 1983, 1990). Much of the work of this nature has been devoted to exploring gender differences in the two ethical orientations. Nevertheless, the two moral voices are not separate molds within which an individual is cast. Rather, most people utilize both voices in their thinking and meaning-making related to ethical concerns. Individuals, both men and women, tend to employ one voice more strongly than the others in speaking and thinking about moral issues; hence, it is the “patterning of responses so that one mode predominates, shaping the way issues are constructed and resolved, and the logic that this implies that are of interest” (Lyons, 1990, p. 44). Data regarding the gender-specificity of the two ethical orientations are, at best, inconclusive. Some empirical evidence seems to indicate that although both men and women express concerns about both justice and care, women are more likely to center their concerns on ideas of care and relationship

(Gilligan & Attanucci, 1988). On the other hand, a recent metanalysis suggests that both males and females use each of these moral voices in speaking about relationships and ethical concerns (Walker, 1993).

The *moral voice* serves many critical purposes, providing a mode through which one views, communicates, represents and constructs one's day to day circumstances and relationships. The voice one employs will impact how and what one *identifies* as a moral problem. In a morality of care, a moral problem is represented in terms of relationships and the activities of care, resting on an "understanding of relationships that entails response to another in that person's terms and contexts" (Lyons, 1990, p. 42). Moral problems relate to issues surrounding potential problems that arise between people—the "severing of ties between people, or conversely, with restoring or maintaining relationships" (p. 42)—not with the breaking of contractual agreements. The focus rests on ways of promoting the welfare of another or to relieve their hurting and burdens. Care and promotion of the self's well-being, especially in the self's relationship to others, is important.

On the other hand, a morality of justice or fairness is based upon an understanding of relationships as "reciprocity between separate individuals." Thus, a moral problem relates "either with mediating issues of conflicting claims in relationships....or with how one is to decide conflicts or how one can justify one's actions and decisions" (Lyons, 1990, p. 43). The major goal, from the justice perspective, is to consider and preserve fairness in relationships between people. By keeping an impartial, objective measure of choice that ensures fairness, an individual must weigh conflicts of obligations, duty or commitment that stem from different relationships, including relationships between self

and others, self and society, or self and one's own values and principles.

The voice that one uses in making meaning of relationships and ethical concerns will also be reflected in how one *resolves* moral conflict (Lyons, 1982). In the morality of care, resolution of conflict is aimed at restoring relationships and connection between people, and in exercising activities of care that will facilitate positive outcomes for others. In the morality of justice, resolution of conflict is based on the primary consideration of meeting obligations, commitments and duties, and upholding one's standards and principles, particularly fairness (Lyons, 1982, p. 43).

Finally, one's moral voice will impact how one *evaluates* resolution of moral conflict. From a morality of care perspective, the evaluation of an ethical resolution is largely based upon whether relationships were maintained or restored. Particular focus is given to whether things work out in the long run, (that is, whether results and relationships continue to be maintained longitudinally over time). From the morality of justice perspective, on the other hand, resolution is evaluated against whether one's values, principles and standards were upheld in one's moral decision and action. Thus, an individual employing this voice must ascertain whether the decision was justified (i.e., fair), and whether one was able to live up to his or her own values, standards and obligations (Lyons, 1982).

In sum, the moral voice that one employs will significantly impact one's *interactions* with other people, one's *identification* of moral conflict, one's *decisions* regarding moral action, and one's *evaluation* of ethical resolution. As Lyons argues, "the different logics of the two moral orientations suggest an interpretation of differences in.....day-to-day behaviors and their way of interacting with others" (p. 33). School

psychologists do not simply internalize and apply uniformly to all situations the codified ethical principles and guidelines that govern the ethical facet of practice. To completely understand ethics within school psychology, one must come to understand the moral voices that school psychologists use to make sense of, represent, and guide their moral thinking and action. The process is highly complex and may involve a combination of voices, frames, and perspectives. Even Kohlberg acknowledged that his virtue of justice “does not fully reflect all that is recognized as being part of the moral domain” (1982, p. 227, as cited in Flanagan & Jackson, 1992).

Gilligan Criticized. Gilligan’s work, in contrasting the ethic of care with the ethic of justice, has elicited much scholarly criticism. First, many theorists and researchers have rejected the idea of a clear dichotomy of ethical orientations. As Tong (1993) has asserted, “To meet with our full approval, the just person must be caring, and the caring person must be just. Far from being dichotomous moral concepts, justice and care are at least mutually compatible if not actually symbiotically related” (p. 92). Rather than conceptualizing two moral voices, then, scholars such as Tong view justice and care both as necessary components for moral thinking and action. Gilligan herself acknowledges that a moral dilemma may be framed either in terms of justice or care; however, she draws upon the analogy of a Gestalt drawing that may be seen either as a duck or a rabbit to argue that some individuals, no matter how hard they try, can see only one object or the other (Gilligan, 1987).

Second, some have asserted that Gilligan has misinterpreted Kohlberg’s work (Greeno & Maccoby, 1986). Rather than revealing gender-related differences in moral

reasoning, Gilligan may actually be illustrating a difference in educational and occupational experiences between men and women. In a society where men historically have had economic and social advantages over women, differential experiences may foster different ways of framing and thinking about one's morality and moral obligations. Thus, critics have argued that Gilligan's error lies in her claim that the difference is somehow inherent to gender. Third, Gilligan's distinction between ethics of justice and care has been attacked as an old idea rather than a novel concept. Critics such as Sher (1987) argued that Gilligan's contrast reflects distinctions made by early ethicists and philosophers such as Kant, Schopenhauer, and Frankena. Fourth, many empirical and conceptual works have criticized the argument that justice and care are gender-correlated. As Tong (1993) stated, in one of Gilligan's own studies, thirty-one men and twenty-two women focused equally on justice and care (1988). This trend, according to Tong, suggested that the supposed differences between men's and women's morality may be more ideological than empirical. Although Gilligan and colleagues typically discussed their results as supportive of two moral voices, the actual data may not support this interpretation, rather pointing to more even distribution of justice and care thinking.

Fifth, some have asserted that although the distinction between justice and care is valid in itself, the ethic of care is an inferior approach to explaining morality. Care, rather than being a moral virtue that is comparable in rank to justice, may be more appropriately characterized as a psychological or personality trait (Puka, 1991). Kohlberg himself seemed to support this notion, stating that many of the tenets of the care orientation are "personal rather than moral in the sense of a formal point of view" (1983, p. 360). This contrasts with the view that care is necessary for any sense of ethics

or morality (Noddings, 1984). Despite, the appeal of the work of Gilligan and her colleagues, the work has clearly not gone without valid criticism. The present inquiry contributes to the ongoing debate regarding the utility of the concepts of moral voices in making sense of how individuals think about and deal with moral and ethical issues in professional practice.

The Concept of “Voice” as a Tool of Inquiry

The concept of “voice” has become a particularly useful tool in qualitative inquiry. Within literary contexts, voice has been defined as “the set of textual signs that characterizes the narrator in a text.....(and) provides information about who the narrator is, who ‘speaks’ ” (Schwandt, 1996, p. 175). Within feminist literature, there is also great concern with voice, with “who speaks, who is heard, what is voiced, or given a voice” (p. 175). In their book *Women’s Ways of Knowing*, Belenky and colleagues (1986) asserted that women’s voices have been silenced through various social practices and customs, including how and whether they have been represented in traditional psychological research and inquiry. In her work, Belenky noted that women tend to ground their statements in metaphors of listening, hearing, and voice. She discussed the advantages of this metaphor over metaphors of vision and the eye:

Visual metaphors such as ‘the mind’s eye,’ suggest a camera passively recording a static reality and promote the illusion that disengagement and objectification are central to the construction of knowledge. Visual metaphors encourage standing at

a distance to get a proper view, removing—it is believed—subject and object from a sphere of possible intercourse. Unlike the eye, the ear operates by registering nearby subtle change. Unlike the eye, the ear requires closeness between subject and object. Unlike seeing, speaking and listening suggest dialogue and interaction (p. 18).

The concepts of voice, hearing and listening thus provide an ideal metaphor through which to explore, understand and validate previously silenced stories, constructions and perspectives.

The “Silenced” Voices of School Psychologists. The field of school psychology, as well as the nature of school psychologists’ historical and present roles within the school, embodies an ideal context within which to examine morality in terms of “voices.” Within the schools and within society collectively, the voice of school psychologists has in many ways been misrepresented, subdued and, in many cases, even silenced. School psychology has experienced much criticism and misunderstanding, both on an individual (district) level and on a broader societal level (Bardon, 1994; Fagan & Wise, 1994). Research, for instance, has documented discrepancies between school psychologists’ understandings of their roles and functions and those perceptions held by others within the school setting (e.g., Hughes, 1979). School psychologists report that although much of their time continues to be devoted to “sorting” children with and without handicaps into appropriate programs, they would prefer to spend more time in other activities (Reschley & Wilson, 1995). The prevailing perceptions, in many ways, continue to limit

the role of the school psychologist to normative assessment and placement into special education programs (Fagan and Wise, 1994). To dispel these notions and to translate the rhetoric of role expansion into reality, school psychologists might begin by seeking greater visibility.

Arguably, one way of increasing visibility is to listen to the voices of school psychologists as they communicate personal accounts of the many facets of their roles and responsibilities. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) argue that personal accounts of experience are important not only “for what they tell us about the phenomena to which they refer” (p. 124), but also for “evidence about their perspectives, and perhaps about the larger subcultures and cultures to which they belong” (p. 125). The well-documented discrepancy between school psychologists’ perceptions of their roles and functions and the perceptions of the school psychologists’ role reported by others in the school environment indicates that school psychology continues to be regarded in a limited way as a test-dominated profession. Little attention has been given to individual practitioners’ perceptions of their professional ethical practice. As previously suggested, the moral and ethical concerns of school psychologists have been reduced to quantitative representations and examinations of ethical dilemmas and responsibilities. A greater understanding of the unique perspectives and struggles of school psychologists in the ethical domain will serve to illuminate the complexity and multi-faceted nature of the field.

Drawing on this metaphor of voice, I have chosen to organize this discourse into three major sections entitled *Understanding the Silence*, *Breaking the Silence*, and *Amplifying the Voices*. This framework was chosen to reflect the evolving process that

characterized this intellectual work as I articulated my questions, explored existing literature, and gave ten school psychologists the opportunity to express their moral voices. The first section has been entitled *Understanding the Silence* for two reasons. One purpose of these two introductory chapters was to explore the various theoretical, educational, legal, economic and socio-cultural factors that have contribute to misunderstandings of the school psychologists' role. Historically limited to strict standardized testing functions, school psychologists have begun recently to voice opposition to a uni-lateral testing role, instead desiring to use their broader skills in assessment and intervention to assist children, families, school systems, and communities. Nevertheless, despite these efforts to broaden their roles and functions, school psychologists continue to be faced by administrators and educators who perceive the school psychologists' role as narrow and confined to assessment. In this way, the school psychologist's voice continue to be limited, misunderstood, and suppressed.

The second purpose of the first section, *Understanding the Silence*, is to explain the rationale for exploring the ethical facets of school psychology practice using a qualitative interpretive inquiry approach. As I have previously argued, the moral voices of school psychologists have been confined in many ways by the traditional manner in which ethics in the field have been conceptualized and studied. Moral thinking, decisions, and actions have been collapsed into discrete categories and represented numerically, thus failing to represent the full complexity of how school psychologists perceive their ethical responsibilities and commitments.

Understanding the reasons for the historical and continued silence of school psychologists and the limited representation of their ethical concerns represents a

breaking of the silence. The second section, *Breaking the Silence*, represents an attempt to begin allowing the voices of the ten participating school psychologists to be heard. I will represent these voices through the discussion of five major themes that were reflected in participants' discussions of their ethical concerns, responsibilities, and commitments as they arose in the practice of school psychologists. Gilligan and colleagues (1990), in their investigation of adolescent girls' moral concerns entitled *Making Connections*, chose to title one of their chapters. *Listening to Voices We Have Not Heard*. This title reflects an effort to overcome the historical tendency to "turn an ear" away from the moral voices of women in this society by striving to hear and understand women's moral voices in their natural form. In similar fashion, I will argue that school psychologists' voices have historically been misunderstood and that the tools of the moral voices of *justice* and *care* may be a useful means of beginning to move beyond historical barriers to understanding the full complexity of the ethical dimension of school psychology.

The third section, *Amplifying the Voices*, is devoted to discussing the core ideas expressed by the participants and illuminating the implications of these data for present and future school psychology research and practice. I deliberately selected the word "amplify" to communicate the fact that having the opportunity to express one's voice does not necessarily guarantee that the voice will be heard or understood. *To amplify* is defined as "to make larger or more powerful; to expand; or to express at length" (Webster, 1994). In the final section, I will attempt to place school psychologists' perceptions of professional ethical responsibilities, concerns, and commitments in a broader context by focusing on the implications of this present study for the profession.

Research Questions

The purpose of the present study was to examine and develop a better understanding of how school psychologists make sense of the ethical dimensions of school psychology practice. To investigate these issues, I addressed the following questions:

- How do school psychologists construe ethical practice?
- In what ways can the moral voices--an *ethic of justice* and *ethic of care*--be useful in understanding ways that school psychologists construe ethical practice?
- What strategies and resources do school psychologists draw upon to resolve ethical conflict? How are these resources integrated in practice?
- How do the ways that school psychologists construe ethical commitments and problems reflect their role definitions?

The purpose of exploring these questions was to build upon the limited and simplified way that school psychologists' ethical responsibilities and obligations have been understood and represented. School psychology is an evolving field where role options are becoming more available and where individual practitioners are increasingly thinking about their roles in very different ways relative to their colleagues in the field. How individuals think about their professional role will likely impact what they identify as their ethical responsibilities and obligations, as well as how they see ethics as applicable to everyday practice. School psychologists do not mindlessly employ a prescribed set of ethical guidelines when making decisions in their careers; rather, they

each have individual ways of thinking about and making sense of these situations and obligations. They may also have individual ways of identifying and making use of available resources that may assist them in situations that arise in their practice. By allowing the voices of ten school psychologists to be heard as they think about and articulate their perspective on professional ethics, I believe that I am taking an important step toward developing a more comprehensive understanding of how personal factors, professional standards, professional training, and other factors meld to form a school psychologists' ethical commitments.

Unique Methodological Issues in Interpretive Research

The representation of human experience in written form represents one of the critical issues involved in qualitative research. Qualitative researchers and theorists (i.e., Behar, 1993; Josselson, 1996; Clifford & Marcus, 1986) have struggled with the question of how to translate and portray spoken words in a way that preserves its meaning, spirit, and authenticity. The question remains: How can one represent accurately and completely the reality of the human being? Schwandt (1997) describes the process of analyzing and representing qualitative data as a difficult and necessary yet dynamic task in qualitative inquiry: This task involves

...a variety of procedures that facilitate working back and forth between data and ideas. It includes the process of organizing, reducing and describing the data; drawing conclusions or interpretations from these data, and warranting those

interpretations. *If data could speak for themselves, analysis would not be necessary* (emphasis added) (p. 4).

Reading the interview transcripts and selecting portions to represent participants' voices moves beyond reporting the data and becomes an interpretive strategy that is at once unavoidable, necessary and intentional. Thus, my interpretive role in reporting the results is necessary and clearly acknowledged in the attempt to capture the unique perspectives and perceptions of participants.

By choosing to engage in interpretive research, I assume special responsibilities. First, I acknowledge the biases that are brought to this study. As both a trained school psychologist and a university faculty member, I have experienced both frustration about the present perceptions of school psychology and present attitudes toward the ethical responsibilities and attitudes of practitioners in many of today's schools. To begin the process of becoming a successful, effective school psychologist, I believe one must reflect on one's ethical commitments, become more able to articulate one's ethical position, and be committed to maintaining a high degree of professional ethical thinking and conduct. What qualifications do I have that allow me to examine the ways that school psychologists think about and make sense of the ethical responsibilities and obligations that they encounter in their practice? As a school psychologist, I have experienced first-hand the intense struggles that occur when my own ethical convictions about what is beneficial for children and families conflicts with the restrictions and demands of historical and systemic contexts. I have been tempted and even, at times, succumbed, to situations urging me to compromise, if only slightly, my ethical

convictions, and have dealt with the personal consequences. I have sensed the depth of the frustration and hopelessness that can result from feeling thwarted in one's efforts to maintain high standards of ethical practice. I have also tasted the hope that can be born from strong commitment to maintaining one's ethical convictions despite these barriers. The field's present understanding of ethics in school psychology, as represented in textbooks and ethical codes, is limited and distorted, I would argue, compared to the harsh and sometimes stifling realities of practice. It is from this experience—as well as my ongoing conversations with supervisors, colleagues and university faculty—that my passion for this topic has resulted and my desire to do this study was conceived.

Expected Contributions

Present understandings of how school psychologists make sense of their professional ethics are limited to descriptive data that categorize and quantify behaviors, problems, and approach strategies. This study is intended to complement these studies by examining how school psychologists actively make sense of ethics as related to their professional work. Thus, there will be a strong effort to identify ways that school psychologists' moral voices may have historically or may continue to be silenced and to give participating school psychologists the opportunity to let their moral voices be heard.

This study also represents the first attempt to use moral voice as a frame for making sense of the ethical dimensions of helping professions like school psychology. To date, the ethic of justice and ethic of care lenses have been applied to document these ethical orientations in many populations including women, males and females, elderly, children and adolescents (Gilligan et al., 1990). However, a review of the literature

indicates that this theoretical perspective has not been utilized within populations of helping professionals to understand how they make sense of the ethical concerns inherent in human service fields. The present inquiry represents one of the first attempts to accomplish this task through listening carefully to the voices of school psychologists as they make sense of the ethical facets of everyday school psychological practice.

Questions of personal constructions, morality and ethics are questions that are complex and ever-evolving. Thus, the purpose of this present study is not to provide definitive answers to the questions posed above, nor is it to test a pre-established set of hypotheses. Rather, the value and purpose of this exploratory research rests in its ability to broaden insight into these complex phenomena by providing rich descriptive data concerning school psychologists' thinking about the ethical dimension of their role. Further, this study may stimulate additional inquiry that will allow us to refine our understanding of the complex ethical dimensions of school psychology. The nature of the meaning-making process that individual school psychologists engage in as they think about their ethical responsibilities and challenges is the question that drives the present inquiry.

Chapter 2

Methods

This study adopted an *interpretive approach* to inquiry (Denzin, 1989; Erickson, 1986; Schwandt, 1997), a methodology that has entered the school psychology research community only recently. Schwandt (1997) defined interpretation in qualitative inquiry as “a clarification, explication or explanation of the meaning of some phenomenon” (p. 73). Interpretive inquiry assumes that individuals’ experiences are not best understood by searching for the “reality” that rests within the interview data, nor is there an effort to evaluate whether or not the participants’ responses, accounts, and perspectives are “accurate” related to an objective absolute. This approach rests on the assumption that experiences cannot be adequately represented when they are reduced to numerical or statistical representation. On the contrary, the individual meanings, perceptions, and construals reported by the participants are taken as “the beginning point of inquiry” (Denzin, 1989, p. 64). Interpretive inquiry assumes that participants’ words and construals reflect to some extent that person’s constructed knowledge and understanding of his or her experience; however, words can never fully capture a person’s inner meanings and experiences, and it is the person’s experiences and understandings that are the object of inquiry. In this research, my goal has been to capture the unique viewpoints and understandings of each participant, to the extent this is possible, as they reflect on their profession and their ethical responsibilities and commitments.

Existing empirical investigations of the ethical facets of school psychology practice, and of the school psychologists, in general, has been limited to quantitative

studies based on surveys and standardized instruments. The assumptions underlying this methodology include the notion that understanding of practice-related issues and concerns can be achieved through reducing thoughts and perceptions to numbers and statistics. The goal of this type of research is to extract from data the “reality” of individual’s realities and experiences. Only one other study examining the subjective constructions and meaning-making of practicing school psychologists was found. Gomaa (1999), in her doctoral dissertation, conducted in-depth interviews with six school psychologists in an attempt to “tell the stories” of how individual practitioners constructed their roles based on individual talents, desires, perceptions, and visions. Gomaa concluded that despite many systemic and historical barriers that school psychologists continue to face, they draw on many tools to shape and mold their professional roles.

Recognition of the “position” or “place” of the researcher is, I believe, of central importance in interpretive inquiry. As the researcher in the present inquiry, I recognize that my own biases, experiences, perceptions, and understandings necessarily shape my views and understandings of school psychology and ethical practice, the questions that I have chosen to pose about these phenomena, and the meaning that I make as I interact with the participants in this study. Thus, interpretive inquiry represents a conversation or a dialogue between people who each “come to the table” with unique perceptions, biases, experiences, and schemata, and these idiosyncracies represent some of the tools that are used to shape and interpret meaning and knowledge.

Validity, Applicability and Reliability in Interpretive Inquiry

Validity. If the goal of interpretive research is to gain an understanding of the participants' views and representations of their work, then the issue of internal validity becomes one of authenticity, representing the participants' perspective as faithfully as possible. Traditional understandings of 'internal validity,' as characterized in conventional quantitative research, is based on the assumption that there is a single 'reality' or 'truth' that is to be uncovered during the process of inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Rather than assuming one objective reality that is true for multiple participants, interpretive inquiry rests on the supposition that one's reality actually consists of one's individual sense-making and mental construction of meaning. Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to internal validity in interpretive research as "truth value," asserting that the interpretive researchers' responsibility is to represent individuals' unique perspectives on the issue in question. The extraction of the "truth" or accuracy of an individual participant's response does not drive interpretive inquiry. My responsibility instead is to provide evidence that I have taken steps to understand and represent individuals' understandings and constructions authentically.

From this perspective, encouraging authenticity and strengthening validity becomes a process of allowing the participant ample opportunity to convey perceptions and experiences rather than one of relating reported perceptions to some objective "truth" and striving to represent those perceptions accurately. Erickson (1986) indicated that one manner of encouraging subjects' authentic communication of their experience is to build rapport with participants. Several steps were taken to establish rapport with participants

(Erickson, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I was personally familiar with several of the participants so there was a pre-existing relationship in many cases. Second, I frequently reminded the participants that the purpose of the study was not to evaluate responses as correct or incorrect in relation to some pre-determined criterion but to understand the unique understandings and perceptions. Erickson (1986) acknowledged that participants will frequently assume that their responses are being evaluated in this way. Through these efforts, I attempted to encourage genuine responses.

As a final note, it is important to acknowledge that in the course of a two-hour interchange, I was not able to grasp fully the complexity of these school psychologists' understandings of their professional ethical practice. Given the many facets and the embedded nature of ethical and moral concerns, and the complex process of human meaning-making in general, this would be impossible. Rather, the goal was to delve below surface representations to begin understanding the individual and subjective ways that school psychologists construe and approach the ethical dimensions of their practice in the schools. This inquiry should be envisioned as the starting point for a process of further inquiry of this nature.

Applicability. Another important question in empirical inquiry relates to the appropriateness of generalizing results to other school psychologists or to the field of school psychology. Traditionally, the value of research hinges largely upon whether the study's results can be applied generally by another inquirer in another setting with another sample. The qualitative, interpretive nature of this study necessitates a distinct definition of generalizability. Within the interpretive inquiry tradition, this concern is

referred to as “applicability.” Qualitative researchers (i.e., Denzin, 1989; Erickson, 1986; Lincoln & Guba, 1985) argue against judging interpretive research against conventional standards of quantitative research. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), the responsibility of the interpretive researcher is to provide enough descriptive data about participants and the context of their study to allow consumers of the research to make judgements about applicability to other cases with similar circumstances.

According to some qualitative researchers, the final judgments of applicability to any specific individual or population lies with those seeking application of results. Schwandt (1997) asserted that the concept of applicability in qualitative inquiry is not to develop explanatory theory based on empirical evidence but rather “to study specific cases....to develop powers of perception and thereby enhance practical wisdom” (p. 60). Arguably, by representing the individual meanings that humans construct, the variability of human experience is magnified. Recognition of the subjective nature of cognition and experience, in turn, increases the applicability of the research insights to many different individuals, circumstances, and bodies of knowledge. Thus, the goal is not limited to informing general theoretical knowledge; rather, unique situations and circumstances are interesting in themselves. Thus, Schwandt asserted that one way of understanding applicability in qualitative research is to assess the study’s ability to:

....contribute to theoretical understanding by illuminating interpretive theories already at work in the connections that frame the stories that are told...[and by] making vivid and critically examining the connections between unique, uncommon lives experiences and the commonality of groups, social relationships,

and culturally constructed images that partially define those experiences (1997, p. 58).

In the present study, I recognized that the generalizability, as traditionally conceptualized, is limited. In selecting my sample, I was not striving to gather data that would be applicable to all school psychologists in all contexts. Hence, I did not focus on choosing a sample that was representative of the national population of school psychologists. Nonetheless, the value of this study has not been compromised. Peshkin (1993) argued that to dismiss qualitative research by evaluating it against traditional quantitative standards is dangerous. He stated, “Research that is not theory driven, hypothesis testing, or generalization producing may be dismissed as deficient or worse. This narrow conception does an injustice to the variety of contributions that qualitative research can make” (p. 23). By talking to these ten school psychologists and coming to understand their unique experiences, perceptions and commitments in their unique contexts, I am confident that I have provided a *starting point* for further inquiry. After begin exposed to the experiences and perceptions of these participants—in Schwandt’s words, the “specific, the local, the particular” (p. 58), I believe that consumers of this work will carry this information into other situations, other schools, and other groups of school psychologists, and it will influence the problems they see, the questions they pose, and the issues they view as important. Schwandt (1997) explains, “The study of the particular helps train perception and increase the capacity for practical reasoning and deliberation in those many situations in life that are full of too many details, idiosyncracies, and exceptional aspects to permit applicability of general knowledge” (p.

60). Thus, this work will provide part of the “lens” through which I and other school psychologists will view and construct future inquiry into the ethical experiences and commitments of school psychologists. Peshkin, quoting the work of Vidich and Bensman (1968) spoke of this type of work as one step down the “infinite path” of the “progressive, processual nature” of research:

.....at best, [the researcher]can feel that he has advanced his problem along an infinite path....there is no final accumulation and no final solution (Vidich & Bensman, 1968, p. 397). The travels we take down the ‘infinite path’ can only be facilitated by a type of research that gets to the bottom of things, that dwells on complexity, and that brings us very close to the phenomena we seek to illuminate.

Reliability. Conventional definitions of reliability hinge on replication and consistency. Thus, a study is reliable if similar results can be attained using similar procedures with similar populations. Within interpretive inquiry, however, reliability is connected to the researcher’s ability to foresee and explain factors that may contribute to change in the phenomenon being studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher is responsible for accounting for potential instability of the findings and for describing how various factors could contribute to changes. Thus, in discussing school psychologists’ perceptions of their ethical commitments and obligations, discussing their present understandings and perceptions is not sufficient. Rather, to provide reliable data, I need to describe those personal and contextual factors that influence their current perceptions and to strive to characterize the process whereby these factors may influence stability

and, thus, changes in their perceptions and understandings. Likewise, according to Lincoln and Guba (1985), I must account for “changes in the emergent design as insights grow and working hypotheses appear” (p. 299). In short, reliability in interpretive inquiry is achieved when the researcher succeeds in “taking into account factors of instability and factors of phenomenal or design-induced change” (p. 299).

In summary, I selected the qualitative and interpretive methods of inquiry because of their promise for allowing the investigation and authentic representation of the meanings and understandings of individual school psychologists. In approaching data gathering and analysis, I attempted to create a product that illustrates the complexity and the dynamic nature of ethical practice in school psychology, without stifling these data with my own personal, academic, or professional biases. It is not my goal to identify a “best way” of practicing that will ensure that one’s decisions and actions are ethical, nor do I claim that these data represent fully the complexity of school psychologists’ ethical commitments and concerns. I strove to avoid entering the worlds of my participants as the “omniscient researcher” whose goal it was to evaluate their thoughts and perceptions against some pre-established standard or criteria. Although my presence as the investigator inherently and necessarily introduces a degree of distortion, I view my active presence in this research as critical to understanding the arguments that I advance, the positions that I support, and the conclusions that I draw. Just as the understanding of the participants’ experiences, contexts and positions is critical to understanding their views of ethical issues, so is understanding of my active stance as a researcher in the inquiry process critical to extracting full meaning from this work. I echo the words of Josselson (1996), who stated, “I bring some intellectual tools and some firsthand experience, but I

try not to judge.”

Participants and Settings

Participants. Selection of participants took place in two phases. In the first round, I identified potential participants from one intermediate school district (ISD) in the central area of a midwest state , including both ISD employees and employees of local districts within the ISD’s jurisdiction. An intermediate school district is a county-level educational agency that works in partnership with several smaller local districts in that county to ensure the provision of a variety of educational services to all students and districts. The first intermediate school district was selected because of my familiarity and previous employment with the district. Members of the Michigan Association of School Psychologists (MASP) who were employed within the selected intermediate school district were sent letters explaining the study and requesting participation. In addition, because many of the school psychologists from that intermediate school district were not MASP members, the original list was supplemented with other potential participants from that district, based on the researchers’ knowledge of professionals employed in that area. This knowledge is based on my two years of experience working within that intermediate school district as a school psychologist. Thus, the combined lists of both MASP and non-MASP members employed by the intermediate school comprised the list of potential participants. In all, the final list contained 36 potential participants. School psychologists with less than three full years of experience were eliminated, to increase the likelihood that participants would have sufficient experience to gain a sense of the

ethical issues and the challenges of practice.

After the list of potential participants in the given region was compiled, initial letters of invitation were sent describing the study and inviting their participation (See letter in Appendix A). Of the 36 letters sent, I received nine responses. Five people agreed to participate, two people requested further information, and two declined participation. After approximately four weeks, I mailed a follow-up letter, reminding potential participants about the study and again requesting them to consider participation (See letter in Appendix B). As a result of this second mailing, two more positive responses to participate were received. Because the desired sample of 10 was not reached, psychologists in a second intermediate school district in the central Michigan area were contacted by the same process described above. As a result of this mailing, two more participants were identified, yielding the final sample of ten school psychologists.

Participant Characteristics. A total of ten school psychologists were included in this study. The final sample involved 6 male participants and 4 female participants with a mean experience of 17.5 years, ranging from 4 years to 32 years of experience. One of the school psychologists retired the year prior to the study but continued to work in a school district under a private contract. All of the participants were Caucasian and ranged in age from the early-thirties to the late-fifties. Table 1, included in Appendix C, outlines the nature of the psychologists' districts, years of experience, and educational levels of participants.

Settings. The school psychologists who participated in this research were employed within two intermediate school districts located in the central part of a midwest state. Six of the school psychologists were employed by the intermediate school district, whereas three of the school psychologists were employed by local districts within one of the two ISDs. The final school psychologist had been employed by the ISD but, at the time of participation, had retired and was working on a private contractual basis with a local school district. Each of these intermediate school districts is described below using pseudonyms in place of real names.

Mayfield ISD. The Mayfield ISD, covering 675 square miles, serves a total of 12 urban, suburban and rural local districts. Through these local districts, the ISD services a total of 47,531 students, according to the 1998 annual report. These students attend a total of 106 public schools, including 73 elementary schools, 19 middle/junior high schools, and 19 high schools. Of this total student population, approximately 15% (7,000+) of students are eligible for special education services under the state special education guidelines. The ISD also serves five public school academies, seven alternative education centers, and two self-contained special education centers for students with severe disabilities. The student population of Mayfield ISD is mainly. With regard to socioeconomic status, an average of 30.3 percent of the student population of each district qualifies for free or reduced lunch programs.

Eight of the participants in the present study were employed within the Mayfield ISD. Of these eight individuals, four were employed by Mayfield ISD, three were employed by local districts within Mayfield ISD, and one retired recently from Mayfield

but was contracted with a local district served by Mayfield at the time of the present study. School psychologists in Mayfield ISD were expected to complete an average of 80 evaluations per year, although the required caseload for individual psychologists varied due to special assignments and other position-specific responsibilities.

Within Mayfield ISD lies an urban local school district which is not served by Mayfield ISD staff (Student population is not included in Mayfield numbers above). Two of the psychologists in the present study were employed by this district, which served approximately 19,060 students in 41 schools (34 elementary schools; four middle/junior high schools; and three high schools). Of these students, approximately 4% (768 students) received special education services, according to 1998 data. More than half of the student population (53%) qualified for free or reduced lunch programs. The population of this district was ethnically diverse, comprised of the following categories: Caucasians (47%); African-American (34%); Hispanic (13%); Asian (5%) and Native American (1%). To serve these students, the district employed a total of seventeen school psychologists, each of whom was expected to complete an average of 70 diagnostic evaluations each year.

Englewood ISD. The Englewood ISD serves a total of eight Midwestern suburban and rural school districts. At the time of this research, recent information about the composition of Englewood ISD student population was not available. However, in terms of racial composition, a majority of students served by Englewood ISD are Caucasian. School psychologists in the Englewood ISD are expected to complete an average of 80 diagnostic evaluations each year.

The Interview Process

I gathered these data by engaging in individual semi-structured interviews with participating school psychologists. The interviews were tape recorded and transcribed either by myself or a transcriber whom I employed. Interviews were at a location chosen by the participant to maximize the participants' comfort and confidentiality. Interviews took place in a testing room at a large university, in a conference room at the intermediate school district office, or in the home of the participant. Interviews ranged from one and a half hours to two and three-quarters hours in duration.

Those psychologists who indicated an interest to participate and who signed and returned their consent form were contacted via phone or e-mail to schedule the interview session. Having experienced the emotional and psychological dissonance that can accompany ethical conflict and having reviewed the literature on professional ethics, I was aware of the sensitive nature of the topic of inquiry. Thus, in an effort to facilitate participants' comfort in discussing these issues and to promote honest and thoughtful responses, I mailed a copy of the interview protocol to all participants after they had returned written consent to participate. Each psychologist was mailed or faxed the protocol at least four days prior to the interview to allow them to preview the questions.

Prior to the interview, several steps were taken to promote rapport and to facilitate the comfort of participants. First, I reviewed issues of informed consent and confidentiality with the participants. Second, I clearly discussed with all participants the option for answering some questions "off the record." Participants were ensured that if they shared information that had the potential of jeopardizing their personal or professional status, they could choose the option of sharing the information with me

without the information being included in written reports. Third, I reminded participants that I was not interested in judging the “rightness or wrongness” of their responses; rather, I was interested in their individual perceptions and constructions.

Instrument. A copy of the interview protocol is included in Appendix D. . The interview concerned past and present role definitions, how school psychologists think about and make sense of the ethical facets of their role, ethical dilemmas that arise in school psychological practice, and the resources that are used by school psychologists in defining and resolving ethical concerns. Questions were drawn in part from interview formats utilized by Gilligan and colleagues (1990), Lyons and colleagues (1983) and Skoe and colleagues (1996), though a majority of the questions were specially tailored to the experience of school psychologists. Through this protocol, participants were guided in examining at least two ethical situations and concerns that they have encountered in their professional practice, in addition to being asked to reason through and discuss two researcher-generated ethical dilemmas. The wording, length, and format of the interview were revised following pilot interviews with two school psychologists who volunteered to participate in the interview and provided feedback about the content, clarity and tone of the questions posed.

Following discussion of the spontaneous and researcher-generated dilemmas, school psychologists were asked to respond to four different statements prepared by this researcher. The format of this section of the interview is based upon on the work of Belenky and colleagues (1987) in which they asked women to respond to various statements about the nature of knowledge and knowing. In the present study, each of the

statements was designed to reflect a role definition or ethical perspective that is rooted in either an ethic of justice or an ethic of care. Rather than tabulating or representing these responses numerically, I used these data to further explore of the moral voices employed by school psychologists. Given the semi-structured nature of the interviews, the protocol was used as a guide. Participants were allowed and encouraged to speak about other topics, I used my discretion to pose other questions to pursue new directions introduced by the participants.

The Evolving Process of Investigating and Analyzing the Data

I originally planned for analysis to involve composing a brief profile of each psychologist's professional roles and responsibilities. Data to be included in this profile would have included past experience, case load size, nature of district in which one is employed, functions served in the school psychology role, role changes, and overall definition of one's professional roles and functions. However, after the interviews were conducted, I believed that some of this information would allow participants to be identified, or it would possibly place their employment in jeopardy. To protect the confidentiality of the participants, I made a post-interview decision to analyze data for general themes across the interviews, while also being sensitive to unique facets of each psychologist's interview. In addition, to protect the confidentiality of participants, pseudonyms were used in all written materials related to this study. Pseudonyms are presented in Table 1.

Thematic Organization

Theme identification involved three phases of analysis. First, I read all interviews completely through at least three times, making notes in the margins and marking salient comments and points of discussion. After these readings were completed, a matrix was compiled, identifying the main issues that were reflected in each individual's interview as they discussed their roles, their understanding of professional ethics, and their own experiences in facing and dealing with ethical dilemmas and in attempting to practice ethically. From this matrix, five major themes were identified and became the organizing tool for discussing the data. These themes are: 1) Ethical obligations reflected in role definitions, 2) Intersection of personal and professional commitments, 3) Construing ethical conflict as system versus individual tensions, 4) Construing ethical practice in school psychology as a complex web of relationships, and 5) Development and emergence of moral voice. Each of these five themes is discussed in greater detail in separate chapters.

Following identification of these major themes, data related to moral and ethical concerns were analyzed using the tool of moral voices--*ethic of justice* and *ethic of care*. In this process, I drew upon the guidance of Brown and colleagues (1987) and Lyons (1983). The school psychologists' responses were analyzed to examine how and whether they defined and made sense of the circumstances and issues using ideas of justice, care, or some combination of the two. My goal was to understand and represent participants' understandings rather than to "rate" the moral development of the participants or to assess their stage of development by the stage-theories advanced by Kohlberg and

Gilligan. After reading and processing the data for several months, I decided that such a restrictive analytic process would not provide an accurate representation of the subjective constructions.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) acknowledged that these decisions become apparent "because of changes in the emergent design as insights grow and working hypotheses appear" (p. 299). As I reviewed the data, I concluded that categorizing participant's statements into either an ethic of justice or an ethic of care undermined the authenticity of these data. Tallying across each interview and making numerical judgments about which voice was used most frequently contradicted my argument that such approaches oversimplify complex material and distort participants' words and meanings. Instead, I concluded that I would succeed in representing their words and voices more faithfully if I remained flexible to the patterns and alternations of moral voice in their interviews in ways that labeling and tallying would not allow. Rather than characterizing discrete chunks of interviews as either an ethic of justice or an ethic of care in a systemic fashion, I opted to employ the voices of justice and care as a starting point and a discussion tool for highlighting points where care and justice seemed to be present. For instance, when interpreting a participant's discussion of his or her approach to an ethical dilemma, I did not attempt to simplify the response and label it as either a justice or care response; rather, I attempted to remain true to the patterns and complexity of the response. In this way, I hoped to allow alternatives to Gilligan's conceptions of justice and care, if present, to emerge from these data. I believed that this approach was much more consistent with an interpretive inquiry approach, a constructivist theoretical stance, and the study's overall purpose of understanding and representing the individual meanings that school

psychologists attach to the ethical dimensions of their role and work.

Chapter 3

Ethical Obligations and Commitments Reflected in Role Definitions

Increasingly, school psychology is a profession that is breaking the historical mold which has had its practitioners locked into a “test and place” role. Despite continuing pressures of high caseloads, limited funds, and others’ perceptions of the school psychologist’s role, this movement has allowed individual practitioners to begin shaping and molding their roles in accordance with perceptions of their personal background experiences, strengths, interests competencies, and visions for their role (Gomaa, 1999). Consistent with constructivist theory, individuals make sense of the world and construct meaning based on how they perceive themselves, the world, and their relationship to the world. Professional roles are not filled passively by people, but they are constructed in relation to specific contexts and individual characteristics. Recently, within the career literature, researchers have advocated this type of shift from objective studies of professional roles to more subjective examinations where focus is on the unique meanings and understandings that individuals have of their own career roles (Young & Collin, 1992). In my study, I was interested in investigating the active construction of school psychologists’ professional roles and, more specifically, their ethical commitments.

Given the primacy of subjective meaning-making and personal constructions in how a professional role is understood and manifested in practice, a practitioner’s perceptions of the professional roles one occupies will affect how ethical problems and

situations within the professional are construed. As Deno (1995) suggested, “Successful functioning in any role requires a clear image of the primary purposes of that role” (p. 471). Thus, one way to understand further the ways in which school psychologists make sense of and come to understand professional ethics is to develop an understanding of how they define their roles and to examine the relationship between how they define their roles and how they view their ethical responsibilities in relation to that role. One common thread, evident in each of the psychologists’ construals, was the *primacy of child advocacy* in professional activities and commitments.

Child Advocate First and Foremost: A Common Thread in Role Definition

At first glance, the role definitions discussed by the ten participants in this study seemed highly individualized. However, upon closer examination of the interviews, I detected a common thread in their role definitions: Each of the school psychologists interviewed expressed some degree of commitment to the role of *child advocate*. These school psychologists expressed their central concern as that of advocating for the benefit of children and families. Nevertheless, the nature of the child advocacy role was not unitary; rather, the salience of this commitment and the forms of this commitment varied by individual practitioner. Each person interpreted the role of child advocate in a unique manner.

Mike, when asked to describe his role in one or two words, stated, “I think the role has always been child advocate first, and then parent advocate, and I think that’s still what I do.” He went on to describe how this commitment has translated into practice:

I think my position has always been child advocacy, and it didn’t matter whether it was really making the child eligible for special ed., or whether it was getting them a therapist. I mean, in my early years, one of my goals was to get every kid in the EI (*Emotionally Impaired*) program hooked up with some community therapist or myself for a therapist, and their families. I mean, I still will do stuff like that. This summer, I saw a kid for like 10 bucks an hour because he had no place to go, so the school paid me 10 bucks an hour to see this kid, so I saw him for 10 sessions during the summer.

Mike also spoke of the discrepancy between his view of himself as a child advocate and others’ views of his role: “I think if people observe me, they would say I do evaluations, I test kids. But I think that that’s a lesser part of the job in terms of how I view myself in the role.” Mike’s idea of professional ethics is heavily rooted in his personal ethical commitments rather than in uniform, prescribed laws or codes:

To me, ethics is not a topic to write laws about. Ethics is really who you are as a person. It’s your moral self, and so the guidelines in the profession are really your own moral development guidelines that you have developed and are developing over the course of your career.

Mike's articulated understanding of professional ethics as intimately rooted in who he is as a person reflects his view of his role as that of a child advocate. Although Mike recognized that others may view his role in an extremely isolated way as that of tester, Mike's own role definition was closely tied to child advocacy commitments. Rather than being confined to others' perceptions of his professional role or to prescribed ethical guidelines, both Mike's role and his ethical commitments stemmed from his personhood and his personal moral commitments.

Joyce also summarized the core of her role by referring to her dedication to child and family advocacy. She expressed, "To me, to be an ethical school psychologist would be to keep the needs of the students and the families you serve as your main priority....to try to keep my ideals with the kids as the most important thing and how can we help them to be the best people they can be." For Joyce, to be an ethical practitioner was "having an ideal of how you should do your job and trying to stick to it." This "ideal", she explained, was formed through "literature that I read, it comes from talking to other school psychologists, and it comes from my own feeling about what I think is appropriate and not appropriate." Joyce's conception of ethics, similar to Mike's, stemmed from a combination of the profession's standards and one's personal moral commitments and obligations.

Robert agreed with the importance of making decisions and practice in a way that will benefit children: "I see my main role as to conduct myself, as I said before, in a way that's not harmful to others. I see myself as conducting myself in a way that is truly being an advocate for the people that I'm supposed to be there for, and that's children." He further described what he meant when he spoke of his professional ethics, referring to

a combination of personal characteristics and professional commitments that have shaped one's ethics:

Ethics, to me, means a code of conduct, a code of behavior. A code of moral behavior that you bring with you in how you relate to others as well as how you relate to your profession because your profession has a code of conduct that they consider the best practices that you go by. As far as the individual, it's the ethical character that you bring to your job but also how you relate that to your particular role in the profession of school psych.

Personal character was a central issue in Robert's understanding of what it means to be an ethical school psychologist. Similar to Mike, Robert believed that a person enters a profession with ethical and moral commitments and character that has developed prior to entering the profession. Upon entering the professional role, these personal ethical commitments become a central determinant in how one thinks about ethics that arise on the job. Also important to Robert's idea of ethics was "knowing yourself and the biases you bring into a situation" and being aware of his potential influence in the lives of others. He stressed the importance of:

....knowing who I am and what is Robert, because I'm bringing myself into a situation. No matter how objective you try to be. Objectivity is nice but we all bring in our internal biases, I don't care where we are or what we are dealing with, who we are dealing with. It's just how we deal with it and the strategies we

use to deal with it.

Jill believed that her ethics have always centered on her efforts to “do what I feel is best for children and families.” The facet of the role that she liked best was “...helping children in systems, allowing them to get to the programs and services that would help them to learn.” Jill made sense of her role as a guide who knows the system, knows how to access programs within the system, and assists children and their families with accessing those programs that will assist the child toward maximal learning and functioning. **Emily** also viewed herself as a child advocate within the specific context, describing her major role as “...To serve children, to make the best possible decisions for the child that can be made within the community and the environment that that child is in.”

Tom explicitly referred to the primacy of the child in his work, stating, “I think our first responsibility is to do what’s right and in the best interest of the kid who is referred to us. That should be our primary concern, not our only concern, but our primary concern is to consider what impact decisions will have on that child.” He agreed with the centrality of child advocacy, however, and recognized that his responsibilities and obligations go beyond that of the individual child. He aligned himself quite strongly with the system, understanding his major role as not just advocating for individual children but “to maximize the potential of the school district.”

Nick’s perception of the relationship between his professional role and his ethical perspectives differed from the other psychologists in important ways. He believed that certain ethical obligations become a school psychologist’s upon entry into the field.

Thus, he recognized that a commitment to child advocacy is his by virtue of his chosen profession and the role he has chosen to fill. He stated, "The job really doesn't mean anything to me if I'm not focusing on the individual and what's best for them. If I'm serving as an administrator, a gatekeeper, or a 'cog' in how the system functions, then I should have gotten an MBA." Ethically, Nick is committed to "behaving in a principled way, or your behavior being driven by a set of principles." He seemed to focus less on his personal dedication to child advocacy and more on the advocacy responsibilities that are his because "*...your role defines your responsibility in a given context.*" Nick discussed ethical matters with a strong voice of justice, not referring to personal commitments to the welfare of children but rather defining his commitments as stemming from the professional role that he occupies. This point seems to be a key to understanding his ethical commitments and obligations.

Clearly, for these psychologists, the role of child advocate was primary in creating and defining one's professional ethical obligations and responsibilities. Thus, commitment to advocating for children served both as a way of defining one's role and a way of summarizing one's ethical commitments. Applying the concept of moral voice as an analytical tool, each of the school psychologists spoke with an element of the voice of *care*, construing their entire professional motivation as promoting the welfare of children. However, strongly intermingled was a voice of *justice*, embodied as concern for balancing the needs of multiple individuals within the system to promote fairness and equality. By virtue of the nature of their roles, the school psychologists seemed to recognize justice as an important part of their roles as they advocate for multiple children and others within the school environment.

Unique Constructions and Interpretations of the Child Advocacy Role

School psychologists commonly understood themselves as child advocates who are responsible for carrying out this role while also considering the context and needs of the system. Nevertheless, the role of child advocate is not singular and uniform; rather, there were many individual ways that this role was interpreted and articulated. Looking at the data more holistically, I observed that child advocacy appeared in many different forms, influenced by the individual characteristics of each school psychologists, as well as by the school culture and context in which each school psychologist practices. As Mike suggested, “It didn’t matter whether it was really making the child eligible for special ed., or whether it was getting them a therapist.” Hence, although each of the school psychologists spoke of child advocacy, either implicitly or explicitly, as their main priority, there are diverse avenues through which child advocacy is pursued by school psychologists. School psychologists in this study viewed their commitments to child advocacy being carried out through a variety of roles including *liaison/negotiator*, *tester* and *gatekeeper*, *consultant*, and *problem-solver*.

The “Balancing” Function. A commonality among all of the school psychologists’ role perceptions was a tension between the system and dedication to individual children, conditions creating the need for the school psychologist to balance somehow these often conflicting needs. I will examine this theme thoroughly in Chapter 5, but a brief discussion is relevant here in the discussion about the interplay between role definitions and ethical commitments. Some of the psychologists, like Jill, clearly viewed

this as part of their role, though she never explicitly provided a label for this facet of her role; others explicitly labeled this function as they discussed their roles. Within this latter group, many different labels were used to describe this role. **Robert** referred to this role as one of “negotiator,” needing to discuss and deal with the system to arrive at agreement on issues pertaining to children in schools. He viewed this skill as crucial to helping children gain access to services and opportunities within the system.

Joyce described her role as “...the P.R. person, the person that is kind of in between parents and school and is kind of looked on from both sides as somebody that can be more objective and be a ‘liaison’ between the two.” Hence, she did not align herself on the side of the system or on the side of the child, rather positioning herself as somewhere in between. However, I noticed that later in her interview, she positioned herself as clearly committed to meeting the needs of the children she serves, stating, “To me, to be an ethical school psychologist would be to keep the needs of the students and the families you serve as your main priority.” According to Joyce, then, commitment to child advocacy often necessitates acting as a liaison or “balancing” the needs of the system and the child.

Tester and “Gatekeeper.” Although many of the school psychologists spoke of ways that they have attempted to move beyond the testing role, the emphasis on this traditional role was evident both explicitly and implicitly in role definitions as well as in discussions of ethical concerns. This is congruent with survey studies of school psychologists which consistently suggest that 2/3 of practicing school psychologists’ time is spent in activities related to testing, classification, and special education placement

(Reschly & Wilson, 1995; Smith, 1984). **Jennifer**, a school psychologist who has been practicing for four years, explicitly talked about how she feels like a “gatekeeper” on occasion and senses that others perceive her as “...the test person, the test lady.” However, as was true of **Mike**, Jennifer’s self-perception of her role is broader and encompasses more functions.

This difference between the nature of the school psychologist’s role as perceived by others (*perceived role*) and broader multi-faceted functions that school psychologists view themselves as fulfilling has been documented (Fagan & Wise, 1994). Studies of school psychologists have consistently demonstrated discrepancies between school psychologists’ desired and self-perceived roles and their demands, expectations, and desires of their districts (Curtis, Graden & Reschly, 1992). This type of discrepancy was referred to by many of psychologists, who spoke of their perceived roles as tied primarily to testing, while their own role definitions involved broader functions. **Jennifer**, for instance, stated:

I like to perceive myself, you know, in a wide variety of ways. I’m a communicator, I’m an educator, I’m a counselor, all kinds of things. But I think, but, since the majority of what I do is testing, that’s typically what people come to me for [but] I do lots of other things. I guess the other one might be consultant, because I do feel like that kind of summarizes a lot of what I do, is you include consulting regarding assessment in that.

Jennifer, who equated ethics with “morality, being on your honor....a certain code of

discipline,” speaks of ethical practice largely in relation to her testing role, reflecting close ties between her role definition and her ethical understandings (See further discussion of Jennifer’s perspective on this issue in Chapter 7). She tries to be completely honest when reporting test data but also recognized the role of professional judgment in placement and programming decisions. Even in the face of pressure to conceal some test results when talking to parents, she believed that it was very important to communicate the information that she has gathered about a student honestly and completely:

Personally, I just try to be honest about the scores and what I’m thinking. And I don’t say, if the scores are there, I won’t tell someone that they’re not. I’ll tell them they’re there, but this or that. Or “But I don’t think....” And I know from other people that I’ve talked with sometimes that maybe that’s not always the case, or other places I’ve worked, people said, “Well, don’t show them the chart, or don’t show them the scores.” But I always do, and I always tell the parents and I always tell the teacher, and I will tell them that I’m on the line here, this is a real borderline case, and what do you think?

Summarizing her perspective of the ethical commitments by which she practices, Jennifer cited three main factors that she viewed as related to testing and eligibility determination: Client confidentiality, honesty in working with team members and parents, and an integration of clinical judgment with specified eligibility guidelines:

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There's three big things. Confidentiality of information is huge. There is, I feel and I've learned, being open and honest about kids and letting yourself be part of a team with another person and making decisions as a team. The last part is....taking the guidelines that I am given at this time--what we have for eligibility and things like that, because that's the main things that I do--and trying to keep with those guidelines but adding a piece of my and teachers and whoever else is on the team's judgment.

For others, although their perception of their own roles was not limited to a testing function, their actual roles (time allotted to various functions) and the system's expectations reflected a strong assessment focus. By far, the major function for every school psychologists was assessment and assessment-related activities (i.e., attending meetings, writing reports, talking with parents about test results). For example, **Joyce** observed that high testing loads and strong testing focus by her district restricted her from becoming more involved in programming and follow-up:

The way it is now, I can make all kinds of recommendations and I can talk to parents and talk to students, but I don't really have time to follow up on most of that, so it may happen and it may not. I don't really know that I can really impact that in a big way.

Robert's discussion of his role contained evidence of this tension between desired function and actual function. Consistent with literature (e.g., Fagan & Wise, 1994),

Robert reflected on his 32 years of experience and concluded that he is and almost always has been perceived mainly as a gatekeeper by teachers, parents, and administrators. He would like to view himself more as a consultant, but he stated, “....Gatekeeper is still there. Gatekeeper was there 25 years ago, and gatekeeper is still there.” When asked to explain why that perception has been so stable, Robert explained that school psychologists are in many ways restricted by legal and financial factors:

The fact that we're written into the LD definition, the EI definition, that EMI definition. That's where the money comes from. Special education, it's all about money. I used to have this notion that there were just altruistic people out there to help kids, but then it occurred to me that it's just an altruistic notion. It is probably mostly based on money. I mean if it wasn't based on money, I would assume that districts would be hiring school psychologists to be doing more than just testing.

Although Robert currently spends about 50% of his time in assessment and 50% in consultation and intervention, he still believed that school psychologists are in many ways locked into a prescribed testing role. Given the current structure of special education funding, Robert believed that he was often unable to render services that he thought were his duty to provide because his major function was perceived as that of testing. Even though he may ethically feel that counseling or consultation is what the child really needs as opposed to testing, he felt pressure to perform only those functions, mainly testing, that are funded directly. For Robert, ethical commitments must often be

sacrificed for adherence to the current system whereby school psychologists are typically funded.

Whereas many of the school psychologists, including Jennifer and Robert, discussed restrictions created by continuing ties to testing and assessment, their discussion of ethics reflected an awareness of a broader responsibility. Robert, while discussing the ethical concerns that accompany administering and making test-based decisions, also referred to his ethical responsibility to act as a role model for children:

I think you need to project yourself as a model of behavior when you are with kids. So often the kids that we deal with don't have very good models of behavior. They have just the opposite, which is what they watch on TV, or.....Especially as a male psychologist, I think there's an additional burden being a male in schools, because so many of these kids don't have a father....I think as a male person in schools, these little boys and little girls are watching you in terms of how you are conducting yourself.

Thus, school psychologists reported practicing within confines and limited perceptions of their roles and contributions, yet they construed their ethical commitments as broader and more comprehensive. The breadth and depth of ethical commitments seem to be more consistent with the psychologists' desired roles and functions, as opposed to the confined roles that may be placed on them by others.

Consultant. School psychologists are increasingly being called upon to serve

consultative functions with parents, school professionals, and community professionals. Although the word *consultation* has been used to mean to advise, counsel, suggest, and solve problems, school psychologists often understand consultation to mean “a mutual problem-solving process between two or more professionals” (Fagan & Wise, 1994, p. 122). Consultation has become a preferred alternative to traditional assessment-focused service-delivery approaches within the school setting (Reschly, 1988, as cited in Kratochwill, Elliott & Rotto, 1995). This trend has occurred largely because it focuses on training and empowering individuals who have the most intensive and prolonged contact with students; it assumes that the consultee will apply learned skills and insights to larger groups of students; and it has the potential, if transfer of skills occurs, for prevention of adjustment problems (Conoley & Conoley, 1992).

Reflecting on this trend, four of the ten psychologists in the present study defined themselves first and foremost as a consultant. Referring to the problem-solving aspect of consultation, two more of the school psychologists perceived themselves primarily in a problem-solving role, reflecting the increased emphasis on consultation and the paradigm shift toward collaborative problem-solving that is currently occurring within the field (see discussion in Reschly & Ysseldyke, 1995). Thus, six of the ten school psychologists focused on the consultative part of their role, despite the fact that they often felt confined to testing functions. In her role as consultant, **Joyce** was concerned primarily with the gathering and dissemination of information that will in some way support children’s education:

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information, and it doesn't necessarily have to be from testing. It could be from the parents feeling this way, you're feeling this way, what can we do? You're getting information from people or from what you are doing, and then you are working with that information.

Other psychologists did not view consultation as their primary function, but they did nonetheless view themselves as fulfilling some degree of consultation function. **Jennifer** acknowledged that consultation increasingly has infiltrated her role but, consistent with her overwhelming emphasis on assessment, viewed her consulting role as largely related to assessment.

Discussion of the schism between perceiving oneself as a consultant and being confined by testing expectations and role perceptions is necessary, because these school psychologists saw it as having significant implications for their ability to practice in a manner consistent with their ethical commitments and responsibilities. As previously stated, the school psychologists in this study defined their ethical commitments relative to their own role definitions, as opposed to the perceptions of other people in the school environment. Viewing themselves primarily as psychoeducational consultants, these school psychologists recognized their need to gather data from multiple people, to collaborate with teachers and parents, and to evaluate the sometimes conflicting needs of students, parents, and educational professionals. As a result, their ethical commitments extended beyond the ethical responsibilities that are tied strictly to testing and encompassed the ethical commitments that arise in the context of interpersonal interactions and relationships.

Problem-Solver. Assessment continued to be the most visible function of these school psychologists, but many (i.e., Deno, 1995) have argued that a “broader and more satisfying role” for school psychologists is that of a “data-based problem solver,” focusing on how best to address individual and system-level problems to attain desired outcomes. Data-based problem solving involves a process approach to problems that arise within the system. After a problem has been identified, the data-based problem-solver gathers information from a variety of sources to define the problem, to make recommendations, and to evaluate the impact of action. All stages of identifying and addressing problems are based on data that have been gathered.

Reflecting this trend, **Jill**, a psychologist who spends over half of her time working with infants and preschool students in the preprimary program, viewed herself as a person who was able to help people solve problems by bringing a fresh perspective to situations:

If you have a child that looks like he may need help, what is the approach you take? You know, is this a child that needs general education intervention first, does it look like it's a child who really should go directly to special education referral? In preprimary, I try to come in as an outsider, someone who's not too tainted by the perspective of other people that have worked with them....I think the staff kind of looks to me for providing a different set of eyes.

Jill's discussion of her views on professional ethics reflected her perceived role as a professional who is called upon to bring an objective, honest evaluation into a situation

where the goal is to solve the presenting problem. Honesty is a large part of what Jill considers to be ethical practice. She explained, “I guess you just try to live ethics in everything you do, I just try to be honest in everything I do, and I also try to place myself in the shoes of the person that I’m dealing with, and so I just try to do the right thing.” Jill provided one example where honesty is important as she seeks to solve problems, whether she seeks solutions in special education or within the general education curriculum:

If I felt that a child had a learning problem, I would look for ways to document that learning problem. But if I felt truly that a child wasn’t eligible for services, I wouldn’t lie that way either. You know, if I had a ‘slow learner’ who’s performing at ability, I think it’s important to be honest with the family and the school and say, “This is a slow learner, we need to look at programming” and putting a child in special education is not always the answer.

This assessment-related ethical issue was one that several of the psychologists in this study cited as one that they face frequently in their practice. Jill explained that there was sometimes a large difference between her impression of a child’s problem and the specified special education eligibility guidelines. This scenario creates ethical problems as she was faced with the following question: Do I ‘fudge’ the data so it supports my clinical impression of this child, or do I take the test results at face value and possibly deny a child’s access to needed support services? Jill’s answer to this ethical dilemma was to interpret the data honestly at all times and to seek alternate, creative programming

options for children who have a learning problem but do not qualify for special education programs.

Another facet of ethical practice, for Jill, was “to maintain an awareness of the big picture.” Jill’s responses suggest that seeing the “big picture” involves two issues. First, Jill asserted that a school psychologist must realize that the effects of decisions are not always immediately apparent; rather, one must look for improvements and positive consequences over the long term. She recalled a situation where she made a recommendation that a child’s certification be changed from EMI to TMI, despite strong opposition from parents and school administration. It was not until nearly 10 years later that she saw the positive consequences of that unpopular decision unfold. Although the decision was difficult and put significant strain on her relationships with school staff members, Jill believed that she would make the same decision again:

Yes, especially with the way things turned out in the end. He’s finally in a appropriate setting for him. He’s full days at a different facility, and I knew things wouldn’t change overnight. I knew that nobody would really see the results of that decision and that agony right away, but I knew long-term that it was the right thing to do, and I think that the better programming for him now has occurred because it started back then.

For Jill, then, an important facet of her ethical commitments involved standing up for what she believes, even in the face of majority opinions that are different. She was willing to risk temporary strain in relationships to advocate for what she thought was best

for a student. Part of her willingness to take these risks was her dedication to maintaining a view of the “big picture.” Although her steadfastness in standing behind her clinical impression may temporarily strain relationships, she hoped that this steadfastness would contribute to positive outcomes in the long term. Seeing the “big picture” also involved having an understanding of the educational system as a whole rather than just one level or one classroom:

Sometimes, like when I work with preprimary and even in the public schools, people don’t see the whole spectrum of kids. And I think having been in K-12 setting helps over time, it helps you make decisions so you can see down the road that this is the outcome. I think sometimes that colleagues that I work with in early childhood have a very narrow view of children because it’s like 0-3. They don’t look beyond at the preprimary classroom problems. And sometimes even in my K-1st grade building, they think every problem has to be solved by the end of first grade. I mean they really feel that they need to solve these problems by end of first grade, and I continually say to them, “You know, there are other people out there, and when they leave this building, these needs will be met.” When they want to test kids very early, you just say, “They need some time.” I think I can ethically say that because I have seen it over the lifespan of children.

Reflecting a voice of care, Jill believed that being ethical “...just comes from the person, and always trying to be empathetic with the person who is at the receiving end.” She did not think that her ethical commitments mainly stemmed from the role or profession;

rather, they stemmed from the person whom she is and from her ability to empathize with others. She continued, “In terms of ethics, you just try to do the best job you can, and I think you always need to feel you’re trying to keep current with journals and with tests and things of that nature.” In summary, by fulfilling the role of problem-solver in her various functions, Jill viewed ethical commitments as placing herself in the shoes of her client, seeing the broad picture in terms of evaluation and programming, remaining honest in all her communications and interactions, and staying as knowledgeable about current research as possible. She strived to maintain her ethical commitment to advocating for children and families and refused to compromise her professional ethical responsibilities toward sound assessment practices.

Tom viewed himself as broadly attending to the needs of many different people within the system. His understanding of his role as “consulting problem solver” is important in making apparent how he positioned himself within the system:

My vision for what I do is to help people achieve goals. Given my knowledge of the educational process and access to information, my personal orientation is to try to facilitate resolution of problems or reducing whatever is impeding their progress toward goals. Mainly, I’ve functioned to try to maximize the potential of the educational system...I try to be there to support the system and if that’s on a microcosmic or a macrocosmic level, that’s what I’m here for.

He later referred to himself as a “total mental health service provider” for *that environment*.” Tom’s overarching role definition did not hinge upon understanding

individual students but rather on maximizing the functioning of the entire system by responding to and addressing the needs of multiple people within the system. Thus, he considered it critical for school psychologists to be aware of the impact of specific contextual factors on their professional work. Returning to Tom's conception of school psychologists as "the conscience of the system," he clearly placed a tremendous responsibility on the school psychologist for overseeing and even policing the activities of the system in relation to ethical matters.

Tom's sense of responsibility toward the system was reflected in the ethical dilemmas that he discussed and in his definition of ethical. Tom defined his idea of "ethical," stating, "When I think of ethical behavior of a school psychologist or any psychologist, my obligation is to first 'do no harm.' Also, it means to me fairness, honesty, integrity, and adhering to documented best practice." In summary, although he discussed the importance of advocating for children, Tom reflected a clear justice orientation that focused on protecting people's rights and maximizing the functioning of the entire system. Another place where this was evident was in his discussion of IDEA regulations as an element that supports his ethical practice:

Particularly in my setting, there is heavy emphasis on IDEA compliance and to the extent that we should adhere to those rules because they are there for a reason.

Our boss is really concerned that we do things in a timely manner and that we follow the letter of the law. That's important because those laws are there to provide access to services in a timely manner to people and to *protect people's rights* [emphasis added]. I deeply believe that those are very important issues and

concepts.

Ken's understanding of his professional role seemed to combine aspects of testing, problem-solving and facilitating to provide the best possible match between individual children and their educational programs. He characterized himself as a data-based problem-solver who is a "matchmaker of abilities to programs":

Well, I just think that what they want a psychologist to do is tell them about the kid. That's what they look in the file and the first report they always read is the psych. report and usually they want to know how smart the kid is and what his reading level is and what his math levels are and things like that. They want to know about abilities so we can match those abilities to programs. So I see that as more our function rather than some more negative sounding term like gatekeeper or things like that.

Seeing his main role as that of facilitating student access to appropriate educational experiences, Ken believed that his ethical obligation as a school psychologist is to help parents and teachers understand students' abilities, to accept that student at his or her level of functioning, and to assist that student in accessing appropriate educational programs.

Ken's ideas of what it means to be an ethical practitioner have also evolved as he has recognized that his own ideas of what is best for a child may not always be the only way to handle a situation. Early in his career, he described his role as a "rescuer" who

thought it was his role to “save” a child single-handedly from failure, but his view of this role changed with experience:

I think we [school psychologists] are all rescuers in a way. You have to be very careful about that. I’ve had some wonderful lessons given to me about that.

People who were able to walk away and show me that just because I think something should be some way doesn’t mean that’s how it has to be. Parents can choose not to use a program, even though we felt that’s what they should.

Ken’s caution about protecting himself from assuming a “rescuer” function may in some ways reflect the care for oneself that, when balanced with a care for the welfare of others, characterizes Gilligan’s ethic of care. On the other hand, it is reflective of the emotional detachment that was referred to in earlier examination of Ken’s discussion. For Ken, ethical practice rested on an attitude that infiltrates every professional decision and action: Recognizing the inherent value of every individual and accepting them where they are without forcing change.

Facilitator. In addition to Ken’s reference to “facilitation,” two of the psychologists interviewed summarized their roles in the school system mainly as that of a “facilitator.” The word *facilitate* means “to make easier” (Webster, 1994). Thus, school psychologists view themselves as making the lives of children, families, teachers, and other educational staff easier to handle. For example, Nick viewed himself as a facilitator who is responsible for “facilitating a lot of things, services for kids, programming,

information for teachers...kind of 'greasing the wheels' of the system." Fulfilling an advocacy role for Nick extends beyond a strict assessment function. He saw himself as involved in many different aspects of education and, by virtue of his position, viewed it as his ethical responsibility to fulfill this multi-faceted function to facilitate a child's access to appropriate educational experiences.

Emily also viewed herself primarily as a facilitator in her role as a school psychologist. Her role as facilitator was multi-faceted and involved "...facilitating evaluation, facilitating assessment, facilitating strategies for a child, facilitating decisions to be made for the child, and coming to a consensus with a group." Asked whether that view has changed over the course of her career, Emily stated that it has changed in some ways but remained the same in others. Consistent across her career, Emily has viewed herself as a facilitator within the context of a team problem-solving model:

I never wanted to be the sole decision-maker. I really like the emphasis, especially with the new laws that are coming, on a team and group approach. And that includes parent. I mean the greater parental emphasis, that has really changed over the years. I mean, now, it's much more, the law requires the parent to be much more involved and I think that has really made them a partner. It brings them to the table in that way that they weren't at the table before.

Emily's conception of ethical practice has been heavily influenced by her experience as a parent (as will be discussed further in the next chapter). To Emily, being an ethical school psychologist means "Making ethical decisions that I can make based on who I am,

according to my framework of what is ethical, as well as what the school psychologists as a group feel is ethical practice.”

The Salience of Ethical Concerns in Practice

To this point, I have focused the discussion on *how* school psychologists construe their professional roles and ethical commitments. However, I believe it is worthwhile to examine also *whether* and *to what extent* school psychologist view ethical considerations as relevant to their own everyday professional world. Also important is the extent to which school psychologists are aware of and sensitive to the ethical facets of their practice. As the psychologists were interviewed, they expressed various perspectives on the extent to which ethics is relevant to the practice of school psychology. Perceptions of the extent to which ethical concerns infiltrate school psychology practice varied notably. Some of the school psychologists recognized ethics as relevant to every decision and every day of practice. **Tom**, for instance, thought that all school psychologists, especially new practitioners exiting training programming, have the responsibility to be aware of the major extent to which ethics enters school psychology:

I just think that people coming into the field need to be prepared for the fact that they are going to deal with ethical questions almost daily. It's a fact of life. It's not a bad thing. It just kind of goes along with territory. We're there to clarify some of those issues and it's good to be aware of them, about what our role is in relation to maintaining ethical and moral behavior. I think it's one of the more

interesting aspects of what we do. It's a real fundamental question about why we do what we do as educators and what we are trying to instill in kids.

Tom did not view his ethical commitments and responsibilities as distinct from the rest of his practice, nor did he think that ethics were irrelevant to the practice of school psychology. On the contrary, he considered ethics to be "fundamental" to his daily practice, a "fact of life" for school psychologists.

Joyce, although recognizing the importance of ethical considerations in her practice, believed that the field has only begun to define what "ethical practice" looks like. Despite the existence of ethical guidelines provided by NASP and APA, Joyce continued to be unsure of the field's stance on what is and is not ethical in practice. This conclusion was evident when she responded to the question of how ethical training of school psychologists can be improved: *"Maybe they could just have a class on ethics, if they really know what the ethics in school psychology are. I don't know if that is really obvious."* Joyce's position seemed to reflect some lack of clarity about where a school psychologist's ethical commitments and responsibilities should and do lie. On the one hand, she thought that her duty as a school psychologist was to meet the educational needs of children and families; however, she acknowledged that the manner of reaching that goal did not have full consensus within the field and is concerned about the consistency whereby school psychologists are making judgments about what does and does not constitute ethical practice. Joyce's confusion illuminated the fact that even though professional organizations provide various written ethical guidelines, there still exists tremendous variability in how school psychologists think about, define and act

upon their ethical commitments in their work.

In contrast with these views of ethics as a central consideration in practice, three of the psychologists interviewed regarded ethics as a minor concern in their practice and in the field of school psychology in general. **Dave**, when asked to discuss some of the ethical issues that he has encountered in practice, replied, “I don’t see too many ethical dilemmas in school psychology. Now maybe I’m missing it. Maybe I’m going in with blinders....” Asked to talk a little bit about the fact that he doesn’t really see any great ethical issues in school psychology, he elaborated:

Most of the work in school psychology right now is pretty clear-cut as far as the types of work that you are doing, whether it’s a behavioral consult or whether it’s evaluation. Those kinds of things are guided not only by the principles of behavioral approaches and reinforcement and that kind of thing, but they’re guided by standardized ways of testing. It seems to me it’s hard to go outside of those lines too much. Also, as I mentioned to you , and some people will disagree with me, but I think it’s a less personal kind of relationship we have. Some people would want it to be more maybe in terms of having more contact. If I think strictly in terms of my practice right now and compare it to the clinical settings I’ve been in, it’s less personal. It doesn’t mean, again, that I don’t care for them, but there’s less opportunity of breaking ethics....It’s pretty standardized to know what you are doing, and it’s hard to deviate....

Dave seemed to think that the highly prescribed and legislated nature of special

education eliminated many of the ethical questions that might otherwise arise in practice.

Additionally, assuming a behavioral approach, Dave's theoretical perspective influenced his views of ethics in practice. Defining his role dually as assessor and consultant, Dave defined *ethics* as "performing the job in a competent manner and not doing anything that would be, by a *reasonable* person's sense, immoral or against the rights of others." This definition suggests a clear universality and rights orientation. What is right, from Dave's perspective, did not seem rooted in a relationship, in a specific context, or in an individual's unique circumstances; rather he seemed to focus on fixed, universal ways of dealing with a situation. He believed that "ethics are ethics.....there is a certain reasonable way of treating other people and working with other people."

Dave's contrast of the school psychologist's role with the clinical psychologist's role provides an interesting portrayal of how the school psychologist's role may present a barrier to a care orientation in a way that would not be true for other types of psychologists. Whereas a clinical psychologist has the opportunity to develop more of a relationship with his or her clients, Dave perceived his role of a school psychologist as quite strictly limited to "standardized" processes and procedures that govern everything from testing to behavioral intervention to *ethical responsibilities*. Considering together Dave's theoretical perspective, his role definition and his view of ethics, Dave viewed all of these factors, including his ethical commitments, as closely defined and "standardized." Compared to many of the other participants, Dave's perception of ethics was much less defined by his personhood and his personal ethical commitments and much more heavily confined to delineated standards that he viewed as universally applicable. His overall conception of his role and his stance regarding professional ethics

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reflected concerns about justice, universality, and preservation of rights.

Jill compared her experience working in hospitals with her practice in the schools, thereby concluding that the ethical facet of school psychological practice is really quite “minor:” “Maybe in schools, because they are not life-death decisions, we don’t pay much attention to ethics. But in hospitals, I know there is a lot of emphasis on ethics and what is to be done. They even have some consultants come in and talk about the need for handling situations ethically.” Jill’s reference to “minor” ethical considerations in school psychology is related to her experience in medical settings where she saw life-and-death decisions being made. In comparison, she saw the decisions that she faced in her practice in the schools as much less significant than those where the consequences could have involved the loss of life.

Mike in some ways echoed Jill and Dave, differentiating between ethical judgment and “professional judgment:”

I mean, we’re not making a whole lot of moral decisions, in my opinion. I think we’re making professional judgments, and that if sometimes they fall within having to make an ethical decision, then I think it falls back on the person’s personal ethics, as opposed to the guidelines that are written by professional organizations.

In large part, Mike explained his position by conceptualizing his ethical convictions and commitments as so closely tied his personhood that ethics do not comprise a distinct aspect of practice: “I mean ethics, to me, doesn’t enter practice as a separate entity.

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Ethics enters with you as a person....I don't think an ethical law or rule ever made anybody change their behavior." In contrast to Tom, who viewed every day as encompassing some sort of ethical issue, Mike did not see ethics as relevant to his daily practice:

I just don't have the issue of ethics in my work. Ethics is not a major issue to me on a legal, day-to-day basis. I do what I do because of who I am, and I'm an ethical person, and I've developed my ethics over the years....even to try to think about it, I have a hard time coming up with those kinds of specific dilemmas.

From the following discussion, I might be tempted to conclude that nearly half of the school psychologists did not consider ethical matters in their practice. However, closer examination of Mike's responses indicated that this conclusion is simplistic and erroneous. At one level, Mike's response appeared to contain contradictory ideas. On the one hand, school psychologists "are not making a whole lot of moral decisions" whereas, on the other hand, ethics entered every facet of practice not as a separate entity but "with you as a person." On a deeper level, however, this seeming contradiction illustrates Mike's conception of ethics as so intimately integrated into one's personhood that to speak of ethics separately is impossible. Of special note is Mike's discussion and use of the word "ethics." Mike seemed to be understanding and employing this word in a very specific way to mean a prescribed code or set of principles or guidelines. Clearly, based on his explanation of his conduct as stemming from his personal moral convictions, it is inaccurate and unfair to conclude that he does not consider moral beliefs or ethical

principles in his work. On the contrary, he seemed to be centrally concerned about ethical thinking and conduct, which he viewed as entering practice with him by virtue of their inherency in his personhood. Thus, Mike drew a clear distinction between “professional judgments” and “moral decision,” but he clearly thought that the judgments that he made in practice are “moral” in nature because he is an individual with personal ethics occupying a position that necessitates professional decisions. Explanations of these psychologists’ judgments of the absence of ethical decisions in school psychology practice will be further explored in Chapters 8 and 9.

Summary. Two major ideas resonated in the participants’ discussions of their roles and ethical responsibilities and commitments. First, the participating school psychologists evidenced intimate ties between how they perceive their professional roles and what they perceive as their primary ethical commitments in practice. For these participants, a primary commitment to child advocacy, in its many different forms, is reflected foremost in their discussions of professional ethical commitments and decisions. For some, their main ethical responsibility was articulated as facilitating children’s access to services in a complex system. For others, their main ethical responsibility was expressed as solving problems that arose in the education of children. Even those who described their role as closely tied to the testing function were clear that their decisions in assessment were driven by their ethical commitment to children’s welfare. Although the exact words of the school psychologists varied, their core message was the same: To practice ethically as a school psychologist is synonymous with *child advocacy*, an unwavering commitment to making decisions and acting in a way to promote the best

interest of children.

Second, many of the school psychologists discussed their professional ethics as closely integrated with their personhood and personal sense of what is right. Clearly, all school psychologists did not define their roles uniformly, nor did they translate the role into practice in a similar manner. Likewise, to understand the ethics involved in school psychology practice as clearly prescribed in codes or as a distinct, separate facet of practice is not sufficient. Rather, these school psychologists expressed their professional ethical commitments as shaped not only by the standards of the field and ethical principles, a factor actually downplayed by these psychologists, but also to their personhood and individual ideas of morality that stem from the core of their identity. Consistent with Damon and Hart's (1992) assertion that individuals define ethics and morality as integrated with their identities to varying degrees, the psychologists were not uniform in their views on this issue but instead expressed varying degrees of integration between professional ethics and their personal identity, as well as varying judgments of the extent to which ethical concerns are apparent in practice. This theme of the integration of one's personal commitments and professional ethics is deserving of further examination and will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

Intersection of Personal and Professional Commitments

Researchers and theorists have suggested that the self is inextricably connected with morality and moral decisions (Damon & Hart, 1992; Gilligan et al., 1990; Punzo, 1996). Proponents of this position would reject classic theories (i.e., Kohlberg, 1984) that isolate moral thinking and action from the individual, arguing that these perspectives represent incomplete and inaccurate understandings of the complex, multi-faceted nature of human thinking and behavior in the ethical domain. Rather, to come to an understanding of how people think about morality and the factors that influence their behavior, I consider it important to understand their perceptions of themselves and their experiences. Only then can a person's moral commitments and actions be grasped and their "moral voices" be heard (Gilligan, 1990).

Consistent with Gilligan (1990), Punzo (1996), and Damon and Hart (1992), the participants in this study actively construed their professional ethical commitments as related to their roles and commitments outside the profession, clearly referring to the intersection of personal commitments with professional ethical decisions. Speaking of their ethical dilemmas and articulating their ethical commitments, the school psychologists highlighted the integrated and interdependent nature of their ethical commitments. They suggested that their experiences and their personhood were critical to understanding the ways that they conceptualize school psychology and the ethical responsibilities of practice. The main purpose of this chapter is to explore this idea, using the words of the participants to demonstrate the intimate connection that many of them

described as existing between themselves as *persons* and themselves as *professionals* with certain ethical commitments. After this groundwork is laid, I will discuss the more specific factors and experiences to which participants referred as they described this intersection.

Understanding Ethics as Inherent in Personhood

As stated above, proponents of a virtue ethics position hold that ethical and moral thinking is a phenomenon that is not determined by one's role in society but rather one that stems from the fiber of one's being, of one's personhood (Punzo, 1996). This intimate relationship between self and morality has been the subject of empirical investigation. For example, in a study of moral exemplars, Colby and Damon (1992) argued that "morality and the self grow closer together during the course of normal development" (p. 306). They further assert, based on their data, that to understand the place that morality and moral concern occupies in a person's life, one must come to know "how the person understands the self in relation to his or her moral beliefs" (p. 306). In reviewing classical research of adult social and moral development (i.e., Erikson, 1980, Levinson, 1978; Loevinger, 1976; Perry, 1968; Vaillant, 1977), Damon and Hart (1992) concluded that "there is every reason to believe that interpersonal and ideological moral notions become increasingly important pillars of self-definition for many people" as they develop (p. 443).

This theme of the close connection between moral concerns and self-definition was present throughout several of the interviews, with school psychologists construing their ethical thinking and behavior not as something that can be learned or taught or

legislated, but rather something that is largely inherent to the person. However, consistent with Damon and Hart's assertion (1992), each school psychologists' perceptions of the nature and degree of self-ethics relationship was unique. Empirical data indicate that "not all people link morality to self in the same way" (Damon & Hart, 1992, p. 444). Thus, to understand school psychologists' ethical commitments and draw implications for the profession, one must understand the unique ways that school psychologists articulated connections between themselves, their personal and professional commitments, and the ethical facets of their profession. The school psychologists in this study, each referring to ethical commitments as stemming from one's personhood, did so to different degrees. As cited by Damon and Hart (1992), "For some, moral values are central to their self-understanding as early as childhood; for others, morality may always remain peripheral to who they think they are" (p. 444).

Before discussing the participants' specific responses, the ways that school psychologists perceived the connection between self and ethics are important to explore. Studies have not only linked self-perceptions and ethical thinking, but, more importantly, they have documented the connection between how a person integrates self with issues of morality and how that person *behaves*. Damon and Hart (1992), recognizing the individuality of how people will integrate self and morality, addressed this issue, concluding "naturally, such a difference (in connections between self and moral concerns) can be expected to affect the extent to which people take moral concerns seriously and translate their values into action" (p. 444). Many empirical studies (i.e., Blasi & Oresick, 1986) have demonstrated that "the manner in which a person integrates moral and self concerns is at least as important in determining the person's moral conduct

as the nature of the person's moral judgments" (Damon & Hart, 1992 , p. 444). Moral perception is regarded as a primary feature of a moral being and is considered an important determinant of subsequent moral behavior (Punzo, 1996). An individual's perspective, perceptions, and character thus provide the "foundation for professional judgment and action" (Jordan & Meara, 1990). Thus, to begin to understand what influences the ethical behavior of school psychologists in their work with children and families, their individual understandings and constructions of professional ethics must be explored and understood.

Several of the participants in this study drew intimate links between their identities as people and school psychologists, and their ethical commitments in practice. **Mike**, for example, expressed this idea succinctly, stating, "Ethical isn't an adjective for a role, ethical is an adjective for an individual person." He went on to describe his view of this intimate intermingling of person and ethics:

To me, ethics is not a topic to write laws about. Ethics is really who you are as a person. It's your moral self, and so the guidelines in the profession are really your own moral development guidelines that you have developed and are developing over the course of your career and I don't have a lot of ethical conflicts on the job....I've always done what I thought was morally the correct thing to do, and I guess ethics to me is making moral judgments and decisions that are appropriate and legal, but more so, personal to the individual. I really see it as part of your personality.

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Mike seemed to understand professional ethics as reducable to personal moral commitments and did not see a clear distinction between himself as a person and his ethics in or outside of the profession. In discussing his role, he emphasized factors that would be unique to the ethical responsibilities and commitments of school psychologists by virtue of their professional position. To Mike, the factors that influence professional ethics are “a combination of what your profession views as appropriate or inappropriate moral behavior, but, I think it’s more what you spiritually believe to be moral and immoral behavior.” He acknowledged that the school psychology profession’s ethical standards have influenced his thinking and behavior, yet he adamantly rejected the idea that a person can “learn” to be an ethical practitioner. If one comes into the profession as a “moral person” with “spiritual” convictions regarding what is moral, Mike considered professional ethical guidelines as “meaningless” because ethical behavior is more a “part of personality”:

....I think that anybody that has high moral and ethical standards as a person doesn’t need to look at those rules to know what to do. And so, I really think it has to do with personality in conjunction with cognition. I really think you need some cognitive kinds of developmental things, but I also think that it is who you are and the basis of moral upbringing. I think moral upbringing speaks of both the personality characteristics you develop out of family, and part of that is the moral teacher, the religion, whatever that spiritual religion might be, as opposed to the institutional religion.

Personal character and commitments also play a role in what constitutes a successful school psychologist:

I think what you do is you take the talents you have and the things you've learned, and you create a production, a masterpiece, or maybe not so much a masterpiece, in an artistic way, and you, whether it's an assessment or therapy, it is *who you are* in combination with what you know, that makes you a good psychologist. It is not learning to give a test by standard procedures. It is not looking at checklists and coming up with statistical graphs.....I think the biggest part of being a school psychologist that makes you successful is your ability to relate instantly to people and to develop trust in people. If you don't have that, I don't think you're ever going to be a good, accepted school psychologist. I mean, that would be the downfall of a school psychologist.

Mike's perceptions of ethical practice have strong implications for the selection and training of school psychologist practitioners. This was especially clear when he discussed his work with graduate-level school psychology interns. His strong belief about the intimate integration of personal ethics and professional ethics was apparent not only in his perspective on professional practice but also in his understanding of his role as an internship supervisor to assist new school psychologists to integrate personal belief systems with professional role responsibilities. His supervisory responsibility was not defined by a passing down of knowledge to novice, but rather through the sharing of

personhood between individual human beings. He viewed his most important work as a supervisor as that of investing himself, as an ethical person, into his interns:

You have to have ethical people training ethical people to be ethical. I think if I helped [an intern] develop an ethical standard, it would be different than mine, but if I helped [the intern] to develop it, it would only be a part of the ethical person he really is. But if I helped [the intern] on the professional side of it get his personal stuff into the professional decision-making, then I think I've really done my job and done something useful....I think the training under mentors, whether it was a direct supervisor of an internships, or a mentor assigned to you on the job, or a respected colleague that you developed a professional and/or personal relationship with. I think that's who help you define ethics. I think that's where you learn it.

Nick also expressed similar ideas regarding the inadequacy of professional codes in regulating behavior. Like Mike, he referred to the role of personal beliefs, in conjunction with professional guidelines, as central determinants of ethical behavior:

A code isn't going to get you to behave ethically, or to think through difficult ethical situations. I guess what I would see the need for is people behaving in a consistent manner, in terms of what they believe to be ethical behavior. Certainly the code would provide broad guidelines, absolute guidelines, in terms of how

you behave, but so many of the nuances of how you function are not going to be addressed in a code. They're going to be addressed by your own personal beliefs.

Nick recognized that this primacy of his personal belief system resulted in differences between how he and other practitioners would perceive and handle a situation differently than he would. However, he acknowledged that a different person could make a different decision than he but still be ethical:

I can't say that you can ever ensure that people would behave in a way that I would perceive to be ethical all of the time. But, I can accept that if they have come to that decision in a reasoned, rational way. Then, that's just a difference, and I can live with that.

This variation has been described by Damon and Hart (1992), who noted that "people who may agree with one another on general moral issues often act in divergent ways when it comes to their own life choices" (p. 454). Thus, although school psychologists can hold the same ethical commitments toward the welfare of children, they may make different choices because morality and ethics may occupy different positions in their self-understanding (Damon & Hart, 1992). In this way, one's self-definition, both as a person and as a professional, becomes a "mediator" between moral commitments and moral action (p. 454). In other words, how closely one sees the integration of the self with moral issues may be one factor explaining the well-documented discrepancy between people's expressed moral commitments and their actual behavior in practice.

Several of the school psychologists, focusing on the role of individual moral commitments, also acknowledged that written professional guidelines and standards impact their views of what constitutes ethical practice. **Tom**, stating that he does embrace the ethical codes of NASP and MASP in his professional practice, nevertheless thought that the primary determinant of being an ethical school psychologist was adhering to his personal ethic:

First of all, I'm responsible to myself. I have a rather high moral standard for my own behavior in relation to the services I provide to children and families, and I have to be able to be comfortable with the decisions I make.....First of all, if I can look at myself in the mirror in the morning and know that I made a decision that will really help the best interest of my clients, then I think I've done right.

Because ethical commitments are so central to the individual person, Tom believes that these personal commitments have shaped his thinking about situations in his professional dealings:

I think ethical behavior is something that needs to be practiced at all times and if a person lives their professional and personal life in an ethical manner, then it becomes sort of a way of thinking that determines your behavior.....ethics aren't selective. Ethics are about who you are and how you are and how you want other people to be.

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Robert, too, understood ethical commitment largely as something you “bring with you” to practice:

....(Ethics are) a code of conduct, a code of behavior. A code of moral behavior that you bring with you in how you relate to others as well as how you relate to your profession because your profession has a code of conduct that they consider the best practices that you go by. As far as the individual, it's the ethical character that you bring to your job but also how you relate to your particular role in the profession of school psychology.

Robert thought that remaining true to oneself and one's personal standards was crucial to being an ethical school psychologist. This idea was one of the major lessons that he tried to instill in school psychology interns that have worked under him in his practice:

I remember telling interns one time, “We're not in this business to win popularity contests, because a lot of things we do, people don't like what we do. There's always somebody out there that at any given point doesn't like what you are doing.” But then you start compromising when you say, “OK, I'm going to please this person or please that person.....” and pretty quick, you're pleasing everybody and you catch your finger in about ten different ways. And where does that leave yourself? And where does that leave the kids?

Likewise viewing her ethical decision and actions as stemming from her personality, **Jennifer** conceptualized ethical thinking and behavior as a “trait” that defined her personhood and characterized the way she has chosen to live her life at work and outside of work. This construal is consistent with a virtue ethics argument that “all act appraisals are explicable in terms of more basic appraisals of persons or of traits” (Montague, 1992, p. 54). Thus, the individual who considers himself or herself to be “moral” will strive to perform moral action to sustain their identity of not just ‘doing moral’ but of ‘being’ or ‘becoming’ moral (Punzo, 1996). If she consistently models trustworthy, child-centered behavior and decision making, she will be regarded by her colleagues, and by herself, as an ethical person and practitioner:

You can be a person who proceeds ethically or in an ethical manner, so that’s just sort of your style and people know that about you, and you’re sort of looked upon as a trustworthy person that doesn’t talk about others, that you do things in a certain way. You don’t fake things....

For some, like **Joyce**, personal moral convictions had a large part in their decision to pursue a career in school psychology. Certain ethical commitments occupy such an important role in a person’s identity that it influences strongly not only how they choose to live their lives, but also the profession that they choose to pursue (Colby & Damon, 1992). In this way, one’s “life work” or “life purpose” is fulfilled. Joyce expressed a strong belief that children in society are often disadvantaged and need individuals who are willing to advocate for them. For Joyce, then, it was her own personal belief system

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that led her to the field of school psychology. She was led to this work by "...my own personal belief system and ethics is that children are really important, and I don't think they get enough services or resources. A lot of them are in big trouble. I think that is what brought me to the field, and I think that is what keeps me there."

Ethics and Self-Awareness. The interconnection between professional ethics, personhood and personal moral commitments creates special responsibilities for school psychologists in their work with children, families, and educational community members. These responsibilities can be understood as similar to the concerns that must be regarded in interpretive inquiry. As the psychologist and researcher conducting this study, I must acknowledge my presence and be aware of the biases that I bring to this work and the ways that it may distort the way the information is interpreted and communicated.

Likewise, the school psychologists recognized that they necessarily carry personal values, beliefs and biases into their work. Because school psychologists are commonly called upon to, in Jill's words, "provide a new set of eyes" on a situation, they must be aware of the biases and slants that they bring with them. Recognition of this responsibility was expressed by Robert, who stated that ethical practice means:

.....not bringing in your own biases, not judging people, which is real easy to do, knowing yourself and the biases you bring into a situation.....Knowing who I am and what is [name] because I'm bringing myself into a situation. No matter how objective you try to be. Objectivity is nice, but we all bring in our internal biases,

I don't care where we are or what we are dealing with or who we are dealing with.....

Self-awareness was also a major concern for Jennifer as she evaluated her ethical conduct. In her position of power and influence, she was concerned that she often advances her own recommendations without fully considering the parents' and family's position and values:

There's always the piece that I'm subtly influencing a parent one way or another. Because you do, whether you are trying to or not, and so if I'm at my one school where I know the at-risk programs are so great, and the kid is just doing well, and why would you want to pull him, but they do have the scores [to qualify for special education], then you have.....How am I talking to this parent?' Am I sort of....I realize that I'm not really pushing special ed., I'm just kind of telling them it's available.....whereas in another case, I would probably be saying it differently. I have just kind of caught myself doing that, like saying, "Oh, we have this program for him, and it would be so great!" So I think you do do that, you just kind of catch yourself doing that. So trying to be real open with the parents, but probably doing some influencing there.

In summary, professional ethics were not construed by these psychologists as an "add-on" to their personal lives or professional roles that could be separately explored; rather, they understood their ethical decisions and behavior in their professional activities

and decisions as flowing naturally from the person whom they are. Along with this intimate connection between personal and ethical commitments come important responsibilities for the school psychologist. Because school psychologists, as helping professionals, are in a position of potentially great influence in the lives of children and families, they recognized the need to be aware of their own biases to prevent undue pressure or influence to make certain decisions that may contradict families' beliefs and values. The participants in this study viewed this responsibility as critical to promoting the welfare of children and preventing harm.

In addition to stating this connection between personal commitments and professional commitments explicitly, school psychologists, like Jill, Robert and Emily, discussed specific personal commitments that intersected with their professional commitments, influencing how they made sense of ethical conflict and ethical responsibilities in their professional world. In some cases, the participants cited personal ethical commitments as a determining factor in the selection of school psychology as their profession. Others cited more specific factors, including family upbringing and religious belief, commitment to civic duty, and parenthood, as personal factors that intersected with professional ethical commitments. The next section is devoted to exploring these critical factors.

Specific Factors and Experiences Impacting Ethical Commitments

The school psychologists in this study varied in the specificity with which they were able to articulate the connection between self and professional ethical commitments.

Some spoke of the relationship in broad, abstract terms, whereas others made more concrete connections between their professional ethical commitments and specific personal commitments, experiences and values. Three of these factors—*family upbringing/religious belief, sense of civic duty, and parenthood*--will now be discussed.

Family Upbringing and Religious Belief. The central role of family upbringing and religion was also important in **Jill's** understanding of what it means to be ethical. Jill believed that her faith development has helped to shape her ethical development and her resulting professional ethical commitments. This coincides with researchers (i.e, Fowler, 1981) who argue that issues of faith, whether religious or non-religious, are “no longer seen as an isolated sphere of one’s life.....(and) should never be separated off from” the rest of one’s life and world view” (Lownsdale, 1997, p. 60). Worthington (1989) explains, “Like two intersecting circles in a Venn diagram, moral and religious development overlap. They have common elements, but neither fully explains the other” (p. 559).

Raised in a religious family and attending private religious schools throughout grade school, **Jill** has internalized values of honesty and fairness. She does not presently characterize herself as a “religious” person, but she nevertheless continues to be committed to these values that were engrained in her early development. For Jill, this means being honest in her interactions with teachers, parents, and administrators:

It just goes back to the person you are, and I just try to be honest, and sometimes I’m almost too honest and that becomes problematic. You have to temper honesty

with the response of the person that you're dealing with. I was raised in a [religious] school, and I think that's been ingrained in me, that you have to do the right thing, you know you have a moral code that you follow and you just need to follow that. That's what is the right thing to do. And I try to have that permeate my life. Although I'm not really that religious now, I think I do have a strong sense of ethics.

Again, the work of Damon and Hart (1992) is useful in understanding Jill's perceptions of ethics. Jill described her current ethical commitments as resulting from a developmental process wherein ethical concerns became increasingly embedded in her personal identity. Although she no longer subscribes to certain religious denominations, doctrines, or practices, she is aware that her developmental experience has positioned particular moral concerns as integral to the person she has become and to the decisions that she makes in her practice. For example, Jill's dedication to being completely honest when interpreting assessments, even at the risk of causing temporary problems in relationships with parents or administrators, has represented the outgrowth of her ethical commitment to honesty which was developed through her early family experience and religious training.

Early experiences and development were also cited by other psychologists as crucial to their present understandings of ethics and ethical behavior. Nick discussed ethical practice as influenced by a host of factors, including prescribed ethical guidelines, as well as his childhood experience and development:

APA has guidelines that are more procedural kinds of things, and a set of personal beliefs as well, about what I want to get out of this job in terms of being a service provider....certainly your *upbringing* has a place in it, and the person you are coming into a job, and how your experience on the job kind of interacts with that.

Participants' references to early experiences provide further support for a developmental view of morality and ethical commitments which has been documented by various theorists and researchers (i.e, Belenky et al., 1986; Damon & Hart, 1988; Gilligan 1982; Gilligan et al., 1990). Rather than referring primarily to ethical guidelines that they became aware of upon entering the profession, they described a more complex, longitudinal process whereby they developed the present values and moral commitments that impact their professional work.

Social and Civic Responsibility. Robert possessed a strong personal commitment to being a good citizen and modeling ethical behavior within his community. He has carried this view into his profession, seeing part of his ethical responsibility as being a positive role model for the students with which he comes into contact:

When you are in schools, when you are walking down those hallways, how you dress, how you walk, how you talk, how you act in assemblies, how you act in classrooms, how you do the things you do...You're a model of behavior. I think you need to project yourself as a model of behavior when you are with kids. So

often the kids that we deal with don't have very good models of behavior. They have just the opposite, which is what they watch on TV, or....Especially as a male psychologist, I think there's an additional burden being a male in schools, because so many of these kids don't have a father. If they do have a male figure at home, the male figure is not nurturing, is rejecting, or punitive in some way, or conducting themselves with behaviors that I wouldn't consider to be healthy behaviors. I think as a male person in schools, these little boys and little girls are watching you in terms of how you are conducting yourself.

In his discussion of this important responsibility, Robert seemed to be taking the perspective of the child, looking at himself through their eyes, from a stance within their worlds. For Gilligan and colleagues (1990), this desire and ability to be responsive to an individual's unique needs and circumstances was one important aspect of an orientation of care.

Parenthood. Commitment to child advocacy took on a different nature and meaning for **Emily** through the personal experience of having children of her own. Presently a mother of four children ranging in age from two to 13, Emily believes that being a parent has transformed her perspectives equipping her with the ability to relate to and validate parents' points of view. When asked to discuss how her perceptions of the ethical facets of practice have changed over the course of her career, Emily replied, "Oh, I know a lot less. A lot more gray. It's not nearly as cut and dry." Upon further

prompting to explain her perspective, Emily attributed this change to two factors:

General life experiences and parenthood:

....having children and living longer....I think it's much more easy to be judgmental about how a parent is parenting a child or what kind of home this child comes from, or "the parent is the problem" kind of thing. But I guess the more I'm a parent and the more I live, not that we don't judge, but "Until you've walked in a man's shoes..." that kind of thing. Much more sensitive, and what it would be like to parent that child 24 hours a day when they have multiple siblings and working. Yeah, I think I've become probably more sensitive.

Being a parent has enabled Emily to be more sensitive and to focus on being responsive to the individual children and family's needs, a perspective founded on Gilligan's notion of care (1990). Emily cited ethical dilemmas that reflected her desire to advocate for children while simultaneously recognizing the feelings and perspectives of parents and families. Interestingly, while discussing these dilemmas that she had encountered in her own professional work, Emily paralleled the discussion with examples from her own parental experience. For instance, she recalled a situation wherein she and her husband had to deal personally with the knowledge that something may have potentially been wrong with her child. Emily cited this experience as one that shaped her present behavior and thinking about parental involvement and her professional interactions with parents. Asked to describe these factors further, Emily replied that when working with children and families, she considers.....:

Being a parent, and thinking ‘What would I want for my child?’ How would I want to be treated, or how would I hear that....Yeah, and just really does make a difference when you have teachers or you hear them say something to you about your child. Or when I thought something was wrong with mine, we had to go through a bunch of tests. I was pregnant, and how I was treated when we were going through all that testing and assessment phase. It was very, a very powerful in how it influenced me.

This influence was also apparent in Emily’s discussion about a case involving a Russian-born student who was in the third grade.

We have a Russian born girl, adopted at age 5 into this country, and she is learning disabled, we called her LD. She acquired language quite rapidly but doesn’t, is not able to do a lot conceptually with the language, so she’s very misleading because she sounds like she knows what she’s talking about but conceptually, I don’t think she’s always there. And she really needs resource support, and there’s no resource support at her school. You know, she’s Russian-born and they have her in a school where there’s lots of international kids, and our decision would be to move her from where she’s comfortable and been in the neighborhood and lived...do you put her in a different school completely, and give her resource support, or do you give her teacher consultant support in that building?

Emily explained that her experience as a parent made her much more sensitive to the family issues inherent in this complex case and led her to emphasize these factors and the child's existing social relationships as the primary concern rather than the most appropriate educational services. For Emily, the major conflict involved:

Whether it's best to keep her at the community school where she's been for the last three years and struggled to develop relationships and where she feels comfortable, and she had a very difficult life her first five years in Russia.

There's a history of abuse, and so she's become a part of this community. Versus the other side is that she would be able to get much better services in the other building because they would be able to give her a lot more service and really make it an education that would be better for her.

The parents' desire to keep their child in the neighborhood and school where she was established and comfortable was a primary factor in Emily's choice to support maintaining the child in her home school:

To finish out this year, we did not move her, we kept her. And I think the parents have to play a big role, I think the school could certainly offer facts and maybe even strengths and weaknesses of each choice, but I really feel it's a parental decision, and the parents support her staying right now.

Emily recognized the importance of accounting for and acknowledging this individual child's needs and the cultural and interpersonal contexts in which she resided. Although she advocates for placing child in the most appropriate educational placement possible, she placed herself in the shoes of the child and the family, elevating these needs above what she viewed as the most appropriate placement in a purely academic sense. She might have made a different decision with a different child under different social and cultural circumstances. She spoke of this circumstance with a voice of care, focusing on responsiveness and minimizing harm for this child and family. Rather than describing this situation in terms of justice and equality, Emily attempted to respond to the child "in that person's terms and contexts" (Gilligan et al., 1990, p. 42). She and the team were careful to consider factors including culture, family values, and community when they made the decision to maintain the child in her original neighborhood school. She did not frame the dilemma and its solution in terms of fulfilling her obligations or making a fair, objective decision; rather, she viewed it as the team's responsibility to make a recommendation and placement that was sensitive to this child's individual needs and contexts.

Summary. The data discussed in this chapter presented strong support for the well-documented connection between the self and one's moral and ethical perspectives and commitments. Often, artificial lines are drawn between one's personal ethical commitments and professional ethical commitments; however, these data indicate that this line is blurred or even erased in reality as school psychologists think about the roots of their ethical commitments both inside and outside of their professional roles. These

school psychologists conceptualized their ethical position within their profession as inextricably interconnected to their personal commitments and the essence of who they are as human beings. They viewed their qualities, habits, characters, values, and ways of thinking as central to ethical reasoning and behavior in practice, as argued by Punzo (1996). For some, professional ethical convictions are framed in such a way that it would be impossible to separate professional ethics from personal moral convictions. Others, though acknowledging the relationship between their personal and professional ethical commitments, did not articulate the relationship as indistinguishable or inextricable but nonetheless referred to their personal ethical commitments when speaking of their professional roles and responsibilities.

Nearly all of the school psychologists mentioned the role of external ethical resources, namely the profession's guidelines and standards, as a factor that they draw upon in their practice. However, although they acknowledged the role of ethical codes, ethical training, and professional organizations in the shaping of ethical thinking and behavior, they did not focus on these external factors as they spoke about their own ethical thinking and behavior. Rather, consistent with researchers interested in identity (i.e., Damon & Hart, 1992), ethical thinking, decisions, and behavior find their lifeforce in the core of personhood and identity. As cited by Damon & Hart, "Self-understanding determines the role of morality in one's life and, consequently, the extent to which one's moral values will determine one's everyday conduct" (1992, p. 458). This theme embodies important implications for training and professional development, topics that I will further articulate in the discussion section.

Clearly, these school psychologists viewed themselves as carrying and exercising their ethical commitments within a system that embodies factors capable of either supporting or hindering ethical practice. The unique characteristics and perspectives of individual practitioners must be understood to fully grasp their ethical commitments. Nevertheless, one must maintain a “reality focus” and realize that professionals are often asked to consider and tailor moral convictions to specific situations and contexts (Punzo, 1996). They are committed to child advocacy, but they face many challenges that sometimes cause them to become frustrated or even to question the viability of those ethical commitments within the system. This salient theme is the topic that I will explore in Chapter 5.

Chapter 5

Construing Ethical Conflict as System versus Individual Tensions

One way that school psychologists construe the ethical dimensions of their professional role is by describing ethical struggles that frequently arise when the needs of the system conflict with the needs of individual children. School psychologists, by the inherent nature of their roles, occupy a unique position within the educational system. On one hand, they are employed by a system, a local district, intermediate school district, or other agency, to ensure the compliance of the organization with state and federal guidelines, to maintain the system, and to ensure that the system is not unduly threatened. On the other hand, school psychologists are also ethically bound to promote the interests of individual children and families. Clearly, this dual responsibility sets the stage for sometimes subtle and other times intense conflicts of interest.

Jacob-Timm (1999) asserted that, “school psychologists who work within the school system must cope with conflicts inherent in the dual roles of pupil advocate and school employee” (p. 208). Others have also addressed these characteristics, asserting that professionals in public service positions “creates a real possibility that individual practitioners will be pressured to put the interests of the agency (as defined by administrators) ahead of the interests of clients or the ethical mandates of professions” (Greenspan & Negron, 1994, pp. 186-187, as cited in Jacob-Timm, 1999).

Ethical problems created by conflicts between child advocacy and systemic demands were evident in the present study. **Nick**, for instance, clearly stated that many of

the ethical struggles that he has faced were “system versus individual type of dilemmas....the needs of the system versus the needs of the individual:”

I would say there is sometimes a variance between the demands of the setting and what I perceive to be behaving in a principled way....I’m sure the people that came up with the special ed. regulations believed themselves to be ethical people. As a school psychologist, I don’t deal with the society at large, I deal with the individual in front of you. And, getting back to what I saw conflicts are, I believe that there are conflicts between the individual needs versus system and societal needs. An individual may need assistance in a specific area, and needs that assistance, but the society or system may see that they do not have the resources or capabilities to provide that service to somebody like that individual. So, there’s a conflict. The individual has the need, and the system, while they may recognize the need, may not feel that they have the resources to meet that need.

Given this tension in the present school psychologists’ perceptions as well as in other empirical studies examining the ethical facets of school psychology practice, I consider it important to examine further how school psychologists conceptualize more specifically the tensions that exist between system employee and child advocate. In the following section, I will summarize the specific factors that the school psychologists in this study pointed to as systemic factors that can create ethical problems when the need of children and the demands of the system conflict.

Factors Contributing to System versus Individual Ethical “Tugs”

In their own individual manner, each of the school psychologists referred to systemic pressures that have created or contributed to the existence of ethical problems and challenges. Jacob-Timm (1999) identified this type of pressure as the most frequent ethical concerns faced by school psychologists. In describing these situations, she refers to them as ethical “tugs” rather than terming these concerns as ethical “problems.” In the present study, I adopted the use of the phrase “ethical tugs” to refer to situations which led school psychologists to think about ethics. Thus, I am interested not only in situations that people would term an “ethical dilemma,” but also in those situations that arouse concern or thoughts about their ethical commitments and obligations.

Emily clearly recognized that inherent in her position as a school psychologist is the need to be concerned with justice and equity. Asked to contrast the ethical concerns of school psychologists with those faced by others types of school psychologists, Emily replied, “Well, you’re dealing with a system and with equity in the system. What’s equitable for Student A versus Student B, where I think in the clinical practice, you’re focused more on a particular child.” She recognized that although she desires to make decisions that will benefit individual children, she must do so within the confines of the system. Emily believed that she was practicing ethically if she was making “the best possible decisions for the child that can be made within the community and the environment that that child is in.” A tension existed for Emily, and for other school psychologists, a tension that was expressed through voices of both care and justice. What were some of the specific facets of the school community that may hinder ethical practice? The school psychologists in this study discussed *limited resources*, *high testing*

caseloads, confusion about client identification, role perceptions, and administrative pressures as particularly problematic.

Limited Resources. One common theme that each psychologist referred to, either directly or indirectly, involved difficulties created by the limited resources to which schools have access. Limited funds often resulted in restricted program options and understaffing which can create heavy pressures for the school psychologists as well as for other educational professionals.

Nick explained that limited financial resources, translating into limited program options, was a factor that school psychologists must often face as they strive to make appropriate program recommendations to support the learning and development of individual students:

An individual may need assistance in a specific area and needs that assistance, but the society or system may see that they do not have the resources or capabilities to provide that service to somebody like that individual, so there's a conflict. The individual has the need, the system, while they may recognize the need, may not feel that they have the resources to meet that need.....The old one is the low-functioning kid who doesn't qualify for special ed., but there's no program to meet the needs of that individual. I think it's becoming worse and worse.....I see the standards being raised, but I don't see any programs in place.

Having worked with these limited resources in his daily practice, Nick believed that balancing the needs of the individual and the needs of the system is the primary role of a school psychologist and that maintaining his ethical standards were critical to professional survival: “I think that’s the job of the school psychologist. How I navigate that is behaving in a way that is ethical. Behaving in a way that is consistent with what I believe is the right thing to do in a given situation.” Nick believed that ethical behavior was a necessity for surviving in a position that has placed multiple demands on him and that often involved conflicting interests of various parties. In a system that often pits individual interests against interests of the system, Nick regarded maintaining one’s ethical standards as essential for successfully serving children and families as a school psychologist. In one sense, maintaining his ethical standards became a *strategy* for navigating the difficult situations that threaten his commitments. Ethical standards therefore become a constant, a *stronghold*, in the demanding “storm” that often characterizes school psychology practice. When discussing situations where he was asked to support decisions that were financially beneficial to the school system but that were not in the best interest of children, he asserted that the only way to handle these situations is to remain committed to his ethical standard of child advocacy. He did not view ethical behavior as an option or a standard to which a school psychologist should aspire; rather, he viewed it as essential to practice.

For some practitioners, the existence of limited resources has had a strong impact on how they define their roles and conceptualize their professional responsibilities. Tom, for example, believed that the increasing need to engage in “*active management of*

special education and general education resources” has become a dominant aspect of his role, one that he has grown to dislike:

It’s having to practice triage in this setting and we are moving closer and closer to a managed care model in the public schools because of resource management issues. To me, that’s an unpalatable thing to have to do. I realize that’s where we are at and I have accepted it, but I wish I did not have to do that.....having to maybe deny resources to people that I think could benefit from them if there were enough to go around. Sometimes, I have to participate in some decisions that shut people out of that process.

Tom’s comment embodied a conflict between justice and fairness and the care of individual students. He expressed the simultaneous need to “help people resolve problems and succeed at what they want to do” while also having to deal with the reality of “having to maybe deny resources” due to limited resources within the system. He framed these responsibilities as a tension that has created growing dissatisfaction and that has in many ways detracted from his ability to support people in reaching their goals. The nature of the job of school psychologist seemed to have conflicted with his beliefs about what is ethical. Further examination of Tom’s interview further illustrated this tension between financial limitations and clinically sound practice and, in some way, between justice and care:

I guess for me, in this [school] setting, I try not to let the economics really get in the way of my decision-making, although it's always in the back of my mind. What impact is this going to have, not only for the kid, but for other kids? You try not to let that get too much in the way, and that's really hard, but it's not my job to define the programs or to fund the programs. It's my job to diagnose whether or not this kid has a handicap, and whether or not they can benefit from something other than what they are getting now.

In the current funding system for special education, only those students who are deemed diagnostically eligible as disabled under federal guidelines are eligible for services. Thus, as a critical member of diagnostic teams within the school system, school psychologists' roles typically are inherently tied to special education as they attempt to determine those students who qualify for services. This current funding structure, according to several of the participants, embodied barriers to ethical practice and created many of the systems versus individual ethical tensions that school psychologists face. **Emily**, citing time and money as the largest barriers to her ideal conception of quality practice, explained how limited resources have created burdens and pressures in her district:

Unfortunately, our roles are tied to special ed., which unfortunately we have to assess to give kids access to service, and especially [district's name] has been very much affected by some of the budget cuts, and special ed. certainly has seen that...yeah, we have decreased school psych. in [district's name] both because

enrollment has decreased, and we're probably not doing as many assessments now because of the new laws, and I think that everyone in special ed. in [district] probably has more work than they can do.

Nick also cited the funding of special education, and the resulting barriers for justifying a school psychologist's work, as hindering his practice. He spoke of how he would remedy this problem:

I think I would be available to every student in the school, as opposed to being restricted to the special ed. population. That is, if there were questions about a student and special ed. wasn't perceived as an outcome of evaluation, but rather just providing information, that wouldn't be hindered in any way....yeah, I guess that would be much more rewarding for me in terms of serving a broader population, as opposed to the special ed. population...I can see kids who aren't special ed., but if there isn't special ed. in there somewhere, there's no justification for it, *because there is no money for it* (emphasis added).

Both **Nick** and **Emily** cited this issue as ethically problematic in their practice. Given the limited services available and the funding structure, school psychologists must typically limit their time to serving only those students who will potentially qualify for special education support. This often prevents them from providing support or preventive intervention for students who are struggling but who are not eligible for special education because, as Nick stated, "there's just no money for it." Second, he felt confined to spend

his time only with a limited number of students who have the potential to qualify for special education services.

Ken, who has been practicing school psychology for 28 years and who practiced prior to the implementation of IDEA and similar state legislation, recalled a time in his early career when financial limitations did not hinder his ability to implement recommendations that he deemed necessary for students' success. He believed that increasingly limited resources have been the major reasons for his shift from idealism to realism in his recommendations:

Idealism is part of my personality where I'm saying I'm trying to reach a more creative side of myself and trying to think of ideas for how to work with the kid. The idealism also comes out of the early years of special ed when there were so many resources available and you had the privilege of being able to think more creatively and let's take the kid downtown and have him work on this kind of a skill and you could just pop them into a bus and go on down there. Now you couldn't dare do that.

In many ways, then, the limited funding available to implement service recommendations has altered the manner in which Ken makes recommendations. Whereas he used to be able to make and implement recommendations that were driven by the students' needs and abilities, he must now temper his recommendations due to limited resources. This situation, according to Ken, has raised many ethical questions. Although he may believe that certain recommendations would be the best for a child, he may not make the

recommendation or advocate for certain services because he is aware of the limited resources. Thus, his ethical commitment to child advocacy is in many ways confined within a system with limited available financial resources.

Heavy Testing Caseloads. School districts, faced with budget cuts, often reduce staffing or make do with present staff coverage, conditions which result in heavier evaluation caseloads for the school psychologists already employed by the system. Hence, another systemic factor that can undermine school psychologists' efforts to meet the needs of individual children and even tempt school psychologists to compromise the quality of services rendered is the *emphasis on testing* and the *high testing caseloads* that many school psychologists face. When asked what makes it difficult to be an ethical school psychologist, **Robert** responded:

Probably, in some ways, the burden of testing because what happens with that is sometimes you want to cut corners when you are overloaded, and you've got 20 kids to see in a month, and the IEPC (Individualized Educational Programming Committee) is coming up and stuff.

Ken agreed that the school setting can hinder his ethical practice "...because of the pressure of numbers and needing to work quickly and trying to make sure you cover all the bases. When you get continual pressure to cut corners."

Joyce also believed that her practice and efficacy was constrained by the limited time that results from heavy caseloads. As suggested by Ken, she often perceived that

the administrative priority is not to maintain ethical practice but to test as many students as possible as quickly as possible:

The way it is now, I could make all kinds of recommendations, and I can talk to parents and talk to the student, but I don't really have the time to follow up on most of that, so it may happen and it may not. I don't really know and I can't really impact that in a big way.

Apparent in Joyce's discussion is the question of whether it is professionally ethical and responsible to make recommendations that may be necessary but that may be unrealistic within time and budgetary constraints. In some cases, Joyce felt forced to change her recommendations because she knew what the school system could and could not provide for the student. Thus, Joyce has found herself facing the ethical dilemma of whether to make recommendations that accurately and fully reflect the child's needs or to temper her recommendations to fit the limits of the system. Thus, she possessed a great deal of professional liberty on the one hand, but she described unspoken institutional barriers that influenced her decisions and recommendations.

Nick also described the relationship between perceived professional liberty and the systemic confines of reality. He believed that his ability to move beyond a testing role to assume other functions has increased over his career; nevertheless, he described his autonomy as "another illusion rather than reality." Asked to explain this statement, he referred to the rigidity of boundaries, so much so that he described the system and its barriers as a "maze" that school psychologists must navigate:

There are things you have to do, so there are very strong boundaries, although they don't always maybe seem that way. In terms of legally, but also requirements in terms of numbers of evaluations you're going to do, the services you are going to provide to a particular school. Um, so that autonomy exists between very rigid sorts of boundaries. So you're a rat in a maze, but you don't know it.

In a profession that is calling for role expansion, Nick focused on the tremendous barriers that hinder school psychologists from realizing their desired functions and their desired ethical commitments. He explained that any liberty school psychologists might appear to have in defining their roles and functions is confined by the stringent legal and financial barriers that characterize the school system. In Nick's experience, school psychologists may have perceived liberty but are actually confined just like "a rat in a maze." This certainly raised ethical concerns for Nick, because he thought that the system confined his practice to certain guidelines, specified functions, and prescribed procedures which many times conflicted with his impression of what is in the best interest of children.

Others' Perceptions of the Role. As described in Chapter 3 within the discussion of role perceptions, a large body of empirical evidence has documented the existence of a discrepancy between school psychologists' perceptions of their roles and functions and the perceptions of school psychologists held by others within the school environment (as discussed in Fagan & Wise, 1994). This discrepancy may hinder school psychologists

efforts to extend beyond a limited testing role in such as way to provide services that better meet the individual needs of students. **Joyce** expressed the difficult task of changing this perception, stating, “I think it’s how everybody already sees the role of the school psychologist. It’s hard to break the role of tester.” **Jennifer** also believed that she was viewed by others as “more of a tester, ‘the test lady’,” despite the fact that she would like to view herself more “in a variety of ways....a communicator....an educator....a counselor.” **Mike** explained that he viewed himself as a professional with many different roles, including consultant, assessor, and systems problem solver. However, he was aware of others’ limited perceptions, qualifying his role description by adding “though other people may not see me that way.” Clearly, based on these descriptions, school psychologists continue to face narrow perceptions of their role that threaten to hinder efforts to expand the role to fit a variety of student and system needs (See Chapter 3 for a complete discussion of role constructions and ethical commitments).

Inflexible Eligibility Criteria. Historically, legislation has mandated that special education programs are available only to children who meet prescribed diagnostic criteria (although recent amendments provide for services for students in general education as well). Based on this fact, state and federally defined program criteria were also cited as a factor that can frustrate school psychologists and detract from the provision of services to individual children in need. **Mike** believed that the rules were sometimes irrelevant to his practice, stating “You’re given a set of rules which you’re supposed to comply to, and yet the rules are sometimes good but sometimes absurd, and the absurdity of the rules makes it very difficult to be an ethical school psychologist.” Thus, rather than serving as

helpful guidelines, Mike thought that the eligibility rules actually prevented him from being able to access services for those students who have a disability and were truly in need of services.

Joyce spoke of this dilemma as one that she experienced in her work with early childhood diagnosis and programming. Asked to discuss the unique ethical issues that she faces in this role, she replied:

Well, in infant and preschool, there is always the ethical dilemma of seeing a kid in trouble and you know they are in trouble, but technically, they are not 50% or lower in any area as being PPI (PrePrimary Impaired), and where do they go? Do you say 'Sorry, there is not room. We aren't going to take you,' or "You don't qualify,' or do you say, 'I know this kid is in trouble. He or she needs help. Just because they don't meet the criteria, we are still gonna put them in.

Joyce's discussion of these circumstances reflects the tremendous difficulty that exists when an ethic of care—"I know this kid is in trouble. He or she needs help"—and an ethic of justice—"We aren't going to take you. You don't qualify"—conflict in a school psychologist's world. Working with preschool children, Joyce knows that early intervention with at-risk children could prevent more serious problems, as well as higher financial costs, down the line for both families and the school system. However, the eligibility criteria with which she was forced to work often confined her and mandated that she choose between two options: 1) Meeting a child's needs and violating the eligibility requirement, or 2) Strictly adhering to the guidelines and potentially preventing

access to services for a child who is in need of intervention. **Emily** also referred to this pressure to meet strict eligibility requirements while also remaining true to her professional opinion of what will benefit the child: “You know, sometimes the laws bind us to meeting certain criteria which may or may not always meet with what we ethically feel is correct.”

These school psychologists described being in a highly uncomfortable position where they were often forced to choose between maintaining their ethical standards for service delivery and adhering to special education eligibility guidelines and established district practices. In many ways, this struggle epitomized the conflict that can exist between commitments to an ethic of justice and an ethic of care. Given the limited funding and resources, special education guidelines are the designated way of selecting the sub-group of students who should receive services. Thus, the current special education system was founded upon concepts of equity, justice, and objective means of determining what is the “right” decision for any given child. The school psychologists in this study have frequently found themselves in situations where they are asked to violate or compromise their ethical commitments to comply with system requirements and legal regulations.

Confusion About Client Identification. One major consequence of the school psychologist’s dual role as system employee and child advocate is that school psychologists must face the often daunting challenge of identifying their primary client. The uncertainty and complexity of this task stands in contrast to the experiences of clinical psychologists and other types of psychologists who define and serve the client

who comes into their offices. A substantial body of evidence suggests that as the school psychologist's role has expanded beyond a strict test-and-place role, clear identification of the client has become even more problematic (Hansen et al., 1989; Fagan & Wise, 1994). Several theorists and researchers have attempted to define the *client* of the school psychologist. Fagan and Wise (1994), who illustrate the multiple definitions of *client* and the resulting consequences of multiple definitions for the practicing school psychologist:

The term *client* may refer to the person in need of professional help, the person who employs a professional, the person paying for the help, the person who is under the protection of another, the person receiving the services of a professional, or the person benefiting from such services. Thus, in the work of the school psychologist, the client may include one or more of the following: Child, parent(s), teacher, principal, special education director, school superintendent, school board, or an agency administrator or governing board (p. 88).

The presence of multiple clients in the school psychologist's world set the stage for what Fagan and Wise termed "divided or mixed loyalties" which exist because they "pit the school psychologist's loyalty to one client against that of another client" (p. 89).

As attested to by each of the school psychologists in this study, this problem of client identification, a problem that often results in divided loyalties, can create difficult ethical problems when the needs of the child and the demands of the system differ. **Mike**

reduced the majority of ethical issues in school psychology to this question of client identification:

I think the key here is the confusion of who the client is, that's the real problem of ethics in school psychology. I think it's never clear who the client is. Is the client the organization you work for, like the school district? Is the client the child? Or is the client the family? Or even is the client the kid himself without the family, or the teacher who made the referral? I think that's the crisis of ethics for the school psychologists, because then if he or she's not clear who the client is, the I think ethical decisions are very hard to make.

Tom agreed, differentiating school psychologists' ethical concerns from those faced by other types of psychologists by pointing to the greater variety of consumers and the resulting increased potential for conflict:

One of the things that are unique [for school psychologists] are the personnel issues that we have to deal with working in an educational setting with large numbers of people, parents, teachers and administrators. There are so many more interactions and so many more potential conflicts of interest than we might have as an individual clinician working individually with a client. There is probably more potential for ethical problems to occur because there are so many competing interests.

Reflecting similar concerns, **Ken's** discussion of his perceptions of ethical responsibility clearly indicated that he viewed himself as a child advocate whose main responsibility was to match children and their needs with appropriate educational programming. He did not merely view assessment as his professional role; rather, he was committed to getting to know the student and helping that students' family to value that student's individual needs and abilities. Yet, even given his strong dedication to advocacy, Ken spoke of the complexity of client identification of school psychology:

For a clinical psychologist, the client is very clear. It's a person who's coming to you for help, even though they might be paid by a health organization or by the parent or somebody like that. Still, the client is the primary focus. It's pretty clear whose rights must be protected. But in the schools, you're hired by somebody, you are working with people, you have all sorts of different possible clients.....parents, teacher, kid, administrator, counselor, all different people. That makes it a little more complicated.

Although Ken believed that to be an ethical school psychologists is to "be aware of who is the client," he acknowledged that this judgment is not always clear. In some of the cases that he has handled, he must make a difficult determination of who his main client is:

First you have to find out who your client is. It's not always the child.

Sometimes, it's the parent, sometimes it's the administrator. Often, you have

more than one client and you have to decide which is the most important one in some way. That takes a real struggle.

As Ken talked about this struggle, he utilized both a voice of care and a voice of justice. He expressed a strong desire to be committed to caring for multiple individuals within the system. Thus, he defined his moral concern, consistent with an ethic of care, in terms of caring for individuals and advocating for their needs (Lyons, 1982). However, an element of the voice of justice is also present in Ken's remarks. In many ways, Ken felt obligations to the students and families with whom he worked and he was frustrated when systemic barriers prevented him from meeting the obligations which were his by virtue of his role. Examining Ken's interview holistically, however, his obligations seemed to stem from a true commitment to knowing individual students, understanding their unique needs, abilities, and contexts, and promoting their welfare while seeking to prevent harm. Thus, Ken depended more on a voice of care when describing his commitments to student welfare

To illustrate the struggle that can arise with unclear identification of one's main client, Ken shared an ethical situation where he was working with a student whose family, in his professional opinion, needed intervention. However, according to district referral guidelines and special education eligibility criteria, he did not believe that a comprehensive evaluation was warranted. However, a dilemma existed because of other concerns contributing to the decision of whether to evaluate formally:

This is a case that was referred to us by the parents. They said that that child could have a learning disability, could be depressed, could have ADHD, this and that and on and on with all these symptoms. Indeed, the child was having some difficulty with grades in 8th grade. We looked back through the file and found no evidence that the child might have a learning disability. We couldn't find evidence that the child had ever been depressed before from the records at the school. We were left with a dilemma. Also the parents wanted the child tested to find out what the child's learning style was but they didn't want special ed. So first you have a child that does not have a long-term disability based on what you found in the file. Second, you have a child who is probably not disabled as far as a learning disability goes. And third, the parents are not requesting special ed. Those are all good reasons to turn down that referral. We knew a little bit more about the case than what I've told you here. We knew that the older sister of this young man was depressed a few years ago and there was a whole problem of school phobia that was resolved when the child went to a psychiatrist. We also knew that the child being referred was starting to miss school. So, we kind of delayed for a while. We met with the parents and told them we thought they should take the child for counseling, which would be our standard recommendation when we see a problem that has come up more recently and looks like a family issue and not so much a long term special ed issue. They didn't go for counseling. They just kept bugging us. They wanted us to test him. Finally we had this meeting with the child study committee and I presented the two dilemmas. I said we have these reasons why we shouldn't test and the

reason I think we should test is because I don't think they are acting in the best interest of the child.

In thinking about this dilemma, Ken referred to his dedication to child advocacy in the form of "protecting the interest of the child" which ultimately led him to decide to test:

Based on what we see, we don't think they [the family] are recognizing what is going on with this kid. So we need to protect the kid here even though it may not be a good reason to test, we think we have to test to find out what's going on. It might illuminate a whole bunch of family issues and might get them to therapy or whatever. So we all agreed we are going to test him.

In this situation, Ken and the rest of the team members supported their decision to test, despite that fact that testing did not appear warranted in relation to formal guidelines, by elevating child advocacy above concerns about justice or eligibility criteria. The outcome of the case included identification of ongoing family problems that were undoubtedly affecting the student, as well as identifying intervention for both the student and the entire family. Thus, Ken and the team's commitment to promoting the child and family's welfare resulted in much needed intervention, despite the fact that they violated prescribed system guidelines:

Well it turned out to be a child abuse issue and not only that but we sent for records and found out the child had been in counseling years ago and the father

did have a psychiatric diagnosis. Not the child but the father. All sorts of things were going on. So we did evaluate and did find out that the child was significantly depressed now. Then we sent them to a counselor and all sorts of things got started. Not resolved, but we got it started, so we felt good that the solution was a good one to protect the kid.

Ken spoke of the need to recognize the presence of multiple clients when he stated, “The client was the kid, because we were trying to protect the kid, but the issue we were going after was the family.” He seemed to recognize that to deal with the demands of multiple clients within a system, a school psychologist must develop the awareness that many situations involve multiple clients with sometimes competing needs and agendas. As asserted by Fagan and Wise (1994), this realization may be the hallmark of an experienced school psychologist:

With experience, the school psychologist comes to understand that almost all referrals of children involve several clients. To minimize client conflicts, the school psychologist persists in keeping the interest of the child as the most important focus of the assessment and intervention process. Each of the potential clients presumably is most concerned with doing what will have the greatest benefit for the child....School psychologists assure all clients that their job is not to make decisions for the clients or the child, but rather to provide professional judgments on behalf of the welfare of the child, who theoretically is the focus of everyone’s concern (p. 90).

Although Ken recognized the need to consider child and family needs as primary, he also recognized system factors that make limitation of referrals necessary for professional survival:

....You have to be careful. Think of all the referrals you get in school. If you start testing every kid who's having a semester with poor grades, you're going to have no end to referrals. You're going to be overwhelmed with those kind of cases....sometimes we have to make hard decisions about that.

Ken's discussion above provided a prime illustration of the complexity and intense difficulty that school psychologists face. On the one hand, he was committed to knowing individual children and making recommendations that will promote their welfare. However, he recognized that within the confines of a system that has limited resources, his decisions must also take into consideration such factors as justice, equity among students regarding potential access to students, and objective means of determining eligibility.

Tom also described this realization as he talked of his need to focus on the children's needs as central and to continue being concerned with other needs within the system:

Rather than the system determines the priorities, it's the need of that child and their situation that should determine our priorities and decision-making. It

doesn't mean you ignore....we don't have unlimited resources, that's for sure, but we stay centered on the case that we are working on right then...that's what our concern is.

Nick also referred to the complexity of client identification that sometimes leads him to make a decision that might differ from his personal moral sense about a situation. As a school psychologist, he believed that his main role was to advocate for students. He added, "The job really doesn't mean anything to me if I'm not focusing on the individual and what's best for them. If I'm serving as an administrator, a gatekeeper, or a "cog" in how the system functions, then I should have gotten an MBA." When asked to describe a dilemma that he had encountered in his own practice, he described a situation where he was evaluating a student with autism to make appropriate programming recommendations:

When you're working at the district level and are an employee of the district, there's more subtle pressure on the individual to conform to meet administrative goals. And in this case, the administrative need was to provide as few services as possible to defray costs...but I decided that I wasn't being paid as an administrator, I was being paid to advocate for this student, and although the \$70,000 or \$60,000 [the district] was spending on him probably could have saved twenty at-risk kids who would have grown up to be tax payers and returned their investment to society 100 times, that was not my concern. My concern was what

was best for the student, and realizing that, I continued to advocate for as much as we could get, and I felt just fine about that.

To resolve this ethical conflict, then, Nick chose to focus on the needs of this individual client while disregarding the needs of the administrators and the system. Justifying his decision in ethical terms, Nick described how his obligations for child advocacy overrode any systemic needs. Asked to discuss the reasons for making this decision, Nick conveyed his perception of his responsibilities as a school psychologist

Your role defines your responsibility in a given context [emphasis added]. If I were just an average Joe on the street, I would say it's ridiculous that this district's spending this much money on that one kid when they could use that money and get much more bang for the buck.....I believe that if an individual is your client, there are responsibilities associated with that, and they are responsibilities to that individual and not to the system.

Applying the concept of moral voice to Nick's dialogue illuminates some important inherent struggles that he faced in his position. On the surface, Nick's reasoning process may seem to reflect an ethic of care, emphasizing meeting the needs of individual students. However, his understanding that his "role defines [my] responsibility in a given context" was consistent with analysis of a justice orientation (Gilligan, 1990) wherein "the moral dilemmas of conflicting claims have to do with conflicts of obligation, duty or commitment *stemming from role-relationships one might*

have” (p. 43). Nick’s rationale for his decision did not seem to rest mainly on responsiveness and promotion of an individual child’s needs, though this certainly was a consideration. Rather, Nick appeared to be motivated to meet his professional obligation of student advocacy that is his because of the roles that he fills, reflecting more of a justice orientation. Thus, there was a clear connection between how Nick defined his role and his resulting ethical commitments (as discussed in Chapter 3). This position was clear as he further explained his reasons for advocating for the program expenditures for the student: “I believe that an individual is your client, there are *responsibilities* that are associated with that, and they are responsibilities to that individual, and not to the system.” Nick did not seek resolution of this dilemma to restore relationships or connections between people. Instead, his major motivation was in meeting his obligations and responsibilities, reflecting a clear justice emphasis. Nevertheless, Nick’s summary of his perspective on the ethical dimensions of school psychology practice reflects a hint of a voice of care, with Nick focusing on the opportunity that he has for making meaningful differences in people’s lives. Sometimes, his efforts to help people may mean that he has strayed from the strict guidelines that govern his practice:

I don’t feel good about this job unless I’m helping other people, and I’m not making a ton of money, and I did this because that’s what I want to do. I will do what it takes to meet that goal, and it may sometimes mean that I don’t always walk the straight and narrow.

Client identification becomes even more complicated for school psychologists who are employed by an intermediate school district but who are working in local districts. **Joyce**, for example, thought that it was most ethical “to keep the needs of the students and the families you serve as your main priority,” but she struggled with maintaining this ethical commitment in the face of multiple-level systemic pressures.

Our administration sees their customers as the local school district. I do, to some extent, but I see my main customers as being the student and their family.

Sometimes you can kind of get into that dilemma because my main customer is the student but my supervisor’s main customer is the local school district. We can get into arguments as to what is most appropriate for that person.

Worthy of further examination is Joyce’s choice of the word “customers” to describe the people whom she serves. This word suggests a distancing, a relationship that exists not because of personal commitment but rather because of the expectations of one’s professional role. Thus, although Joyce views the student and the family as the primary consideration in her practice, her words do not reflect the intimacy and commitment that form the core of an ethic of care (as described in Lyons, 1982). One must also consider, however, the possibility that Joyce’s use of this word reflects the system’s attitudes about child and family services. This word choice may therefore be merely another example of how systemic commitments and priorities may infiltrate the thinking of the school psychologist.

Transient Nature of the Role. School psychologist often serve multiple schools and may spend only one day, or even less time, in any one building in a given week. This factor can hinder the development of relationships and thus serve as a systemic barrier to providing sound school psychological services. Fagan and Wise (1994) described the school psychologist as commonly treated as outsiders or “guests” in the school system rather than a “family members.” **Mike** explained:

I think my ideal role would be to have the school psychologist much more involved with the kid and the family and the program. I think that’s the mistake that special ed. has made for school psychologists over the years. They’ve become people that are in and out all the time. You go in, you see the kid, do a bunch of stuff as fast as you can, you do to the next kid, and then if you have any kind of professional morals, you invest in the kid as long as you can, and then you have to move on.

Jennifer also disliked this facet of her role, expressing that it is difficult to form relationships necessary to feel integrated into the system:

There is just the feeling that I’m in so many different schools, and it’s hard to feel like you really belong. Sometimes you do, and you get along with teachers well, but it’s that difficult problem of just being a part of the school. I don’t know, you’re just never quite ‘in the club.’

When speaking about their ideal role, many of the school psychologists believed that being in one district would solve this problem. However, even those psychologists working in one district described role misperceptions and strained relationships that created problems with their complete “belonging” within the system.

Educational Philosophy. In Chapter 1, I described the multiple factors that have influenced the changing role of the school psychologists. In addition to legal, economic, and socio-cultural reforms, changing educational philosophies and changing roles of educational institutions in today’s society have contributed to the broadening roles and responsibilities of school psychologists. Describing this reform effort, **Mike** believed that changing philosophies and expectations regarding the role of the school system have also created a barrier to ethical practice and quality psychological services for children:

....it’s also a philosophy of “What’s the job of the schools” and there’s been a lot of historical lawsuits about teaching values in the schools, and don’t do treatment, and “You’re just supposed to teach my kid” kind of thing. So I think society has to decide who’s going to take care of the others kinds, the affective kinds of teaching for kids, and if it’s going to be community mental health that deals with those kinds of problems, then we’ve got to have better community mental health services.....the HMO’s and the restrictions on outpatient therapy for insurance companies has limited, even for wealthy people, the availability of reasonable therapy. I think the school has to take part of that.

As described in Chapter 1, many researchers and educational reformers have argued that to meet the needs of today's students and families, schools must adopt a central role in multi-agency service delivery that will meet multiple social, emotional and psychological needs (Ascher, 1990; Knitzer, 1993; Munger, 1991). To survive in and contribute meaningfully to a school's efforts, the school psychologist must broaden their skills and expertise. The broadening role of schools in the lives of children undoubtedly introduces opportunities for school psychologists to expand their roles, but it also introduces many complicated ethical questions regarding the appropriate place for values and affective education, adequate services to meet the mental health needs of a broad spectrum of children and families, and restriction of therapy by insurance companies. According to Mike, before schools and school psychologists fully embrace these expanded roles, they should evaluate carefully the consequences of this type of reform effort and determine whether schools are able to provide these services effectively and efficiently.

Mike cited a second educational philosophy and practice that made his practice difficult. Within education over the past 15 years, there has been an increasingly strong push for the full inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms. He believed that the move toward full inclusion of students with disabilities has created new ethical challenges for school psychologists. Mike explained:

One of the big issues is the mainstreaming and the total inclusion of kids. I mean, I think that's an ethical issue for me. I think that that is a misguided law or guideline, and not that it's wrong, but I think it's misused, and I think that the

purpose that people wanted out of having their severely handicapped kids in the general population has been at least as detrimental to kids as it has been useful.

In some cases, Mike has found himself working with students with severe needs who, in his opinion, needed more support than could be given in the general education classroom. However, he has felt pressure from parents, as well as from the field of education in general, to recommend full inclusion for the child for social-emotional reasons. Thus, this push toward full inclusion, though sometimes serving to meet students needs more appropriately, can also create ethical struggles for school psychologists in cases when students would not benefit from inclusion as much as they would from more supportive programming.

Administrative Pressure. A specific problem that accompanies the lack of clarity in identifying the school psychologist's client is administrative pressure to act a particular way. Recent research (Jann & Hyman, 1991; Jann, Hyman & Reinhardt, 1992; McMahon, 1993; Pope & Vetter, 1992) indicates that many of the dilemmas faced by school psychologists involved pressures from administration to act unethically by placing systemic needs ahead of student needs. Most recently, a survey of school psychologists, conducted by Jacob-Timm (1999), indicated that the most common category of ethically troubling incidents related to struggles to act in the best interest of students and to maintain ethical standards, despite pressure from administrators to act unethically. Many of these ethical conflicts between school psychologists and administrators (20 of 49) related to special education eligibility, placement, and services.

Joyce has experienced administrative pressure to act unethically in situations where her recommendations would result in large monetary costs to the district. She shared one example of this struggle:

If there is a student who is having a lot of trouble or has CP (cerebral palsy) or Down Syndrome, and my ethics might tell me that this student isn't gonna survive very well without at least some time with an aide to move around the building or to get things done, and that might not happen.

In this case, Joyce would feel pressure to sacrifice the student's needs to avoid a substantial cost to the school district. Rather than focusing solely on her professional impression of what the student needs, the financial pressures of the school district entered into her decision and created ethical struggles for Joyce.

One of the dilemmas described by Jill clearly illustrated the intense administrative pressure that often accompanies a school psychologist's diagnostic role. She recalled a situation wherein an administrator pressured her to retain a certain diagnostic decision and programming recommendation when she thought a change in programming was necessary. The administrator seemed to be primarily interested in the programming costs to the district and the political issues connected to the family's desire to retain the original diagnosis. Jill's conflict in this situation involved her desire to be honest about her diagnostic impression coupled with administrative pressure to make other recommendations:

..being caught between the administration and *what I felt was right* (emphasis added), and feeling some pressure from someone else to say something that really wasn't true or accurate. And wanting to please people that you have a long-standing relationships with, like the building principal

Honesty came at a price to Jill in this situation. She described feeling very isolated and unsupported:

That IEPC was a grueling IEPC, and I had no support....my director sat there and glared at me, and the building principal was unhappy with me, and the family, at that meeting....it was a very powerful meeting and they came and talked about how they had cried about the conversation I had with them....the administration was really not supportive and [even] wanted me to disappear.

Jill clearly expressed the strong dissonance that she experienced as she tried to balance the school system's demands against what she perceived as the child's and family's needs. Asked to discuss the factors that she considered in this situation, she responded:

Existing relationships that I have with administrators....[and], to some extent, feeling empathy for the family, but also feeling that in the child's best interest, that family constellation needed to come to more of a resolution than it had come to. I needed to be honest, and teachers needed to feel that, you know, they needed to know accurately where the child was, not pretend he was something else.

Jill's ethical dilemma and how she chose to resolve the dilemma largely reflected a voice of justice. For Jill, honesty was a primary motivation for her professional decision-making and was *universally applicable* in all situations encountered. The universality and impartiality of this motivation is characteristic of Kohlberg's ethic of justice (Kohlberg, 1969, 1984). Rather than expressing a commitment to remaining responsive to a child's unique situations and contexts, she emphasized the need to be honest in all situations, regardless of the outcome. Thus, although she described her role as one of child advocate and systemic problem-solver, she emphasized universal applicability when she identified and solved this ethical problem.

Ken also reported being faced with a situation wherein a principal unilaterally placed a child with an emotional impairment into an "inappropriately classified classroom." Believing that this placement was detrimental to the child, a social worker on Ken's team reported the case to a protection and advocacy representative. This referral prompted the principal to call a meeting of all special education staff with the purpose of identifying the person who had made the report. Ken recalled that although he supported the social worker's report and opposed the administrator's unilateral action, he did not voice his opinion for fear of losing his job. He stated, "It's an interesting thing when you are sitting there and you've got a job on the line and you're paying a mortgage, and you've got a family and all these sorts of things. You're feeling like 'Well, how much am I going to say here?'"

Administrative pressure can also determine in large part the influence of legal mandates on a school psychologist's behavior. Tom explained that in his district, limited

monetary resources are a strong determinant in how his administrator enforced compliance with special education laws:

Well, in our school district, there is a heavy emphasis on IDEA compliance. At times, we are made to be slaves to those timelines and sometimes there are things more important in the daily flow of activity than whether you are on time with a re-eval. or not, and we can become a little too rigid and be slaves to that criteria. I think a lot of that would depend on your boss and what they expect of you, how much emphasis they place on compliance and so forth.....In [district's name], we don't have a lot of money or a lot of staff [so] there is a heavy emphasis on number or quota. How much we should get done and unfortunately we are in a situation where we have to meter our services so that we can make sure that we get everything done that must be done. At times, that creates conflicts of interest.

Administrative pressure is thus often driven, at least in part, by monetary restrictions. When asked to identify the kinds of ethical issues encountered in practice, Tom immediately discussed the way that limited economic resources creates ethical pressures.

.....the pressure to place kids or not place kids in special education for reasons other than what are right and appropriate, or for reasons that are not in the best interest of the child but in someone else's best interest. The interference of the economic situation that we find ourselves in as a school district or individual

buildings....Maybe one of the great challenges I face and I think we all face is the reality of resource management issues, particularly money and competition from outside. Not that that should encourage unethical behavior, but I think in some ways it changes your priorities about where you should be directing your energy and your resources knowing that.

The critical role of administrative pressure was also apparent in the school psychologists' discussion about the importance of administrative support. Just as administrative pressure created many ethical problems and dilemmas for school psychologists, administrative support was viewed as central to the ability to make and execute ethical decisions within the system. Mike, for instance, recalled one incident where the special education support team reviewed a student case and decided that there was not sufficient concern to pursue a comprehensive evaluation: "It was my judgment at the meeting that the information about the child functioning level was already known and the problem was that they needed to just adjust their curriculum in the class a bit." As a result of this decision, the referring teachers in the system placed pressure on the support staff to change their decision.

Mike cited administrative support as a key to resolving this conflict: "...the principal went in and talked to those teachers....I didn't even know and he never said anything to me about it, but that's what I mean. He was kind of protecting our turf." In this example, administrative support not only allowed them to resolve this potential conflict, but it also enabled Mike and his colleagues to act in what they determined to be an ethical manner. This example, then, illustrates the important role that the

administration can play in supporting a school psychologist's ethical practice. A supportive administrator can facilitate ethical practice, whereas an administrator focused solely on finances and caseload numbers can make it very difficult for school psychologists to practice according to their ethical convictions and commitments.

Tom, too, when discussing how his roles and functions have changed over the course of his career, referred to administrative support as being crucial to competent, ethical service delivery:

Here in [district's name], it's been the administration's orientation that not only school psychologists but teacher consultants and social workers, teachers of speech and language impaired, all sort of adopt or embrace a model of collaborative consultation.

Compared to many of the other school psychologists interviewed in this study, Tom presented a substantively different conception of the position and responsibility of the school psychologist within the larger system. He referred to this responsibility as the "conscience" of the system:

I feel like one of the roles we serve as school psychologists is sort of a conscience of the school district maybe and, not to sound lofty about that, but we don't necessarily have the same allegiances or political ties that other disciplines or groups of people have here. We can afford to take one step back and hold the mirror up a little bit....our main concern is to maximize the potential of the school

district, and I don't think the school district can be totally effective if they are engaging in unethical or inappropriate or improper practices and certainly illegal practices. We can help maximize potentials that way.....Our main concern is to maximize the potential of the school district, and I don't think the school district can be totally effective if they are engaging in unethical or inappropriate or improper practices.

Tom understood the school psychologist as having fewer obligations to the system than other educational professionals. Asked why school psychologists, as opposed to other support staff, are in the position to "hold the mirror to the system," he referred to the school psychologist's lack of an ongoing caseload:

Most school psychologists don't really have a vested interest one way or the other in whether a kid qualifies for services, so whether they do or not is not really a concern. It's the truth-seeking that's the concern, the fact-finding, assessing all the dynamics of the case and weighing the positive against the negative and helping people see that...Not having to worry about a particular caseload other than here where we are expected to complete so many assessments, it's not really an issue.

Several points must be made concerning Tom's statement. First, the manner in which Tom framed the determination of eligibility reflects a strong element of justice. He suggested that when working with children and families to determine eligibility and make

recommendations, school psychologists can and should remain detached and “don’t really have a vested interest” in whether the child qualifies for services. Kohlberg (1984), in describing moral voices, suggested that a voice of justice is founded upon impartiality and justice apart from responsiveness to an individual’s unique needs and circumstances. In suggesting that school psychologists are disengaged from their work, Tom clearly employed a voice of justice and described an assessment process that was oriented toward objective means of meeting one’s professional tasks and obligations. His ethical commitments seemed to be based on an objectified, detached approach rather than on relationships, responsiveness, or the provision of care to students and families.

Second, Tom appeared to understand himself and other school psychologists as the *holders of the truth*—the “truth seekers”—who serve as the “moral police” of the school system. He thus viewed himself as facing a great deal of pressure not only to monitor and be responsible for his own ethical behavior and decisions, but also to monitor the ethical decisions of the system. Again, this view stemmed largely from his perception of school psychologists as detached in some ways from the rest of the educational system. This detachment, according to Tom, allows the school psychologist to oversee the workings of the entire system and to serve as the “moral conscience” of the entire system. In contrast, a person utilizing a voice of care might describe school psychologists as more personally and integrally involved in the process, as situated in many different relationships within the system, and as responsive to the individual needs and circumstances of each child and of each player within the system. From a care perspective, school psychologists would be less apt to make moral and ethical judgments from the position of a detached observer or evaluator of moral action; rather, they would

be concerned about commitments to relationships and advocating for processes that would preserve and develop relationships while promoting the care of both the school psychologists and all others within the system. As he described his perceptions, Tom provided a clear example of a strong voice of justice as he described his role as a school psychologist, his position within the rest of the system, and his approach to identifying and handling ethical conflict.

Lack of Empirical Support for Special Education Intervention. One unresolved problem in school psychology practice relates to the lack of empirical evidence for special education services for students with mild disabilities (Reschly & Ysseldyke, 1995). Outcome studies exploring the efficacy of special education continue to yield uncertain results, casting doubt upon the utility of current diagnostic procedures and treatments (Dunn, 1968; Kavale, 1990; Reschly, 1987). For **Joyce**, the entire special education system, more specifically the lack of empirical evidence to support its efficacy, created a major ethical issue:

An ethical issue is knowing that the researchers have generally shown that special education is not necessarily a good thing but that is still the way it is, and so a lot of times you wrestle with “If I test this child and say they are eligible and move them into special education, is that a good thing or not?” That, to me, is a really big issue.

Jennifer, who happened to work in the same intermediate school district as **Joyce**, also saw the inconclusive evidence for the effectiveness of special education as an ethical problem “that kind of overflows everything.” Ultimately, many school psychologists described their overriding goal as advocating for the educational and social-emotional needs of children. Often, within the current system, the school psychologist’s role in this process is tied inherently to special education (See previous sections of this chapter for full discussion of this issue). Thus, with the lack of documentation of special education’s effectiveness in promoting educational and social-emotional success for students, the entire assessment and eligibility determination function of the school psychologist becomes a major ethical concern. **Jennifer**, **Joyce**, and the rest of the other participants, expressed a commitment to child advocacy that infiltrates all aspects of their practice. However, making recommendations for special education services that are not empirically supported introduced ethical concerns about whether one’s recommendations are actually driven by concern for students’ welfare.

In situations where school psychologists are faced with political pressure to make an eligibility decision that may not be empirically supported, **Tom** believed that his main role was to serve as “truth-seeking” in the face of various political and monetary pressures. To resist administrative pressure to act unethically, **Tom** thought it was critical to:

.....consider the body of evidence independent of the pressure that other people are putting on you to make the decision. I know that’s hard to do, but remember what I said about us being truth seekers, maintaining that orientation throughout

the diagnostic process. Trying to insulate yourself, which is virtually impossible to do, from that political pressure to meet somebody else's needs and really get to the bottom of what is going on with the child.

Clearly, the school psychologists in this study experienced administrative pressures that challenged their ethical commitments and sometimes led them to question whether unwavering commitment to ethical practice within the system was possible. However, the school psychologists in this study provided hope that school psychologists can and do work diligently to remain committed to child advocacy and their other ethical convictions, despite these intense pressures. Existing research (Jann et al., 1992; Pope & Vetter, 1992) has indicated that school psychologists resist administrative pressure to act unethically, choosing instead to act in the best interest of students and families. The psychologists in this present study discussed specific ethically difficult situations in which they chose to resist administrative pressures and deal with the consequences. **Ken**, for example, discussed an ethical dilemma where he supported the ethical decisions and actions of a colleague, even though he felt that both her job and his job could be on the line. **Nick** advocated for an individual aide for a student with autism, despite administrative resistance due to the high monetary costs, stating "I believe that an individual is your client....and they are responsibilities to that individual and not to the system." Finally, **Jill** also resisted administrative pressure to support a diagnosis that she did not feel was accurate, risking her ongoing relationship to maintain her diagnostic honesty. These three examples illustrate the very difficult situations that school psychologists face, but they also highlight the risks and consequences that many of them

are willing to take to maintain their ethical commitments and obligations. Even in the face of strong administrative pressure, strain in professional interpersonal relationships, and loss of one's position, these school psychologists were willing to voice their ethical convictions and maintain their commitments to advocating for children within the school system. The school psychologists, in the three examples noted above, exercised a voice of justice in maintaining their ethical commitments. In an observation that is critical to this present investigation, school psychologists did not utilize care-based moral reasoning to withstand administrative pressures. What sense can be made of this important observation? The fact that a voice of justice was more clearly evident than a voice of care illuminates the strength of contextual factors in school psychologists' moral thinking, an issue that will be completely examined in Chapters 8 and 9.

Summary. Consistent with recent quantitative survey data (Jacob-Timm, 1999; Pope & Vetter, 1992), the school psychologists participating in this study described tension between their roles of system employee and child advocate. They frequently found themselves confronted with conflicting interests and assumed a precarious position of trying to balance these interests. On the one hand, school psychologists believed that their main responsibility was to advocate for the welfare of children and families, as was fully discussed in Chapter 3. Yet, they described real and intense pressure to place the interests of the system ahead of the interests of individual children and their own personal and professional ethical commitments. This tension can create very real and frustrating barriers to exercising one's moral convictions and to expressing freely one's moral voice. As will be explored fully in Chapters 8 and 9, administrative and systemic pressures can

cause school psychologists' moral voices to be suppressed. The voice of justice was more clearly evident than the voice of care as school psychologists strove to reconcile their ethical commitments to children with the intense pressures of the system.

To assume, however, that the tension is one between a harsh, cold, bureaucratic system and a warm personal relationship with the child is not accurate in light of the present data. To equate the school system with a justice orientation and the care orientation with the needs of individual students is inaccurate and simplistic. These data indicated that the system is not without a face; rather, it is comprised of multiple relationships to which the school psychologist may form both personal and professional allegiances. In the next chapter, I will explore this idea by examining how school psychologists construe ethical responsibility and conflict not only between system and individual, but also within a complicated web of relationships that exist within the system.

EXPLORING ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF PRACTICE:
LISTENING TO VOICES OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

VOLUME II

By

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A DISSERTATION

Submitted to
Michigan State University
In partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of Counseling, Educational Psychology and Special Education (CEPSE)

1999

Chapter 6

Construing Ethical Practice in School Psychology as a Complex Web of Relationships

Another way that school psychologists understand and communicate the ethical complexity of practice is in terms of the multiplicity of relationships that exist. To portray the ethical struggles of school psychologists as concerns for individual children versus the needs of the broader system is inaccurate. The system within which a school psychologist is situated is not merely a bureaucratic entity without a face or human dimension. The system, according to the present data, is a complex web of relationships that are in many ways interdependent. As school psychologists discussed their understandings of ethical commitments and their experiences with ethical problems, they conceptualized these problems as situated within a specific context of relationships and interpersonal interchanges. Hence, the precise nature of the interplay between relationships and ethics in a school psychologist's world is worthy of specific examination because, as Piaget asserted, "Apart from our relationships with people, there can be no moral necessity" (1965, as cited in Gilligan, 1990).

Several existing empirical studies have demonstrated the centrality of this complex web of relationships for the ethical practice of school. Jacob-Timm (1999), for instance, found that major categories of ethically troubling incidents faced by school psychologists included pressure from administrators to act unethically, struggles to maintain ethical standards despite pressure from parents, general conflicting relationships, and confronting unethical practices of colleagues. Each of these categories

involves a relationship between a school psychologist and another party within the school system. Clearly, these data support the primacy of relationships in the ethical domain of school psychological practice.

Many potential reasons could explain the increasing primacy of relationships in school psychology practice. School psychologists are becoming increasingly involved with a broader range of people that schools must serve because of new legislation, emphasis on interagency collaboration in the education of children, and the increased time that school psychologists spend in consultation (see complete discussion of these factors in Chapter 1). With the expansion of the school psychologist's role into more of a consultative and problem-solving function (Fagan & Wise, 1994; Jacob-Timm, 1988), successful practice of school psychology "depends heavily upon the relationships among individuals involved and the cultural expectations about those relationships" (Fagan & Wise, 1994, p. 88).

Untangling the Web: Balancing the Needs of Multiple Players in the System

Consistent with existing research and discussions within the school psychology literature, school psychologists must often work to balance the needs of many people including students, families, teachers, administrators, and communities. This responsibility is outlined as a school psychologist's ethical responsibility in the NASP ethical guidelines: "*School psychologists shall attempt to resolve situations in which there are divided or conflicting interests in a manner which is mutually beneficial and protects the rights of all parties involved.*" Although this ethical responsibility is clearly outlined in standardized codes, the school psychologists in this study struggle with how

to balance the needs of multiple parties in a way that “protects the rights of all parties involved.”

The participants in this study relayed several examples when they were placed in the position of having to balancing multiple and potentially conflicting needs and agendas. They described the difficulties, and even seeming impossibilities, of striving for solutions that protected the rights of all involved parties. **Mike** thought that interpersonal skills and the ability to relate successfully with multiple people in potentially conflicting situations were critical for any school psychologist’s success. He conceptualized the formation and maintenance of the web of relationships in which he exists as an “art” which is critical to his effectiveness in the schools:

I think it’s an art. I think the biggest part of being a school psychologist that makes you successful is your ability to relate instantly to people and develop trust in people. If you don’t have that, I don’t think you’re ever going to be a good, accepted school psychologist. I mean, that would be the downfall of a school psychologist, and that’s, interpersonal relationships, are an art, not a science, that’s how I see it.

Nick, a psychologist who is relatively new in his district, also spoke of the importance of interpersonal skills and relationships in his practice. He described how the formation of relationships is critical to gaining entry into the system and moving beyond a strict testing role:

I think you certainly spend the first year of two years just learning what the parameters of the job are, so I think it changed in that I became more efficient at the required pieces of the job, which allowed me more energy to do the things that were more interesting to me....[like] doing the consultation piece, seeing kids individually, more service-oriented in a face-to-face way as opposed to doing an evaluation. I find that as I work in districts and develop relationships, with my abilities and training and the needs of a district, that often times, I can move away from the evaluation piece, and do some other things that I do have training in, and meet the needs of the district....

The school psychologist's challenge of gaining entry into the system has been discussed by many researchers and theorists interested in the field of school psychology (Fagan & Wise, 1994; Sarason, 1971). Often perceived by others within schools as the "guest in the house of education" (Fagan & Wise, 1994, p. 85), the school psychologist may have the potential of being perceived as and treated as "outsiders." To dispel these notions and gain entry to the system, school psychologists must be aware of the nature of the system, the process of change in the schools (or lack thereof, as described by Sarason, 1971), and the power of interpersonal relationships in gaining access to the system.

Clearly, the development and maintenance of interpersonal relationships is critical to the professional survival of school psychologists. Yet, to say that the school psychologist is merely in a position of balancing the needs of multiple players is to fail to capture the complexity of the social world in which school psychologists function. Rather, one must look deeper to understand more fully the nature and dynamics of this

web of relationships. One way that school psychologists understand the relationship web is in regard to their need to strive constantly to balance the needs and demands of various people with whom they work. With experience, school psychologists appear to become more able to see and address the needs of multiple consumers, reflecting the recognition of their multiple clients. **Ken's** discussion of his ethical development provides a good example of this developed understanding. Over the course of his career, Ken has believed that he has become less idealistic and more practical, largely due to his growing ability to consider the needs of everyone within the system and not just the needs of individual children:

I'm still more of an idealistic kind of person and I get around that by not apologizing for it. When I get into a meeting on a kid, I want to brainstorm and think of every possible solution we can think of and don't care how goofy it sounds. I have other people who work with me who are much more practical and they just want to know we only have enough teachers to do this and this....It doesn't bother me any that we come up with these goofy ideas because I think that many times you come up with a solution that way. I guess my answer is that I used to be extremely idealistic and now I'm not quite as idealistic. I'm more practical because now I'm working within the building and I see more everybody's needs.

Fagan and Wise (1994) suggested that Ken's ability to "see everybody's needs" as one characteristic of a school psychologist who has developed a realistic understanding of the

nature of the role. Although novice school psychologists may remain so focused on the needs of one party that they may alienate others or fail to see viable alternatives, experienced school psychologists are aware of multiple needs and are better able to seek solutions and recommendations that address the needs of multiple players.

Tom has also come to the point in his career where he views himself as responsible for helping to meet the needs and goals of many individuals within the school system. He sees his major priority as the service of children and families, but he saw this goal as being accomplished in his attempts to “maximize the potential of the school district.” Tom also acknowledged that “there is probably more potential for ethical problems to occur because there are so many competing interests.” As discussed in Chapter 3, Tom perceived his ethical responsibilities as extending beyond the specific students and families to whom he is assigned. Instead, he felt responsible for monitoring the ethics of the entire system, for “holding up the mirror” to the system and facilitating its ethical functioning.

Jill described this delicate task of balancing and addressing the needs of multiple individuals:

In school psychology, you have to balance between a lot of different “agencies.” You have to balance the family as an interest group, and then you have to balance the school system, then you have to balance the teachers, the system as a whole, and then you look special education and finances.....like say a child needs a paraprofessional, and you know that that local director does not want that child to have a paraprofessional, but you have to say that you really feel that the child

needs a paraprofessional. Or, saying the converse to family that you have a relationship with, and they want to do something, and you say, “You know, it’s right to do it, but I don’t feel it’s in the child’s best interest.”

Evident in Jill’s discussion is her desire to evaluate all decisions in terms of “the child’s best interest.” Her commitment to child advocacy remains primary, even as she strives to balance the needs and desires of many different people within the system. At times, she has supported the administrator when she thought that the administrator’s recommendation would promote student welfare. At other times, she has opposed the administrator and supported the desires of families, but her decisions are always driven by her main ethical commitment: Child advocacy.

Joyce, conceptualizing herself as the “PR person” and the “liaison,” discussed the role of balancing relationships and striving to meet the needs of multiple parties. Her role has come to involve:

...being a liaison between the teacher and the parent, or the parent and the school, so that if they’re coming in an adversarial role, somehow we can work it out so that they can both feel like their needs are met. It’s a lot of interpersonal working with people that has gotten much more important.

This role of “balancing” is one that many of the psychologists referred to repeatedly in their discussions of roles and ethics. However, as will be further discussed in Chapter 7, the process of learning to balance the interests of multiple people is not

automatic but was rather described as a skill that develops with time and experience.

Joyce recalls being heavily focused on testing in her early career and not focusing on the interpersonal relationship side of practice:

When I first started, the testing was basically your job and at this point, I think it is probably the easiest part.....You did the testing, you made your recommendations, and you were done and didn't get involved in relationships and the political stuff. The ethical issues as far as testing might be maybe I didn't ask that question the right way or maybe he [the student] was too tired. So it more hinged on the testing part and why that wasn't the best it could be.

Over the course of **Joyce's** career, she has moved from a testing-focused perspective toward a relationship-focused perspective. In this developmental process, she has seen how critical her interpersonal skills have become as she acts as a liaison between multiple parties within the school and community:

Now, it's shifted into more relationships or service.....You really need to know how to get your idea across to other people in a way that they will listen to you and take it seriously.....being the liaison between the teacher and the parent or the parent and the school, so that if they're coming in in an adversarial role, somehow we can work it out so they both feel like their needs are met. It's a lot of interpersonal working with people that has gotten much more important.

Clearly, Joyce has seen her role demand more interpersonal skills and relationship building than was true in her early professional experience when she was much more focused on testing. Along with these role changes has come the evolution of ethical responsibilities in her relationships with the multiple players that she described above.

Jill, who also frequently finds herself needing to serve as a liaison, senses pressure as she attempts to balance these differing interests. For example, she sometimes struggled with making recommendations when trying to consider the needs of the teacher, the students, and the parent: “You might not be honest about what you might think is the most appropriate, knowing the teacher and knowing the parents.” According to Jill, when she is placed in the position where she must work to balance conflicting interests, it frequently became an ethical struggle because she had to facilitate an agreement that would benefit the child, while remaining sensitive to the unique perspectives of all people involved in the decisions. Sometimes, she felt pressure to support one party and had to decide whether to succumb to the pressure or stick to her true opinion about what the particular child needs.

Joyce, viewing herself as a liaison between teacher, parent, and school, agreed that servicing many different parties made it difficult to be a school psychologist. To be a successful school psychologist, Joyce believed that “you have to be somebody who can deal with different groups of people.” For example, she often found that her relationships with teachers were strained when she found that a child who the teacher referred did not qualify for services. Likewise, her relationships with parents could be strained when her opinion differed from the parents’. When her recommendations were costly to the

district, her relationships with administrators experienced temporary strain. This “balancing act” created multiple ethical conflicts:

I think it’s hard to make everybody happy. Your recommendations might make the teacher really unhappy because you say that they don’t qualify or the parents might be really unhappy because you say ‘I can’t do this here, you need to look at some outside counseling’the administration...and I think we need to spend more money to meet the needs of this child....”

Joyce seems to imply that the presence of multiple conflicting interests created an environment in which breaches of ethical standards could easily occur. To survive in this sometimes hostile environment, Joyce strived to remain committed first and foremost to children. This unyielding commitment to children, however, did not come without difficult costs and challenges. As discussed in previous sections of this chapter, Joyce agreed that although relationships are critical to the school psychologist’s effectiveness, her commitment to always place children’s needs first sometimes strained relationships with others in the system:

It would be nice to always have a good relationship with everybody you work with, but it’s just not always possible....in my ideal, the needs of the child come first. I’m going to be asking the teachers or parents to do things that I think are appropriate to that child, and that will impact their life and make their life harder.

Robert recalled a complex dilemma that serves to illustrate the web of relationships in which a school psychologist is situated and the intense ethical struggles that are created when the desires of differing parties conflict. He was asked to conduct an evaluation with a first grade child whom he described as “a cute little guy with blue eyes and a big smile....everybody loved him....probably one of the most popular kids in the whole school.” Evaluation results suggested that the child was functioning in the Educable Mentally Impaired range; however, teachers and administrators resisted this diagnosis, resulting in severely strained relationships. Robert recalled the ethical conflict that resulted from this pressure to make a recommendation that conflicted with his assessment: “They put pressure on me to change the diagnosis, to change the certification, to not have him EMI, to somehow sweep this whole thing under the carpet....I was a very unpopular person in that school for about two weeks, from administrator to teacher.”

Robert indicated that the teachers and school administrators seemed angry with him and his decision, resulting in strained relationships. The only people who seemed to agree with him and accept the diagnosis were the student’s parents, who were almost relieved that they finally had an answer to their child’s difficulties. He recalled, “The only person who vaguely understood was the parent, who said ‘I knew there was something wrong but I just couldn’t put my finger on it. I was wondering why he didn’t walk until he was 20 months old, didn’t talk until he was 3.....now I know why.’”

Robert’s ethical struggle and resulting decision in this case illustrates the desire to understand the unique child and family needs yet remaining true to his personal ethical convictions about the child’s disability and the child’s intervention needs. He strove to

understand the parent and child's unique context, and, despite strong pressure and relational conflict with school staff, thought that the parents needed to have an accurate diagnostic picture of their son so that they could better understand him. As he discussed his decision, he utilized a moral voice of care, as he tried to place himself in the position of the family and the child in their unique contexts and circumstances. He was willing to sacrifice temporarily his relationships with the school staff to promote the child's welfare, yet he sensed that his decision would promote relationships and child welfare in the long run. Consistent with a voice of care, he was motivated to carry out his activities of care to benefit the child, although he also expressed concern about the potential relationship strain that would result. He strove to work toward a solution that would allow him to blend the interests and needs of all involved parties and, thus, to maintain multiple professional relationships.

However, issues of justice were also clearly evident in Robert's discussion. By virtue of his position as a school psychologist, he also discussed "conflicting claims in relationships between people" (Lyons, 1982, p. 43). However, he perceived his role not as objective, detached, and impartial but rather as personal, involved, and child-focused. This tension between care and justice, as it specifically applied to a school psychologist's role and work, will be discussed further in the final chapter.

In Robert's case, he experienced temporary interpersonal strain with the teachers and administrators because he was willing to maintain his position of diagnostic integrity and his commitment to child advocacy. This relational strain resulted from his commitment to his willingness to maintain his ethical convictions in the face of opposition. Discussing this type of conflict, Tom agreed that interpersonal conflict often

results from ethical conflict. Moreover, he believed that ethical violations often exist when school psychologists strive to maintain relationships at the expense of student welfare. Thus, the lack of interpersonal conflict may actually serve as an *indicant* of an ethical problem:

There are certainly obviously conflicts of interest that come up now and again that we've all faced and all will face. Having to make choices about allegiances or being liked....a much wiser man than me once said, 'If everybody likes you all the time, you are not doing your best job....Sometimes that's sort of a tip-off. If you know that the decision you've made is going to upset somebody or disturb the equilibrium, that might be a sign that there is some ethical conflict.

According to Tom, it is easy for a school psychologist to try to avoid conflict by focusing on pleasing people and seeking solutions that makes everybody happy. Although this approach may save relationships and prevent relational strain, this "equilibrium" may come as a result of sacrificing a child's best interest. Tom is skeptical of school psychologists who do not face interpersonal conflict, as he sees this as inherent in the job. He perceives interpersonal conflict as an unavoidable fact of life for school psychologists who are committed to child advocacy, even in the face of multiple pressures to cut corners and focus on other factors within the system. Thus, interpersonal conflict "comes with the territory" of being an ethical school psychologist.

As evident from the statements offered by the participants, relationships are an essential facet of the school psychologists' world. In this complex web of relationships

exists potential for multiple ethical conflicts and dilemmas. Thus, considering the school psychologist's need to consider multiple clients in their work within the school system (discussed in Chapter 6), the specific nature of the various relationships existing with a broad range of people both inside and outside the school environment must be examined. When discussing their ethical obligations, the school psychologists in this study described specifically their relationships with students, families, teachers, administrators, professional colleagues/team members, and community professionals. Each of these will be described in the ensuing sections of this chapter.

Relationships with Students. As discussed in Chapter 3, school psychologists overwhelmingly conceptualized their main role as child advocacy. However, in describing their relationships with children in their practice, they identified several characteristics of the school psychologists' role that limited their ability to form these relationships. **Dave**, trained as a clinical psychologist and having spent much of his early career working in agency settings, differentiated clinical psychologists from school psychologists by the more intense, close personal relationships with children that characterizes private practice. Relationships are an important part of the school psychologist's work; nevertheless, barriers exist, limiting the depth and intensity of the relationship:

I would say the truth is that if you are working in a clinical setting doing therapy with somebody, the relationship becomes more intense. That's not to say that school psychologists don't care about their patient, but it's a less personal type of

thing. So some ethical dilemmas in clinical psychology would be more in terms of the relationships. In school psychology, it might be more in terms of....pushing the kid one way or the other or the number of tests or how much they do in testing.

Asked to discuss why relationships that a school psychologist develops with students is less personal and less intense, Dave referred to many of the barriers that were discussed in Chapter 5, stating high testing caseloads and limited perceptions of the school psychologist's role as potential reasons:

Well, number one, you see quite a few kids, and number two, if you're not doing the consultative type of model, you're actually giving the traditional testing type of thing, it might involve an observation for about an hour or so, and the actual contact with the kid might be two and one-half or three hours. And it's in a very structured, standardized setting. That's not to say that you don't do an interview with them to learn a little bit about the family, school, and that type of thing, but I don't think you can have as much contact with them. It's not that you care about them any less, but....

Dave believed that true therapeutic change in the lives of children and families necessitates a more personal sustained relationship. However, he also did not think that this is possible within the school setting. The systemic barriers such as financial limitations and role misperceptions create an environment where it is virtually impossible

to know a student individually and to understand the individual child's unique circumstances and contexts. Thus, Dave thought that these barriers prohibited the development of true relationship with children. Interestingly, Dave did not describe his thoughts with remorse but instead spoke of these issues in a matter-of-fact manner, indicating that these limitations are "the nature of the beast" in school psychology. Clearly, Dave did not believe that speaking with a moral voice of care is possible within the confines of the school system. The nature of the role prevents focusing on care and relationships and necessitates assuming an objective, impartial approach to students and their problems. This issue and Dave's perspective will be further explored in Chapters 8 and 9.

Relationships with Families. Within the field of school psychology, there has been a shift from focusing services solely on individual children to focusing on the entire family as the unit of assessment and intervention (Christenson, 1995; Fagan & Wise, 1994). Rich (1995) has stated this relationship quite succinctly: "Families and teachers might wish that the school could do the job alone. But today's schools need families, and today's families needs schools. In many ways, the mutual need may be the greatest hope for change" (Rich, 1995, as cited in Christenson, 1995, p. 253). Christenson concluded that "positive family-school connections are not automatic; however, they are essential to children's optimal success in school and must become a major focus within educational restructuring efforts" (p. 253).

Consistent with Christenson's assertion, one of the major overriding themes of recent legislation, IDEA '97, is a focus on servicing families and including families in all

aspects of educational assessment, intervention, and program evaluation. An assumption underlying this shift is that to benefit individual children, school psychologists must recognize the child as embedded in the family context and see that any changes within the family will necessarily affect all members of the family. In the interviews, when asked to describe the initial impact of IDEA '97 on their practice, every school psychologist interviewed referred to the increasing involvement of parents and families, as will be discussed later in this chapter.

The new focus on families and home-school communication and collaboration is another factor that impacts how school psychologists construe ethical concerns. **Joyce** described an issue that she has faced in practice that reflects a struggle between maintaining family relationships in the short-term and making therapeutically sound recommendations:

Sometimes, it's kind of knowing that a family would really benefit from therapy or counseling, knowing that if you say that, they may never talk to you again, and where do you go in that situation because there really isn't a good....you can muddle through and just keep working at it until they trust you enough, or do you be honest and say "This is the way I think it should be" and let the chips fall where they may.

Joyce's comments illustrate the ethical conflict that can arise when a psychologist's recommendations may differ from the type or extent of intervention that the family desires for their child. Joyce struggles with whether she should express her professional

option honestly and “be honest.....and let the chips fall where they may” in her relationship with families, or whether she should temper her recommendations in an attempt to be sensitive to the family’s needs and receptivity.

As Joyce suggested, relationships with families may be the most difficult to maintain when the parent’s opinion about what is best for their child differs with the school psychologist’s recommendations. **Ken** has addressed this ethical concern in his own mind by emphasizing that the ultimate decision for eligibility services lies with the parent. He regards respect for parental decisions as an important part of remaining ethical in his practice:

....I think you have to be willing to accept the fact that parents can refuse services. They have that right. It’s no different than when you go into a physician and the physician recommends that you take certain pills for a disorder and you decide not to take the pills. You have that right.

When asked how to handle an issue wherein the parents disagree with a school psychologists’ diagnostic impression (e.g., selecting an EI diagnosis over an LD diagnosis), **Joyce** explained that she would take the time to listen to the parents, to try to understand their point of view, and to consider their unique circumstances in making recommendations. She utilized both a voice of care and elements of an impartial, detached, justice-focused voice, when describing her manner of approaching this situation.

I would first talk to the parents myself and explain why or why not I think it's appropriate that they have an EI (Emotionally Impaired) label as opposed to an LD (Learning Disabled) label, and what my reasonings are and go through that. Then, if they're not going to budge, another option might be writing a report saying we are classifying this child as LD; however, there are a lot of other factors going on, and that always needs to be part of the approach when working with him or her.

Several ethical issues are inherent in this excerpt. One major ethical issue is that of diagnostic integrity. If a parent refuses the EI label, Joyce sometimes felt pressure to recommend an LD label in her report, even if she truly believed that the child had an emotional impairment. However, the practitioners recognized that situations like this become further complicated when the school psychologist felt strongly that the child would be harmed by the decision for which parents were advocating. Focusing on care of a student does not always mean succumbing to a parents' desires or demands for their child. When a psychologist thought that the child's needs were being overlooked or sacrificed, it sometimes meant explaining one's rationale to the parent and standing by one's recommendations, even in the face of parental opposition. **Ken** addressed this difficult ethical struggle:

Now the real dilemma comes when you feel that the parents are not acting in the best interest of the child and that's a real toughy. It has to be quite a severe case in order for you to make that justification. If the parents simply decide they are

not going to use special ed, they are going to keep them in general ed and the kid keeps having difficulties in school but he's not dropping out of school, and he's not becoming depressed and so on and he's still with his friends, then you'd have to say you've made your decision. If they make a decision that causes the child to have a lot of trauma, that's different.

In her case, **Joyce** seemed to evaluate whether her decision was valid or not on the basis of the ultimate outcomes for the child. Thus, she evaluated her decisions using a moral voice of care (Lyons, 1982), focusing on ultimate outcomes for the child and whether or not the child's best interest over time will be promoted

Another family-related issue that created potential for ethical conflict is the potential undue influence that school psychologists could have in a family's education-related decisions. Forming and maintaining relationships with families undoubtedly gives the school psychologist a degree of power and influence with that family, a factor that can come into play in cases where parents refused special education services.

Jennifer relayed a situation wherein she had to decide whether or not to exert this influence to persuade the parents to agree to a psychoeducational evaluation. This situation involved a second-grade student whom the evaluation team had wanted to evaluate since first grade; however, the mother was reluctant to allow the school to evaluate, although she finally gave consent. Results of the evaluation suggested that the student qualified as EMI, and the team recommended special education support. The mother, however, refused to consent to services, despite the team's efforts to explain the

benefits to her daughter. The student's parents were divorced, and Jennifer's dilemma consisted of whether she should call the father to try to gain his support for services:

I guess [the conflict] was just that I could have played it out so that I really pushed the dad, because I think I could have maybe pushed him....He had some kind of custody where I could have pushed him to say 'Let's just have a meeting and I'll sign the papers.....My options would have been to maybe really scare the dad and really play it up, and say she was flunking out or not going to make it, and you need to do this. The whole thing is that it would have been behind the mom's back, and that would be an issue.

Jennifer decided to express her concerns to the father while simultaneously trying to preserve her relationship with the mother, a factor that she viewed as crucial in her efforts ultimately to secure services for the student. Jennifer expressed a voice of care in her desire to preserve this relationship while also seeking to promote what she believed to be in the child's best interest:

I talked with dad at length, and we talked...he talked about that it [agreement with services] would probably happen some day and maybe even next year. So I decided to just go that route. In that case, I was concerned about the student, but I couldn't see ruining that with mom. I just think it would have been a disaster somehow, like she would have said no and we would never had another chance.

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Jennifer opted to handle this ethical conflict by focusing on the decision that would preserve her relationship with mother and would also likely result in services for the child in the long run, though not immediately. She was willing to sacrifice immediate results to secure the long-term care for the child and the maintenance of interpersonal relationship, reflecting hallmarks of a moral voice of care (Lyons, 1982).

Robert has dealt with family situations where he had to make a decision to make a Protective Services (PS) referral or take a different course of action when he was concerned about possible parental abuse of a student. In the example cited, the student told Robert that he was being disciplined severely. With only this limited knowledge, Robert was placed in the position of how to act on the student's claim:

We were just in the process of doing this evaluation, and I've been involved in situations before where you make a PS referral and the mother comes in and "Boom," there goes any relationships you have with the parent. It absolutely goes down the drain. So you lose whatever relationship you have with the parent and whatever credibility you have...

Robert's concern about maintaining his relationship with the parents provides an example of setting the "universal" idea aside and elevating the relationship with the family as the primary consideration when making a decision. Robert recognized that relationship with the family is crucial to establishing trust and forming a working partnership with the parents. In the end, the team decided not to make the PS referral. Robert reflected on the positive consequences of this decision:

Looking back, it was the right thing to do because we were able to bring the parents on board. The stepfather came across as sort of a meek sort of guy in some ways. In other ways, he saw this as a way he could assert some discipline with the child that he perceived had never existed before.....we found ways that the dad could work with him [the student] and make it more palatable for the child and a little more time specific in giving these punishments.

Similar to Jennifer's situation described above, Robert's success in "bringing the parents on board" resulted in long-term outcomes that promoted the child's interests. By focusing on care and relationship as key components to maintaining ethically sound practice, Robert was able to resolve his ethical conflict in a way that both he and the parents viewed as satisfactory.

Over the course of her 16-year career, Joyce has come to view validation of parents' concerns and perspectives as a critical step toward maintaining good relationships necessary to meet the needs of students and families. She described one instance where two sets of parents, each of whom had children in the same classroom, were very angry about the teacher's behavior and reported it to her. The conflict for Joyce was what to do with the information. She discussed the conflict in terms of implications for the quality of the students' educational experience, the teacher's future, as well as Joyce's ongoing relationship with the teacher, the parents' wishes to rectify the problem, and the principal's need to know about and deal with the parents' concerns. The ongoing relationship with the teacher was a major concern because "I had to work

with her still.” To resolve this conflict, Joyce decided to inform the principal about the parental concerns. Asked to sum what she learned from this situation, Joyce emphasized the need to maintain the trust and relationship of parents:

Put more stock in what parents say.....In the beginning of my career, being the ideal person that I am, you always want to think that the system that you are working in is good and the teachers are there because they like kids and so when parents come in and tell you things, you just kind of poo-poo it. But the longer I work, the more I think parents really know what they’re talking about sometimes. They may be coming from a totally different angle, but they still know. Most of the time, they really know their kids, so if they’re telling you something, you need to listen to them.

Clearly reflected in this explanation is a voice of care, as Joyce strives to come to a complete knowledge of a child’s and parent’s unique perspectives, skills and abilities. She recognized that parents know their children better than anyone in the school system, and she strove to understand children’s and parent’s circumstances in all aspects of her work.

Emily also reported that she places strong emphasis on parental reports and perceptions of their child’s strengths and weaknesses, an emphasis that has become even stronger as she has experienced raising her own four children. Her parental experiences have caused her to be more sensitive to parents and has increased her ability to place herself in the shoes of parents and understand their perspectives:

I think it's much more easy to be judgmental about how a parent is parenting a child or what kind of home this child comes from, or "the parent is the problem" kind of thing. But I guess the more I'm a parent and the more I live, not that we don't judge, but "Until you've walked in a man's shoes..." that kind of thing. Much more sensitive, and what it would be like to parent that child 24 hours a day when they have multiple siblings and working. Yeah, I think I've become probably more sensitive.

She further explained that her own experience of going through testing with one of her children helped her to modify her own practice:

Being a parent, and thinking 'What would I want for my child?' How would I want to be treated, or how would I hear that.....Yeah, and just really does make a difference when you have teachers or you hear them say something to you about your child.....Or when I thought something was wrong with mine, we had to go through a bunch of tests. I was pregnant, and how I was treated when we were going through all that testing and assessment phase. It was very, very powerful in how it influenced me.

Clearly, legislation and educational reformed movements have increased school psychologists' ongoing contact and communication with families. Several of the school psychologists in this study indicated that part of their ethical commitments pertained to

involving parents in decisions, striving to understand the parents' perspectives, and, when possible, making recommendations that would benefit both child and family.

Psychologists' discussions of their relationships with families reflected a moral voice of care, as they strove to understand the families' circumstances and contexts, maintain relationships with the family, and work together with the family to promote the care of the child and of the entire family unit.

Relationships with Teachers. School psychologists spend a major portion of their time consulting with teachers about student concerns, working with teachers to design and implement classroom interventions, and gauging student progress within the curriculum. Thus, the development of working relationships with teachers is central to the school psychologist's work. **Dave** agreed that his ethical practice was supported by forming relationships with teachers and school staff. These relationships, according to Dave, were founded on his willingness to demonstrate respect for teachers and on his expertise in areas relevant to teacher concerns. Asked to describe a factor that supported his ability to practice ethically, Dave replied, "Relationships with the staff...if they respect you in terms of your comments and they respect you in terms of your knowledge, I don't think it's much of a challenge."

Robert, also referring to the importance of developing and maintaining positive relationships with teachers, discussed his efforts to accomplish this goal. Like many of the other participants (as discussed in Chapters 3 and 5, and in earlier sections of this chapter), Robert described his role as one of "balancing" the needs and desires of teachers with other interested parties. Like Dave, he believed that respect, consistency

and knowledge are key factor in his ability to develop solid working relationships with teachers. However, he recognized that this process can be difficult because of his need to consider the needs of many parties:

That's a difficult balancing act. One of the things I found is just being a good consultant, going in and really listening to what the teacher has to say. Even though the teacher may not agree with what you are saying as far as making sure the teacher feels like he or she is part of the team and really using that information. You may or may not come to the same conclusion that the teacher's coming to but you are using the information and when you go back to the teacher, you are giving the teacher some positive feedback, giving the teacher something he or she can use. That you're not saying you don't believe in what they are saying and brush the teacher aside and saying they are really not part of the team after all. That you are really truly, not just on paper, having reciprocal interaction with that teacher. Some of that comes with the credibility of just being in the building long enough and having people, again, observe you as far as coming across both personally in terms of who you are and what you bring there as far as ethics and morals of who you are as a person. Also the expertise that you bring.

For Robert, establishing credibility with teachers is, in part, possible because of his unwavering commitment to professional ethics. If he treats teachers with respect and is consistent in his ethical commitments, then he can maintain a good working relationship

with teachers, even if he sometimes disagrees with their assessment and recommendations.

School psychologists did not view relationships with teachers as something that developed automatically. Rather, the participants described a process that required time, attention, and trust. **Tom**, for example, spoke of the time, respect, and consistency necessary to establish a relationship of trust with colleagues, particularly with teachers. If Tom took time with teachers and showed them due respect, and if he was consistent in his commitments, then he found that he was able to maintain good relationships with teachers, even if their opinions about a particular student might differ:

In order to maintain a level of trust and personal working relationship, sometimes you are forced into situations where you have to make decisions that are not going to come out so you are smelling like a rose....but I still think there is a level of integrity that maintains when you do what you know is the right thing in your heart, and it's in the best interest of the students. I've found that people might not always agree with you but they'll respect you for your decisions if you are consistent in your decision-making. That's really important.

Yet, despite Tom's focus on relationships, he made a clear distinction between have a relationship with someone he *likes* personally and personally invests in, and having a relationship that is defined solely in professional terms. For Tom, he demonstrated respect to all teachers by virtue of their position, regardless of whether he

likes them personally or not. Tom was ethically committed to demonstrating respect and honor for all people:

There are two kinds of relationships: There's a personal relationship and a professional relationship. I try to communicate respect to teachers always. That doesn't mean I like them, but every person is due respect, and what goes around comes around. If I approach people with contempt, I can pretty well expect that's how they are gonna see me, as contemptible. I try to show respect and honor the job that people do, and be aware of the stress that they are under, but again, I don't like everybody that I come into contact with at school, and that includes parents, kids, teachers, administrators, and everybody else. That's not what the world is all about. I'm not Pollyanna, and I don't necessarily expect them to like me, but again, I hope that they will respect me for my behavior, the kind of integrity I attempt to project in my decision-making.

When addressing the issue of ethical consultation with teachers, **Dave** also made a distinction between a professional working relationship with teachers, and what he terms a "buddy-buddy" relationship:

It's more of a process. It's sitting down with them, having them identify the problem, talking with them about it, and I think they start to feel that you're listening to them and doing an active listening kind of thing. Then getting them to give some information about the child....they find out that they know more about

the kid than they thought they did. Then I think they really get involved....but.....only trying to make a good relationship and being buddy-buddy with the teacher....I don't think that's going to help them or help the child.

In terms of his perceptions of professional ethics, Dave draws an important distinction here between a superficial “buddy-buddy” relationship and a professional relationship that is child-centered. According to Dave, if a school psychologist develops a “buddy-buddy” relationship with teachers, it might skew their perspective and introduce the danger of losing sight of the child. Thus, both Tom and Dave’s ethical standards involved maintaining relationships with teachers while simultaneously staying focused on student needs. Teacher relationships that are overly personal may actually lead to detrimental effects for students, if school psychologists gave primacy to sustaining the teacher relationship while losing sight of the students’ welfare.

Jill provided an example that served as an illustration of Tom and Dave’s point. She described a situation wherein her ongoing personal relationship with a teacher created a strong ethical conflict. Jill believed that the teacher’s practices were not beneficial to the children in her classroom, but, due largely to an ongoing relationship with the teacher, she struggled with whether to bring this situation to the attention of the building principal:

It was a classroom program where the teacher really wasn’t doing a lot of direct instruction in the program, and the kids were just kind of wandering in the program. And I had a relationship with the teacher, so I tried to giveI really

liked the teacher, but I felt that she wasn't, that the kids were kind of being short-changed.

A major reason behind this ethical conflict was Jill's personal relationship with the teacher and her desire to promote sound educational practices without damaging her personal relationship with the teacher. Jill's discussion of her attempt to put herself in the teacher's shoes reflected a voice of care, as she considered her position of relationship with this teacher: "...and she [the teacher] was really being short-changed, too, because she is a better teacher than that, actually." The voice of care was also evident in Jill's resolution of the problem. While Jill did inform the principal of her concerns, she also took action to try to support the development of the teacher and to provide both personal and professional support. She explained, "I was supportive throughout, you know, and she would talk about the things that people were asking her to do, and I would try to be supportive and telling her that they were positive changes that were occurring."

Joyce believed that good relationships with teachers were important; however, she described the same type of cautions that Dave and Tom described about becoming overly involved with teachers on a personal level. She explained that too much energy invested in personal relationships with staff can actually be detrimental to students, stating "I think it wouldn't necessarily always be good for the child if you were always really worried about maintaining a good relationship with the teacher." Just as Dave indicated, Joyce stayed focused on the student in her work with teachers to avoid ethical problems that could arise when a school psychologist forms a personal friendship with teachers.

Joyce spoke of another ongoing ethical problem that she has faced with teachers in the secondary school she serves. This problematic issue pertains to her recommendations for classroom accommodations for students with disabilities. The general education teachers were unwilling to change their grading practices to accommodate students with disabilities who qualify for special education services. Joyce identified the ethical conflict: "The core conflict is how can I maintain their respect and keep them seeing me as somebody to work with but keep trying to change that system." Joyce attributed part of the difficulty of this situation to her relative lack of ongoing relationship with the secondary teachers and students. She explained, "A big factor is that I don't have any ongoing relationship with them in the secondary schools. I see the kids every three years. I'll see them and I'll do the evaluation. I make the recommendations and who knows what happens after that."

Joyce's lack of relationship with the secondary teachers contributed to their resistance to implementing her recommendations. Given her high caseload and the system's limited financial resources, Joyce did not have the time to develop the type of relationship with teachers that is necessary to work collaboratively as a team. Thus, an ethical conflict existed because she believed that solid working relationships with teachers are necessary for promoting students' best interests; however, systemic barriers prevented her from developing these relationships.

Tom also described a situation where teachers were resistant to special education services in their school building. He referred to a situation in one of his buildings which housed a self-contained EMI program. This situation occurred early in his career at a time when he had been servicing the building for only a short time. He explained that

many of the general education teachers and some administrators in that building had made it clear that they did not agree with the existence of the classroom in their building, nor did they want any of the students mainstreamed into their classrooms. This elicited concerns from parents who complained that their children were being discriminated against and were being treated unfairly. In reflecting on his decision of how to handle this problem, Tom articulated his conflict: “The conflict for me, right off the bat, was putting my relationship with staff in that building at risk in terms of what my role was and what I stood for and what I was going to tolerate.” In the end, Tom decided to elevate students’ well-being above his relationship with the teachers and brought the concern to the school’s administrators:

It ended up in a meeting with the principal, my boss, the director of special education, to talk about what my allegiances were and to shed light on the issue. We got some action and closely examined what was happening with the kids’ IEPs and how they were mainstreamed. We focused on the solution of the problem, not on an individual person’s behaviors or motives.

Tom clearly recognized that he was threatening his relationships with the general education teachers but purposely chose to remain committed to child advocacy, explaining,

I recognized it as a wrong, as a violation of the kids’ rights, and I just didn’t feel I have much to lose....If they were going to hate me, they’re gonna hate me. My

job is not to be liked by teachers. My job is to do what's right for kids. That's who I am in first service to, those kids and their parents.

In this situation, Tom experienced ethical conflict when he was faced with whether to support the teachers' perspectives, and thereby prevent strain in his relationship with them, or to support what he thought was the best course of action for the students. In deciding to maintain his ethical commitments to child advocacy and "to do what's right for kids," he was willing to experience some strain in his relationship with teachers.

This situation illustrates the intense difficult that school psychologists can face within the web of relationships when different people have differing and conflicting opinions. Tom desired to establish positive relationships with the teachers, because he thought that these relationships would set the stage for collaborative work for students, but he did not want to sacrifice his ethical commitment to child advocacy. In this case, he was willing to temporarily experience strain in his relationships with teachers to support the maintenance of the services that the students needed.

Relationships with Administrators. In Chapter 3, the importance of administrative support to the successful and ethical functioning of school psychologists was described, along with the tremendous ethical conflict that can exist when administrators pressure school psychologists to act unethically. The participants in this study did not speak of the administrators with whom they work as a faceless, detached facet of the system; rather, administrators were referred to in relationship terms. Nick

stated that professional relationships with administrators comprise a key factor in his ability to practice ethically:

If I have a good relationship with the special education director, and they understand how I think and operate, then generally I have found them to be supportive of what I'm trying to do.....and not just the special ed. director, but administrators as well. If there is a relationship there, an understanding there, then generally they are supportive.

The situation discussed by Tom (explained above) also involved a relationship with the building administrators. Tom's decision involved confronting the building principal, a person with whom he was just beginning to establish a working relationship, in his efforts to ensure the children's right to an appropriate education:

I attacked it as a problem. I went to the people who I knew were the only ones who could really effect a change realistically. It was probably going to be through some coercion, but that's their job. Administrators need to administrate, and sometimes that is going to piss people off, but too bad. If it's trampling on the rights of kids, then they need to be pissed off a little bit....They're basically defenseless, these kids, and I thought there was a little bit of bullying going on, sort of a lack of administrative gumption on the part of the principal, who was well aware of it by now. She was just kind of not doing her job to remedy the situation, so I put myself at risk in my relationship with this principal.

Although Tom no longer serves that building, he believed that he was able to establish and maintain a solid relationship with the principal, largely because of his consistent efforts to advocate for students and to maintain his ethical standards for advocacy. Maintaining the student at the center of his decision-making process has allowed him to establish positive relationships and to stand by decisions that may not originally be supported by administrators:

I felt I left on very good terms with that principal and had a very good working relationship with her because I demonstrated consistency in my behavior with her. I right away established who I was and what I was about, and she was the kind of person who appreciated that sort of approach.

For Tom, his dedication to practicing consistently according to his ethical principles was key to establishing a good working relationship with administrators. This solid relationship, in turn, formed a basis that allowed him to continue practicing according to his ethical convictions, even when he did not agree with the administrator's perspective.

Jill, as an employee of an intermediate school district, has been placed in many different districts and has thus worked with many different administrators. She drew on her oft-changing placement and roles to emphasize the importance of developing relationships to establish credibility:

I have had a lot of changing from district to district. So every district you go into, you have to kind of reestablish relationships, and I think your ethics is part of that

reestablishing credibility. Like when I first came to [district's name], they didn't want me to attend staffing meetings....but I felt I needed to be there, ethically, to do a good job, I needed to be at those staff meetings. And now, it's pretty much an expectation that I attend these staff meetings.

Gradually, as she developed a relationship with the principal, she became what Jill described as "very, very, very supportive of [my] role." As was true in Tom's case, Jill found that establishing a relationship with her building administrator was key to creating an environment that was supportive of her ethical decision making.

Jill's relationships with the building principal and special education director were also a central consideration in a situation where she made a recommendation that a student's eligibility be changed, despite the fact that she was the only one that supported this decision. She cited "existing relationships with the administrators" and "wanting to please people that you have a long-standing relationship with, like the building principle" as factors that made this decision very difficult for her. She desired to remain true to her ethical conviction about a students' needs, but she did not want to threaten her relationship with the administrator. However, she was willing to place these relationships in the background, at least temporarily, to support what she viewed as a decision that was "in the child's best interest." Jill believed that the family needed to understand the child's accurate level of functioning to meet the child's needs, so she was considering the unique family context in making her decision. Likewise, she thought that the teachers needed to know the child's functioning to best meet the students' educational needs. Thus, she maintained the child, as his needs and unique circumstances, at the forefront of

her ethical reasoning process. Stressing the needs of the family in this situation, she stated, “That family constellation needed to come to more of a resolution than it had come to. I needed to be honest, and teachers needed to know accurately where the child was, not pretend he was something else.” Jill recalled that although her relationship was strained temporarily due to her decision, the quality and depth of the relationship increased in the long run due to Jill’s willingness to stand by her ethical convictions, facilitating later decision-making. Jill was honest, which, in her case, is a universally applied standard, thereby exercising a voice of justice. However, her main motivation in this case was the child’s needs and the long-term welfare of the child, evidencing a voice of care.

Relationships with Other Team Members and School Professionals. Many researchers and theorists interested in educational reform have identified collaborative team problem-solving as the key to successful schools (Wiggins, 1989). Although the history of team approaches in education is relatively short-lived, recent changes, especially the Regular Education Initiative supporting inclusive education of students with disabilities, have led to increasing focus on collaborative problem-solving teams (Schattman & Benay, 1992; Shaw & Swerdik, 1995). Increasingly, collaborative teams are viewed as the most effective means of meeting the needs of an ever diverse student body, and also empowering teachers to make significant changes in their teaching approaches (Shaw & Swerdik, 1995). Multi-disciplinary teams involve professionals from a variety of disciplines, backgrounds, and areas of expertise (Maher & Pfeiffer, 1983), and the school psychologist is often relied upon as a team facilitator (Shaw &

Swerdik, 1995; Ysseldyke, Algozzine & Mitchell, 1982). Thus, school psychologists frequently play an integral role in team functioning, factors which have many implications for ethical practice. The school psychologists in this study described two major issues related to team functioning and ethical practice: The role of colleague support in practicing ethically, and the conflicts that can arise when colleagues make unethical decisions.

First, several of participants in this study noted that team collaboration was critical to their ability to practice ethically and to establish credibility as an ethical school psychologist. When **Emily** entered her present district as a novice school psychologist, she recalled that the development of trust with teacher consultants was a challenge but something that was critical to her establishment of credibility. Emily explained:

Our TC [teacher consultant] model is different than a lot of places, their main job is to do the achievement testing, and I would do all the achievement testing and all the ability testing. The resource teacher would always provide some, but we always did it. But in [district], their feeling is that they really do that, that's role. So I came in doing everything, and I'm sure that was perceived as not trusting them or not being part of their team. And so now I've modified it, I probably do less achievement testing, and I've also established a trust factor that I know their work. Certainly, on a lot of kids I question, I still run through a brief battery. That is, because there's a trust, there has to be a stronger relationship when you're using their data, too.

Emily believed that her ability to trust the teacher consultants on her team resulted in a smoother, more efficient process, resulting in better services for children. Thus, the solid working relationships, founded on trust and mutual credibility, allowed her to maintain her ethical commitment to child advocacy.

Just as team members may create ethical concerns for the school psychologists, the ethical decisions of other team members could also empower school psychologists and challenge them to remain committed to ethical practice. Emily, for instance, believed that her fellow team members were a critical factor in holding her accountable to ethical practice:

I think my peers really have the best interest of children in mind and are very ethical people. In general, most of the people that I work with on the core team, we have very similar principles.....And we share and hold each other accountable for that standard of practice.

Jennifer also thought that the collaborative team model in her district, based on the multidisciplinary model mandated by federal and state law, supported her ethical practice “when you’re deciding who to test and who not to:”

We have the staffing team set up that involves...the special ed. teacher, and the reading teacher, and the at-risk person, and the principal, and the social worker and the counselor, and we’re all there, and the teacher. I think we do a good job at looking at all of the issues and making good decisions in that way, so I don’t

feel like they're one side, or we're just looking at kids that are behavior problems, or we're just looking at kids whose parents don't work....

The team, according to Jennifer, served the function of helping to ensure that her decisions were as free from bias and undue influence as possible, an important facet of what Jennifer defined as ethical practice.

Ken described a particular example where a team member's ethical decision empowered him in his own ethical thinking and action. He discussed an ethical dilemma where an administrator made a unilateral decision to place a student in a program that was not appropriate for the student's needs. This action prompted the social worker on the multidisciplinary team to make a report to the district's protection and advocacy committee. When the administrator called a meeting in an attempt to identify the person who filed the report, Ken was placed in a position of having either to disagree with an educationally unsound student placement or to support the social worker's stance. When the social worker stated that she had made the referral and would do it again, Ken developed a great admiration for her but questioned how he would handle the same situation:

I guess it was a dilemma that we were both experiencing of how to handle these questions that were coming at us and, of course, the threat was that you were going to lose your job because you were trying to protect the kid's interests. She [the social worker] stuck right with it. It was great.

The social worker's courage and unwavering commitment to her ethical position empowered Ken, who recalled the tremendous amount of respect that the social worker gained from both himself and other staff members as a result of her action: "At the time, I was surprised that she spoke up, and it made me feel braver and the next time something happened to me, I could feel more brave and able to react in the same way." In this situation, Ken did not come forward to support his colleague overtly; nevertheless, he was empowered in his own ethical convictions by viewing his colleague's willingness to risk her own job to make a decision that she deemed as ethical and child-focused.

Despite these positive comments, team functioning can provide a supportive environment for ethical decisions, working as a team can also create problems. As professionals working in conjunction with a team of professionals from multiple disciplines, school psychologists exist in a setting where there is inherent potential for ethical conflict. One could experience ethical conflict in relationship to the decisions of other school psychologists or in relationship to the decisions of professionals from other disciplines. The school psychologists in this study described many situations where they experienced ethical conflict due to a decision made by a team member.

Jill, for example, described how the decisions of team members sometimes created ethical conflict for her. She recalled, "Sometimes I question what other people are doing that I work with," citing two situations where she felt concern about a team members' ethical behavior. One situation involved a social worker who allowed a social work intern to handle a highly sensitive case with minimal supervision. This created an ethical conflict for Jill, who viewed the intern as underprepared and underqualified for this case. From Jill's perspective, the school social worker made an erroneous and

unethical decision in assigning the intern to handle independently. She described the case:

I had a child who has just been diagnosed outside of the school as a child with Asperger's syndrome, and when I met with the mom today, she said that the social worker had been out to observe the child at preschool, and she named the social worker, it was an intern. And it's a child who's five...I guess I feel strongly that there is a place for interns and interns to have good experiences, but I think as a parent, I would want to be dealing with more than just an intern on some of these cases....I wouldn't be doing that. I would not be conducting business that way. But my standards are different sometimes than other people's standards, and that sometimes is a dilemma, because I feel that there is a way to do business that is the right way, and that doesn't always occur.

For Jill, the decisions of her teammates sometimes caused ethical conflict, particularly when she believed that the decision might have brought harm to students. When this conflict occurred, she felt in many ways stuck because the decisions were sometimes beyond her control. However, she viewed it as her ethical responsibility to confront this unethical behavior by discussing her concerns with the person making the decision. This is not an easy decision, because it could cause strain in the relationship with the team member.

The second situation that Jill described involved the family of a child with a three-year-old daughter who exhibited some signs of autism. According to Jill, the teacher

consultant on the team persisted in vacillating on the diagnosis, resulting in what Jill termed a “gutwrenching experience” for the family. Experiencing ethical conflict about how to deal with this problem, Jill opted to confront the teacher consultant, supporting her decision as one that was in the best interest of the family. This example illustrates the conflict that exists when one must place one relationship in jeopardy to maintain another within the web. To promote care for the child, Jill was willing to place her relationship with her team member in jeopardy.

Jennifer agreed that working within a multi-disciplinary team model, although providing important means of collaborative decision-making, can raise questions about decisions of a fellow teammate:

You could have an issue, like you feel someone on the team, maybe the speech therapist, where you feel like they are dropping the ball on this kid. You feel like they are doing articulation testing, because that’s all they like to do, but doesn’t the kid need some language?

Jennifer, as described above, believed that her own professional ethical development has been in large part characterized by her increasing ability and willingness to trust the input of her teammates rather than to make a unilateral decision herself. However, she also recognized the special challenges that exist when one works as a member of a team, describing a specific ethical problem that she faced in her own practice. The situation involved an student with Asperger’s Syndrome who was included in general education and who, according to Jennifer, was highly successful due, in large

part, to the general education teacher's skill in working with the student. However, earlier in the year, the general education teacher had requested that the student be moved from her classroom into a self-contained program due to behavior problems. When the behavior problems seemed to come under better control, several members of the team thought that the student was doing well in the classroom under this general education teacher's instruction; however, because they were unsure of the skill of the teacher with whom the student would be placed during the next school year, they were recommending a self-contained Autistic Impaired (AI) program for next year. This decision was made by limited members of the Multi-disciplinary Education Team (MET), without the input of the current general education teacher:

The core problem was that part of the MET team was extremely pleased with where that student was at and was afraid that if they gave another part of the MET team too much information, that might change....We thought that if we offered it [the self-contained program] right now, the general education teacher was going to jump for it and really push for it and try to get him out [of her classroom] because she had done that earlier in the year when he wasn't being so good. She had worked so well with him and the AI consultant had helped out and now he was getting these services and we were afraid that she was going to go back into that mode of 'Get him out of the classroom.

As Jennifer reflected on the situation, she recalls feeling conflicted between her own commitment to being completely honest coupled with pressure from other team

members to act with less candidness. At one point in a meeting that did involve the entire MET team, including the general education teacher, Jennifer did recall that she almost brought up the issue, but she opted not to at that point. She recalled that at that point, withholding the information from the teacher became a decision that was not an issue of “we forgot to say it” but rather a deliberate “we weren’t going to say it.”

After that was said, I thought it didn’t feel right because I’m not, my thing is that I like to totally tell people everything and weigh out all of that stuff, so it didn’t feel right. I was kind of going by the other two MET members and thinking this is also their thinking that is wouldn’t be smart and maybe we need to put the student first and you know....but it was a dilemma. It was a funny feeling that doesn’t quite sit right and you knew that something wasn’t right.

Jennifer went on to explain why she made the decision to go along with keeping the information from the teacher, despite her judgment about what was right:

I think it was just the fact that there were the two other MET members and one of them is more experienced and it was kind of the idea that it was okay and we don’t have to go into that right now and it’s not going to matter. At that point, I think we had actually found out that it [the self-contained AI program] was full anyway....so why bring all that stuff up right now. So then what could I have done? I could have said.....I don’t know, I just didn’t feel so strongly about it at

the time, and I probably wouldn't have to this day, unless it had come out the way it did and the teacher had been so upset.

Jennifer handled her conflict by approaching the teacher and telling her that she was wrong in withholding the information and that she would have handled it differently if she encountered a similar situation:

I'm sure I would do it differently and I even told that to the teacher. I said, 'You know, this was a huge case. I've never had a kid with Asberger's before. We involved this big team, and it was a big process. We tried to make the student the center, but you are right. We left you out on this piece.'

In this situation, Jennifer's and the team's commitment to child advocacy was elevated above that of the relationship with the teacher. Although the team members realized that they were withholding information from the teacher, they thought that this withholding was necessary to avoid threat to the student's future progress. As Jennifer discussed her conflict, she supported her agreement with the decision, although it went against her commitment to complete honesty, in the name of student advocacy: "I think we were trying to protect the student. We were seeing ourselves as putting the student first....".

In addition to problematic ethical situations that can arise when working with professionals from other disciplines, school psychologists might also be faced with having to confront the unethical behavior of fellow school psychologists. **Dave** has dealt

with situations where he had a relationship with a school psychologist who completed a previous evaluation on a student Dave was re-evaluating. As he reviewed prior testing, Dave discovered that the previous psychologist had completed several cases

...didn't use appropriate measures, didn't complete the measures, and classified a student into a category that would really be damaging to that student: EMI.

When I came into the district to do a re-evaluation, I found that it was incorrect. I did testing and didn't say anything to the administrator or teachers there, but I reclassified him into the appropriate category, which is LD. The ethical issue is 'What does one do with the psychologist?' Do I talk to the supervisor? Do I talk to them?

Dave's discussion of his decision and resulting actions illustrates the multiple levels that can be involved when remedying an ethical violation:

When I looked through the files, there were some tests that weren't even given, and some things that were guessed on, and I started thinking, 'Oh, boy, am I missing something here?' I was trying to decide what was the right thing to do, but then when I went back through other students' files for re-evaluations, I saw there were actually two and it turned out to be three later. This led me into deciding that I first had to sit down and talk with him [the psychologist]. And then I had to make the changes and deal with the other special ed. staff when, all

of the sudden, these kids are coming out of EMI and going into something different. Those were some of the difficulties.

Dave recognized that the other school psychologist's evaluation process was harming multiple students, so he chose to take the time and effort necessary to approach the psychologist with his concerns, as well as to take efforts to remedy the errors. In this situation, Dave seemed to struggle with several issues. First, he had an obligation to protect fellow school psychologists and the profession. By calling the other school psychologist's diagnosis into question, he struggled with whether he was being disloyal to the profession. Second, despite his feelings of loyalty, he concluded that he was ultimately responsible for taking action to promote students' welfare and was willing to bring the concern to the other school psychologists' attention. Dave, along with the other school psychologists, recognized that their position within teams had the potential to create opportunities for ethical practice, as well as to create challenges. They knew that they must sometimes risk their interpersonal relationships to promote students' welfare. This approach to managing the web of relationships differs from Gilligan's idea of an ethic of care. The school psychologists in this study believed that relationships must sometimes be *breached* to maintain ethical practice. Relationships, in general, appear to be secondary to the child's welfare.

Relationships with Community Professionals. Given the increased emphasis on inter-agency collaboration, school psychologists also commonly find themselves forming and working with relationships with community therapists, medical professionals, and

other professionals outside the school system. Given the present trend in education, school psychologists will probably find inter-agency collaboration increasingly more important in their work with children and families (Ascher, 1990; Knitzer, 1993; Munger, 1991; Reed et al., 1997). This collaborative interaction also creates the potential for ethical conflict.

Mike described a situation where his relationships with other professionals outside the school environment was a central factor in his decision. He was evaluating a student who had previously received a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome and believed that the diagnosis was inaccurate. Thus, he was faced with the situation of "how do I tell a parent that the diagnosis and problem of the child that they've been believing for five years is not what I think the problem is." One of the primary considerations for Mike as he worked through this case was the reputation of the professionals who had made the original diagnosis, "...protecting my relationship with and the reputation of the other two people that did the [original] evaluation." Just as Dave expressed, Mike believed a certain sense of obligation to protect the credibility of colleagues and the profession; however, his main concern was making a decision that would benefit the child and family.

Existing in a Web of Relationships: The Need for Confidentiality

Clearly, school psychologists discussed their ethical commitments and responsibilities as embedded within many different relationships. They recognized that

these relationships held the potential for either supporting or hindering ethical practice. Often, they were willing to raise student concerns above concerns about relationships to maintain their ethical commitments to student advocacy.

Given this complicated web of relationships in which the school psychologist resides, *confidentiality* becomes a critical ethical consideration. According to the NASP ethical guidelines, school psychologists are responsible for working to maintain student confidentiality:

School psychologists respect the confidentiality of information obtained during their professional work. Information is revealed only with the informed consent of the client, or the client's parent or legal guardian, except in those situations in which failure to release information would result in clear danger to the client or others.....School psychologists discuss confidential information only for professional purposes and only with persons who have a legitimate need to know.

As these school psychologists discussed the particular ethical challenges that arise from this web of relationships, they overwhelmingly referred to *student confidentiality* as one of their major concerns. Although they were aware of their professional ethical responsibility outlined in the NASP guidelines, they expressed the difficulty of translating this into practice and differentiating when information should be shared, for example, when it “would result in clear danger to the client or others” and when a person other than the client “has a legitimate need to know.” **Robert** believed that the complex web of relationships in which a school psychologist exists necessitates closer attention to

the ethical responsibility of confidentiality, a principle that can be very difficult to uphold with this web:

In some ways, I think school psychologists have to be even more diligent when you talk about confidentiality, mainly because of all the people you are interacting with. Clinical psychologists see kids in their office and may relate to or call someone about this child, or may call the physician or something like that, but school psychologists, just walking down the hall, run into teachers, into students, secretaries.....people are always wanting information. We have a very unique set of information that we carry around with us and people—I don't care who it is, secretaries, administrators, even custodians—seem to want the information that you have.

Jennifer agreed, suggesting that this is one way that the ethical concerns of a school psychologist may differ from those faced by other psychologists: “I guess...there might be more issues of confidentiality among staff. There's just more staff to talk with, there are more kids around, so you might hear something from one kid about another kid....[and] what do you do with that.” Jennifer has frequently found herself in situations where she was asked to disclose information in a way that made her uncomfortable. Her efforts to maintain client confidentiality was evident in many components of her practice, ranging from everyday interactions with school staff to what she has chosen to document in her written reports:

I think about that often when I'm talking with people or just making sure I'm talking to that one person, or if it's a staffing, then it's OK. Having the door shut, asking parents if they want certain pieces in the reports, putting the reports where they are supposed to be, not floating them around everywhere.

Dave also described pressure that he sometimes feels from school staff who seek information about a child. To deal with this ethical conflict of disseminating information, he sought to make a judgment about whether the desired information was relevant to the child's education:

I sometimes get pressure in the school for information, events, some of the family background. If I don't think it's pertinent, I don't talk about it. It may be pertinent but may not be pertinent in the school setting, so I don't talk about it in my report. Sometimes, I get pressure, like 'What do you know about this background?', 'Is it a dysfunctional family?' and that type of thing, and it may very well be, but if it doesn't relate to school, say it only relates to a therapist working with him, I won't put it in there.

In his practice, **Mike** viewed confidentiality as the biggest ethical challenge that he faces:

I think that may be the greatest dissonance that I have. If a kid gives me a piece of information, whether to share it with the parents or whether to share it with the school people, and how I respect the confidentiality of what the kid told you....I

think the major issue in my ethical conflict would be if a kid told me that he was going to hurt himself, how do I protect the confidentiality of the kid, and yet tell the parent or tell the school to monitor the kid. And I think you always err on the conservative side, you always give up confidentiality for the sake of the kid, but with trust that the other people handle it with their confidentiality and where they got the information.

Reflecting on their experiences, these school psychologists described one of their major ethical challenges as the difficulty of respecting and maintaining child confidentiality while existing in multiple relationships with parents, school staff, and community professionals. The appropriate, ethical sharing of information is an area that is very difficult as school psychologists balance the desire to respect students' rights while also sharing information that school staff should know to promote student learning and development. This issue provides a prime illustration that even though professional organizations such as NASP outline ethical standards, there are many difficulties and challenges as each individual psychologist translates these guidelines into their everyday practice.

IDEA '97 and Relationships

As referred to several times in the discussion of school psychologists' relationships with families, one factor that will influence the future practice of school psychology is IDEA '97. Although most districts are still in the process of examining the

new laws and modifying their practices to meet the law, the participants expressed definite ideas about the effects of this legislation on their ethical practice.

The school psychologists in this study thought that the most significant impact would be apparent in the more comprehensive inclusion of parents in the evaluation process and programming decisions. **Joyce** saw the increased involvement of parents as positive because she has come to value more and more the input and evaluation of parents. Nevertheless, she thought that family involvement would increase the potential for ethical conflict within the complex web of participants, making ethical practice even more challenging for the school psychologist:

Whenever you have more involvement of parents, you have more chances of having ethical issues because they are coming in with their own side of things, and the teachers are coming in and the administrators are coming in....I think you are more torn in different ways in finding the best ways for that student.

Emily evaluated IDEA's greater emphasis on parental involvement throughout the referral and evaluation process as a factor that has vastly improved the assessment process and the ongoing collaboration between home and school; however, she also believed that the elimination of the MET meeting may decrease the general education teachers' sense of involvement.

I really like the evaluation review meetings that really call the group together...I think it's increased the, it's given us a better assessment, it's certainly provided a

vehicle for better communication right off the start, with the parent and the teachers. What I haven't liked is they've taken away the MET meeting, because it really allowed the teachers to really share data and hear more about the student and it allowed you to, I guess more time to discuss and explore, where I think there's a real pressure if you do the MET and IEPC together just to get it all done, it doesn't allow some of the brainstorming and communication that occurred before.

Emily had concerns that the elimination of meetings would result in less collaboration and in lower quality recommendations, changes that might ultimately harm children.

Jennifer believed that the greater involvement of parents could create ethical tensions related to the complete sharing of information. School psychologists have an ethical responsibility to maintain communication with parents regarding all aspects of their contact with the child. This responsibility is outlined in the NASP ethical guidelines, which state that "parents and students are to be fully informed about all relevant aspects of school psychological services in advance." Jennifer indicated that teachers, psychologists, administrators and other school staff may be less inclined to share their true impressions of the child if the parent is present, illuminating ethical concerns about keeping the parents fully informed.

The main issue is probably the idea of having the parents involved at the staffing or any time you are talking about possibly doing an evaluation or a referral, and so we have already come across the issue that teachers want there to be a time

where they can just talk about the kid without the parent there because there are things that they want to tell about the parent that they can't say in front of the parents. Or about the kid maybe even that they don't want to have to sort of dress up to not hurt the parents' feelings, so I think that is a dilemma.

Dave does not see IDEA as changing his own practice currently, but he reported some concerns that he has heard expressed by his colleagues:

In talking to some people, they were concerned that if the parents are right there, that other people might hold back on saying some things....it might be more unethical not to talk about the things they are concerned about because of the fear of hurting the parents or liability issues or that kind of thing.

While the full impact of IDEA '97 on the practice of school psychology has yet to be fully understood, several potential implications for ethical practice were discussed by these school psychologists. They believed that greater parental involvement will both increase home-school communication and collaboration, as well as illuminate ethical issues related to keeping parents informed. They also thought that while the legislation is purported to increase the collaborative nature of evaluation and programming, the elimination of certain meetings may actually make it more difficult to keep teachers involved as integral members of evaluation and program planning teams.

Summary. Clearly, school psychologists did not view the system as mechanistic and impersonal, nor did they see themselves as practicing within a vacuum. On the contrary, they understood themselves as embedded within a web of relationships that creates a complicated tangle of obligations and potential ethical conflicts. As described by these participants, the school psychologist faces a very difficult task in seeking solutions to ethical problems that are satisfactory to all of these relationship participants, while dealing with rifts in relationships that can occur when a school psychologists' decision differs from the position of others within the relationship web. Although school psychologists were cognizant of the need to recognize possible damage to relationships, they acknowledged that it was difficult, if not impossible, to make decisions that satisfy all involved. They described numerous situations where they sacrificed relationships, although in many cases only temporarily, to maintain student welfare as the motivation behind their decisions and actions.

The ability to deal with conflicting interests and agendas was not a skill or an ability that school psychologists bring with them upon entry into the profession. Rather, when describing their ability to "navigate" their way around this complex web of relationships and to balance the needs of multiple parties, many of the school psychologists described a *developmental* process. With time, experience, knowledge of the system, and personal reflection, they became increasingly able to understand people's needs, identify potential conflicts of interests, and balance the varied needs of multiple clients by consistently maintaining the child at the center of their practice. Thus, consistent with classic theorists (i.e., Kohlberg, Gilligan) who conceptualized moral thinking and action as developmental, these school psychologists reported their own

professional ethical commitments as developmental rather than fixed, suggesting the need to further examine the process whereby school psychologists come to navigate the ethical facets of their role.

Additionally, these school psychologists described intense systemic pressure to compromise ethical standards to promote the system above student welfare.

Nevertheless, they expressed hope that their moral voices could emerge from these systems. In discussing the context within which they worked, then, they described factors that allowed their moral voices to *emerge* from a system that presents many barriers to ethical commitments. The exploration of the *developmental* and *emergent* nature of school psychologists' moral voices is the goal of the next chapter.

Chapter 7

Development and Emergence of Moral Voice

One possible way of construing ethical thinking and action is to view it as a static trait that a person either does or does not possess. However, theorists, most notably Gilligan (1982) and Kohlberg (1969), have agreed that moral voice is more accurately conceptualized as developmental in nature, and each have articulated stage theories where they outline various stages of moral development. While each of these theorists have distinct and different conceptions of the nature of moral development, they make the common assertion that any individual's functioning in the moral domain can be assessed and categorized into one of their stages. These theories have been discussed mainly in relation to moral development in one's personal life; however, the question remains whether moral development can also be conceptualized within the framework of one's professional career.

These data in the present study suggest that moral development in the professional domain must be understood as continuous with, yet in many ways distinct from, moral development in the personal domain. As discussed in Chapter 4, many of the school psychologists understood the core of their professional ethical commitments as stemming from their personal ethical commitments and the essence of their personhood; nevertheless, a developmental theme was clearly evident as school psychologists reflected upon their professional experience. Many of the school psychologists did not conceptualize their ethical commitments and perspective as something that was gained in their training or that they "possessed" in full immediately upon entering practice, rather,

they described their ethical commitments as either 1) a dynamic phenomenon that developed with experience, or 2) as inherent in their personhood but developing within the context of their professional activities.

Close examination of these data indicated that the moral voices of school psychologists must be understood as both *developmental* and *emergent*. Definitions of these two words must be clarified, as they will be used as distinct but complementary terms in this present discussion. First, *development* is a word commonly used in the field of psychology to communicate growth and change. To say that something is *developmental* in nature is to characterize it as evolving, maturing, growing and opening. Developmental psychologists define the concept of *development* in distinctive ways that reflect specific philosophical, social and political beliefs. However, each definition typically involves similar ideas about the focus of developmental theory and analysis. For example, Miller (1993) argues that the critical component of a developmental theory is “change over time” (p. 4). Cobb (1998) argued that all definitions of development have in common their “attempt to explain the constancies and changes in function that occur throughout the life course” (p. 43). Lerner (1986) asserted that development is concerned with differences that occur with age and attempts to explain their sources or causes. Thus, while different theorists focus on different ideas and phenomenon, ranging from neurological change to environmental influence, the core idea in development relates to growth and change across one’s lifespan.

Related to this ideal, though subtly different, is the term *emergent*, which refers to the coming forth, the coming into view, or the coming into being that occurs as a result of inquiry. Qualitative researchers, for instance, when discussing emerging themes, refer to

those themes that they may not have anticipated prior to the study but that “came forth” from the data. As used in this present study, the concept of *emergence* differs from *development* in that it relates more directly to the specific context. In this chapter, the word *emergent* will be used to describe a process of coming forth from the system, or emerging from beyond systemic barriers. School psychologists described contextual barriers to their ethical practice; nevertheless, they also identified contextual factors that allowed them to exercise and develop their ethical commitments. Certainly, the concepts of *development* and *emergence* are not mutually exclusive but are in many ways interrelated. Emergence can be understood as a facet of development, while developmental phenomenon can be understood as emergent in nature. For the purposes of this study, the concept of *development* was used to describe a process of growth and unfolding that school psychologists characterized when describing their ethical thinking. The concept of *emergence*, on the other hand, was used to describe factors that school psychologists described as instrumental in allowing their moral voice to come forth from the system and be heard more fully. *Emergence* was used to describe school psychologists’ increasing ability to exercise their ethical commitment in relation to, and many times in spite of, the systemic context. Together, these two concepts were employed to frame the ensuing discussion of the evolution of school psychologists’ ethical thinking over the course of their professional experience.

Moral Voice as a *Developmental* Phenomenon

While these school psychologists understood ethical thinking and behavior as a characteristic that develops and becomes refined over the course of one's professional career, the process was not uniform across psychologists. Some of the school psychologists believed that the ethical dimensions of their practice, e.g., their understandings of their ethical responsibilities and their ability to act in an ethically consistent manner, became much clearer and simpler with experience. Others reported that as their roles moved beyond testing into other domains, their ethical responsibilities increased along with the difficulties accompanying ethical decision-making.

The Early Years: The Ethical Facets of Testing. One theme reflected in these data was the strong orientation toward testing that characterized several of the participants' early careers. In these early years, testing was the overriding concern both in their role constructions as well as in their understanding of professional ethical commitments. **Jennifer** is the participant with the fewest years of experience, with nearly four complete years of experience in practice. At this early point in her career, she continued to report ethical struggles that are largely related to testing. For Jennifer, being an ethical school psychologist was closely tied to assessment and involved three major components. First, Jennifer viewed ethics as largely related to "when you're deciding who to test and who not to" and "just a real basic thing of doing assessments and being accurate with the assessments and not fudging scores." Second, becoming a more ethical practitioner has involved being more willing to trust others' input and to rely on team

members in coming to a team decision rather than relying solely on her own judgement. While her ethical position continued to be largely test-based, then, she has become increasingly willing and able to collaborate around assessment data and eligibility decisions, thereby sharing ownership of the decision-making process. She explained, “I think when I first started, I felt like I had to make the decision because I couldn’t trust what the teacher thought, and now I feel like I’m much more open with talking about all of the results and all that stuff.”

Thirdly, Jennifer’s broadening perspective on ethical practice has encompassed a greater ability to make recommendations that are less dependent to test data and more based on a child’s individual needs. During her internship and first year in the field, she stuck closely to the idea that if a child meets eligibility criteria, then she should automatically recommend special education. With experience, however, Jennifer’s emphasis shifted along with the transformation of her self-perceived role. Whereas the earlier years of her practice were characterized by strict adherence to policy and rules, she viewed herself as becoming increasingly focused on children’s needs. Apparent in Jennifer’s description of her ethical development was a clear shift from a justice-orientation (“They all have a right to it”) to a care orientation (“What’s the best for that child”):

I think from when I first started with my internship, the idea was that if the kid looks like they are eligible, you definitely want them in [special education]....Now, it just seems more and more difficult, the more you look at programs and other options and trying to be with the new law and trying to be

more and more keeping them in the regular program. The idea that these kids have a right to special education, I don't feel quite like I used to feel. Now, it's more like not that I think they have a right to it, but that I'm looking more at what's the best for that child.

To summarize Jennifer's understanding of her own development, she continued to think about her ethical obligations and commitments as assessment-focused; however, she described a transformation in her ethical thinking that was characterized as a gradual move away from strict, rule-driven reliance on test data to greater reliance on multi-disciplinary team collaboration and on her own professional judgment about what was best for an individual child. This provided a clear example of how Jennifer's developing role definition influenced the ethical issues that she saw in practice. She clearly conceptualized her ethical commitments as developmental and dynamic. Thus, while she continued to see her role as largely tied to assessment, she was aware that her role definition, along with her ethical commitments and her thinking about ethical issues, were evolving with experience.

Moving Beyond the Testing Role: Grasping the "Bigger Picture" Consistent with Jennifer's assessment of her ethical development, reflections of the more experienced school psychologists also indicated that ethical practice in their early experience was largely related to testing and assessment. With the progression of one's career, however, comes a shift away from strict reliance on test data. **Robert**, reflecting on 32 years of experience that existed prior to any formal legislation moderating special

education services, recalled this “process” through which a strict adherence to tests and numbers which was gradually replaced by greater confidence in “clinical judgment:.”

It’s almost like a process. When you’re first in the field, I know when I was first in the field, you’re really sort of driven by the numbers game, like you are really numbers-oriented and sticking by the facts and nothing but the facts. As you get a little more experience, I think you start using more clinical judgment.

Likewise, **Joyce** reflected on her early career, recalling her focus on testing and her resistance to become involved in less prescribed, less mandated domains of school psychology practice:

..at that point, testing was the thing. You did the testing, you made your recommendations, and you were done and didn’t get as involved in relationships and political stuff and other things. The ethical issues as far as testing might be ‘Maybe I didn’t ask that question the right way’ or ‘he was too tired.’ So it more hinged on the testing part and why that wasn’t the best it could be. Now, it’s shifted more into relationships or service.

Hence, one hallmark of a seasoned school psychologist seemed to be a perception of professional ethics that was less closely tied to an assessment function. **Joyce** described a developmental process whereby her perspective on ethics shifted from focus on testing and more prescribed functions to focus on interpersonal relationships and what

it means to service children and families in a way that promotes their welfare. Similar to Jennifer, Joyce's description involved a developmental process that is characterized by the increasing presence of a relational, care-based orientation.

Jill believed that her ethics have always centered on her efforts to "do what I feel is best for children and families;" however, she thought that her idea of "ethical" became much less constrained over the course of her career, allowing her to focus more on "what is best for children and families." She explained, "...at first, you are probably all concerned with the testing and just doing it right. And I think after a while, you're more comfortable with that role, the testing role, and you are able to look at a bigger picture." For Jill, then, the ethical dimension of her practice has in many ways become more complicated and multi-faceted as her career has progressed. Her expanding role and experience have also played a role in shaping her current perceptions of the ethical commitments that she holds as an experienced school psychologist. As she has become less confined to a single, test-driven manner of looking at children and has gained experience in the school culture, she has been able to focus more on what is right for the child in the long run or "in the bigger picture."

Jill's ability to look at the "bigger picture" was important in her conceptualization of what it means to maintain ethically sound practice. Two meanings of "seeing the bigger picture" were reflected in Jill's responses to interview questions. First, as described above, she has become increasingly able, with experience, to look beyond test data to other factors that influence a child's life and functioning. Second, Jill's professional experience working with people ranging from infancy to adulthood has allowed her to see that any one program in any given year does not have to solve all of

the child's problems; rather, she viewed intervention as more of a long-term process, allowing her to see small improvements in functioning as success. Jill has come to understand that she may not see the benefits of a decision immediately when it is made but must focus on long-term benefits for students.

One situation reported by Jill involved the re-evaluation of a severely impaired student who had previously been qualified as EMI and who was being educated in his local high school with the support of a resource teacher. Upon conducting the re-evaluation, it was Jill's recommendation that TMI was a more appropriate diagnostic label and that more restrictive services were necessary to meet the student's needs;. However, the family strongly opposed this change of label and programming. Some of the administrators also pressured Jill to retain the original diagnosis due to greater potential costs to the district from programming and outside evaluations. Despite this pressure, Jill maintained her position that TMI was the diagnostic label that most appropriately characterized the child's functioning and needs. Reflecting on this incident, she thought that she probably would have made the same decision at the beginning of her career, although the decision may have actually been easier at that point:

It probably would have been easier at the beginning, because I would have just looked at the test data, and not looked at the other pieces of it. When you start out, you just tend to look at the data and you may not be necessarily politically savvy....I would have made the same decision, but maybe it was a bit more gut-wrenching with time that it would have been because as a new psychologist, I would have said, 'Well, here's the figures and here's the data and this is it.

Jill described a shift from a one-source view of assessment to a multi-source approach to assessment that takes into account such factors as interpersonal relationships within the system. While Jill believed that this process allowed her to make decisions in a way that is more beneficial for children and families, she acknowledged that this perspective resulted in a more complex perspective on ethics than she held when she focused strictly on test data.

Jill's perception of the "importance of seeing the big picture" was also evident as she discussed a researcher-generated dilemma where a school psychologist recommended that a child receive a diagnosis of an emotional impairment. However, the parents opposed this diagnosis and refused services unless the child was labeled as learning disabled instead of emotionally impaired. Addressing this situation, Jill believed that it was important to respect the views of the parents, while also being diagnostically honest and maintaining sight of "the bigger picture:"

I think we always have to remember that it's parents; the parents have the right to determine services, or to agree to services or not to agree to services. And sometimes because a parent makes a decision at one point...I have had cases where they've come back and said, "OK, we'll go with it." So sometimes, I think you have to look long-term. I think you have to be honest. I guess some psychologists don't care about the accuracy of their labels. I happen to be one that cares about the accuracy of the label, because I think later on, things may become more problematic.

Mistakes in Decision-Making and Ethical Development. In the example above, Jill depicted how making the decision that one views as professionally and ethically correct, despite pressure to make a different decision, can serve the function of reinforcing one's professional ethical commitments. For some practitioners, ethical development rests on a process of making wrong decisions, facing the consequences of those decisions, and learning from these mistakes. For example, Nick noted that over the course of his career, his definition of what is ethical has been clarified and simplified: "I don't think it's changed so much as become more defined. What used to be dilemmas for me are no longer dilemmas....making the wrong choices, and taking the knowledge and having it operate on future choices." Whereas Jill reported more complicated ethical-decision making later in her career, Nick reported that early experiences simplified his ethical decision-making. This increasing clarity, according to Nick, has resulted in fewer ethical dilemmas:

I don't feel that I face as many dilemmas any more. So, my ethics have been defined by the dilemmas that I have experienced in the past. So now, I behave according to those lessons and those ethics that were developed through experience. So, I am operating in accordance with those ethics now, but not in a dilemma sort of way.

Early mistakes in decision-making were also highly influential in Tom's professional ethical development:

I think I've gotten a little bit wise about how to employ ethics to good advantage in terms of people that we serve, but I've made a few mistakes with regards to how I've handled situations that I thought were egregious, and I wasn't exactly politically savvy about some things and I've learned through some of those painful experiences how to get things done in a manner that is positive and helps everybody come out ahead.

Tom recalled a specific situation early in his career where he made a mistake that formed how he now looks at his ethical responsibility:

This was an elementary school teacher who had a long history of difficulty emotionally, particularly interacting with students that challenged her authority and competence as a classroom manager, and at one point, I was involved in the assessment of one of her students.....in the course of this evaluation, the parent of the student had come to me and intimated that this teacher had more or less abused this student verbally and perhaps even physically, which I didn't feel was out of character for this teacher, knowing what I knew, and I felt like this person was a pretty reliable source and there was good reason to believe, knowing the child also, that this had occurred. So my dilemma there was what to do about it....who do I talk to? How do I communicate this? How much of what the parent said do I bring into evidence, considering it was a third party report?

In this situation, Tom decided to document the suspected abuse in his report, a decision that he would make differently at his present stage of development. He went on to discuss further his struggle in making this decision and in dealing with the consequences of what he now considers to be a faulty decision:

I felt an obligation to the parent and to the child to more or less use the report as an intervention, which was the wrong thing to do. Part of my decision to not talk to the teacher was mitigated by my concern over this teacher taking even more retribution on the kid who she already had some major issues with. This was kind of a no-win situation. I knew that there was a historical pattern of difficulty with this teacher's behavior. There had been corrective action, or attempted corrective action, taken with administration involved and really resolved nothing. The union helped this teacher prevail in her position and I don't know. At the time, it seemed like the right thing to do, but it blew up in my face. I didn't think clearly about the possible consequences of that action, not only for me, but for my employer and every other school psychologist who's going to talk into that building. What kind of allegiances there were in terms of peer group in that building and the teaching staff. That was a very unintelligent decision.

The salience of this decision and its consequences in Tom's ethical development was clear as he expressed the lasting effects on his practice: "That haunts me to this very day....it's really helped to determine my behavior to this point in relation to those kinds of issues because I learned a lot from that and I will never make that mistake again."

Robert also believed that decisions resulting in undesirable outcomes have shaped how he handles cases he encountered in his present practice. One example is in his decision-making related to PS referrals. Robert recalled one case wherein he opted not to make a PS referral when a student claimed that he was being abused:

I think of the experience of making those referrals and then losing the.....negative experiences where we have lost the family. Sometimes you don't have any choice. If the child comes in with bruises and things like that...this child had no bruises or marks that I knew of and I think he also tended to, he was full of emotional stress, but I think also that there was a certain amount of exaggeration.

The outcome of this situation was positive, because Robert was able to maintain a relationship with the family while also assisting them in implementing appropriate discipline in their home.

Accumulated Experience. Professional experience shapes attitudes, supports confidence, and assists school psychologists in gaining the credibility necessary that seem to be essential in making ethical decisions within the schools. The school psychologists in this study cited various facets of their experience, construing these factors as crucial to their ability to practice according to their moral and ethical convictions and standards. **Ken** reported that his early experience working with severely mentally impaired students led him to recognize the uniqueness and inherent value of each individual student, regardless of his or her disability. Infiltration of this attitude into every facet of his work

has occurred gradually over the course of Ken's career. For Ken, then, recognition of this inherent value of every student was what it meant to be an ethical practitioner:

Ethics is not only a practice, it's an *attitude*....it has to do with the current societal practice of attaching the worth of a person to their abilities, and I have a huge problem with that. All the kids we test are varied in abilities and in my opinion they're all equally valuable. I'm not just saying that in an idealistic way. I'm saying that I really believe that. I've worked with kids who were at one or two month's mental age. I did that for many years at the Hill Center. I've worked with kids now with IQ's of 140.....each of these kids are equally valuable, they just occupy a different place in society. That's the only difference. I often try to convey this to parents. Here's this handicapped, visually impaired child. That child is OK.

Clearly, Ken defined ethical practice as his success in recognizing this inherent value of every person with whom he comes into contact:

All we're trying to do is to help the child live a full life. That's all we're doing so that they can use all their abilities and feel confident and feel loved and valued. If we can do that, then that's our benefit of the child being here....When I test a child and a child has problems, I don't necessarily get emotionally involved in it. I don't necessarily think that it's really a shame....I mostly think that this is how this child is unique so what are we going to do about that problem, if you want to

call it a problem. The child can't read, so what are we going to do about the reading issue to help her become more functional? That's how I look at things.....

Often, practitioners viewed diagnostic work as the identification of problem areas that children need to change. However, as stemming from his ethical commitment to recognizing and valuing the inherent worth of individual children, Ken felt differently about this issue:

.....And remember the child does not have to change. Sometimes parents will have a handicapped child and they will keep waiting for that child to become better and the point is that that child does not have to change. The child is okay just the way they are. If they are autistic, that's okay. There's a place for everybody.

Interesting contrasts existed between the core of Ken's ethical obligations and Nick's ethical obligations. For Nick, the main motivation stemmed from fulfilling his professional responsibilities and obligations that are his by virtue of the professional role that he has chosen to assume. For Ken, on the other hand, ethical decisions seemed to stem more from an understanding of students' individual needs within specific situations, entering into their worlds and thereby reflecting more obviously a moral voice of care. The care perspective is characterized in part by the valuing of distinctive qualities of individuals, by having:

....respect for individual worth, merit, need or idiosyncrasy....a form of respect which involves admiration and cherishing, when the distinctive qualities are valued intrinsically, and which, at the least, involves toleration when the distinctive qualities are not valued intrinsically.....for so-called 'care' reasoners, recognition of, and commitment to, persons in their peculiarity is an overriding moral concern (Friedman, 1993, p. 270).

Nevertheless, in conjunction with this focus on caring for the individual, Ken's discussion of his ethical commitments also reflected an obvious justice orientation. Ken made statements that were characterized by universal applicability to all students with whom he came into contact. For instance, he believed that the students he worked with were "all *equally* valuable" and that "everything has to be *fair*." Additionally, when he made a decision about a child, he stated, "I don't necessarily get emotionally involved in it." Coupled with his understanding of children as inherently unique and valuable was a apparent emotional detachment that is more characteristic of a justice orientation rather than a care orientation (Gilligan, 1982). Ken recalled situations wherein he dealt with teachers and parents who misunderstood a student's level of functioning. Ken's role in this situation was to "make them understand that was okay, the kid was still okay," whether or not the child has a disability:

I would test a child a find out they weren't functioning as high as the staff thought and that was because they had invested so much time into the child and gotten all emotionally invested in the child, and they think they are functioning way up here

and, as it turns out, they aren't functioning that high. You would have to go in and basically tell them the truth and then put them back together again.

Mike thought that his longevity in his district was a critical factor in supporting his decision-making. He believed that there was a "difference in the longevity of a person in a district, the trust of a person in a district, the competence of a person as perceived in the district....." He believed that this longevity resulted in stronger trust between him and others in the district, as well as greater self-confidence in his decisions:

I think if you don't have a conviction about what you're about to say and you can't stand behind it, noone's every going to believe you. And I think if you do have conviction and you believe what you've decided...I mean it's much different than when you have to prove yourself and try to get tenure in your first year on the job,

Thus, Mike agreed that the development of relationship was a key factor that supported his ethical practice and enabled him to remain committed to his ethical convictions: "They don't question my ethics, in part because of the history of trust that has developed over the years, for both the client as the family and the client as the school." Mike described an incident wherein his longevity in the district would have played a key role in his decision. He was conducting a re-evaluation of a student who had previously been diagnosed as having Asperger's syndrome. Upon completing his assessment, however, Mike disagreed with the diagnosis. After considering the family's

right to know the appropriate diagnosis, protection of the credibility of the psychologist rendering the original diagnosis, and possible consequences for programming, Mike opted to be honest about his impression about the erroneous nature of the first diagnosis. Asked if he would have made the same decision earlier in his career, Mike stated:

I probably would have gone with the syndrome that was diagnosed earlier because of not enough experience, not enough confidence, not enough perhaps, stability—meaning professional stability in that milieu in which people might have less respect for you because they don't know you so well. And probably would have just gone along with the group decision.

Comparison of psychologists' discussions of the role of experience suggested a common strand between **Jennifer's** and **Emily's** understanding of their ethical development. For these two women, becoming more ethical involved a greater reliance on teammates' opinions when making eligibility and placement decisions. In contrast, Mike discussed his ethical development as characterized by a greater reliance and confidence in himself and his clinical impression. These data parallel data reported by Gilligan and colleagues where women are more likely to construe ethical issues in terms of connections with other people, while men are more likely to construe ethical issues as separate and individual (1982). This was apparent as Mike went on to summarize his stance on ethical decision-making:

You can never underestimate the impact you have on a child or family with the words you say to them, and I think that that gets scary is you spend too much time cogitating about it. I think it's better to believe that what you're doing is good, just and morally right, and that your decision is based on everything that you could possibly know at that time. But that statement that I just made is really a lifelong development of position, it's not something that you start out with.

It appears that although Mike recognized his position of influence and power in the lives of families, he tried to distance himself from this connection, instead focusing on his decision to be somewhat detached and rational. This detached, rational manner of ethical practice is consistent with a voice of justice.

Personal Growth and Parenthood. The main theme in **Emily's** discussion of the ethical facet of her practice was the intimate relationship between her professional practice and her role as a parent. Parenthood, for Emily, has been key in the development of her moral voice. Discussing the factors that have influenced her ethical practice, she replied:

Having children and living longer....I think it's much more easy to be judgmental about how a parent is parenting a child or what kind of home this child comes from, or "the parent is the problem" kind of thing. But I guess the more I'm a parent and the more I live, not that we don't judge, but "Until you've walked in a man's shoes..." that kind of thing. Much more sensitive, and what it would be

like to parent that child 24 hours a day when they have multiple siblings and working. Yeah, I think I've become probably more sensitive.

When she dealt with children and families, she made an effort to place herself in their shoes and hear what she was saying as they would hear it. This increased sensitivity was especially fostered by her own experience with a child who potentially had some medical problems. When she interacted with families, she drew upon this experience:

Being a parent, and thinking 'What would I want for my child?' How would I want to be treated, or how would I hear that.....and [it] just really does make a difference when you have teachers or you hear them say something to you about your child. Or when I thought something was wrong with mine, we had to go through a bunch of tests. I was pregnant, and how I was treated when we were going through all that testing and assessment phase. It was very, a very powerful in how it influenced me.

In addition to citing the role of professional experience in ethical development, **Mike** believed that his definition of what is ethical has been an outgrowth of personal growth and development. More specifically, he stated the increasing self-knowledge that comes with age also affected professional ethical development. Asked to describe the nature of these changes in his thinking about ethics, he explained:

I think it's less rigid and it's more global than it used to be. I think when you're trained in your early years, you are more rigid because you don't have the experiences by which to make more free judgments, more free decisions, and I think as I got older, I think I became less rule-oriented and more kind of self-oriented, and again....I think that it really has to do with liking who you are and how you've developed, and you make your decisions based on who you are more as you get older than when you are first trained. It's hard to know where you're at in terms of an ethical position when you're 25, and by 50, you should have a much better sense of that.

In summary, while many of the participants understood professional ethical commitments as stemming from the core of their personhood (discussed thoroughly in Chapter 4), they did not describe these commitments as a static, uni-dimensional trait. Rather, they described a complex developmental phenomenon that is shaped through cumulative professional experience, the establishment of trust and credibility in the system, personal roles such as parenthood, and personal life experiences. In addition to understanding the ethical practice of school psychology as a developmental phenomenon, participants also characterized their ethical position as *emergent*.

Moral Voice as an *Emergent* Phenomenon

The word *emergent*, as addressed in the introductory paragraph of this chapter, suggests a “coming forth from” or a “rising out of.” Implied is a freeing from

boundaries or restriction. As outlined thoroughly in Chapter 3, school psychologists face many systemic barriers that may hinder the exercise and expression of moral convictions that are closely held to oneself. Extending the metaphor of voice, then, it is clear that school psychologists' voice can sometimes become *suppressed* when faced with administrative pressures such as limited financial resources, high caseloads, political pressures, and role perceptions (See Chapter 5 for a complete discussion of these systemic barriers). Even if school psychologists strive to remain committed to their ethical convictions, their moral voice can be twisted, distorted and even drowned out by the complex barriers that can characterize the system. The next section of this chapter will discuss the factors that have allowed participants' moral voices to break through and emerge from some of the strong systemic barriers that they described. As school psychologists described instances contributing to their expression of moral voice, they clearly discussed three factors that supported this expression: The *ethical behavioral of colleagues*, *administrative support*, and the *role of professional judgment*.

Ethical Behavior of Team Colleagues. One factor that allowed school psychologists' moral voices to be expressed more fully is the willingness of their colleagues to remain committed to their ethical convictions, even in the face of tremendous risk (i.e., loss of job and professional prestige). Several of the participants described situations where their commitments to their own ethical convictions were strengthened when they witnessed other professionals take a public stand for their own moral convictions. **Ken**, for instance, recalled being faced with a situation where a principal unilaterally placed a child with an emotional impairment into an

“inappropriately classified classroom.” Believing that this placement was detrimental to the child, a social worker on Ken’s team reported the case to a protection and advocacy representative. This referral prompted the principal to call a meeting of all special education staff with the purpose of identifying the person who had made the report. Ken reported that while he supported the social worker’s report and opposed the administrator’s unilateral action, he did not voice his opinion for fear of losing his job. Reflecting on this situation, he stated, “It’s an interesting thing when you are sitting there and you’ve got a job on the line and you’re paying a mortgage, and you’ve got a family and all these sorts of things. You’re feeling like ‘Well, how much am I going to say here?’”. Ken proceeded to describe how his observation of the social worker’s willingness to place her job on the line supported his own desire to maintain ethical practice: “.....seeing her take the stand made me want to do the same next time.”

Emily also reported that because her colleagues are ethical people who are devoted to maintaining ethical practice, she is supported and held accountable in her own ethical behavior:

I think my peers are really have the best interest of children in mind and are very ethical people. In general, most of the people that I work with on the core team, we have very similar principles.....And we share and hold each other accountable for that standard of practice.

Rather than feeling isolated in her effort to maintain personal ethical commitment and the standards of the profession, Emily felt supported in her efforts to maintain her

dedication to child welfare. This type of colleague support created an environment that facilitated the expression of a school psychologists' moral voice in a way that would not be possible in isolation.

Administrative Support. As described in Chapter 5, administrative support is essential to a school psychologist's ability to maintain their ethical commitments in their professional work. A prime example of this was described by **Mike** as he recalled an incident where the special education support team reviewed a student case and decided that there was not sufficient concern to pursue a comprehensive evaluation: "It was my judgment at the meeting that the information about the child functioning level was already known and the problem was that they needed to just adjust their curriculum in the class a bit." As a result of this decision, the referring teachers in the system placed pressure on the support staff to change their decision. According to Mike, the key to resolving this conflict was the unsolicited support he received from his administrator: "...the principal went in and talked to those teachers....I didn't even know and he never said anything to me about it, but that is what I mean. He was kind of protecting our turf." In this example, administrative support enabled Mike and his colleagues to act in what they determined to be an ethical manner. This example, then, illustrated the important role that the administration can play in a school psychologist's ethical practice. As suggested in Chapter 5, a supportive administrator can facilitate the expression of moral voice, while an administrator focused solely on finances and caseload numbers can make it very difficult for school psychologists to practice according to their ethical convictions and commitments.

Clinical Judgment. The factor that school psychologists discussed as most salient in their ability to break through the barriers and express their moral voice, referred to by each of the participants, was the central role of “clinical judgment or “professional judgment.” In relation to eligibility decisions, for example, commitment to making ethical decisions surpassed inflexible adherence to laws and eligibility standards and often involved a professional opinion regarding the child’s unique strengths, weaknesses, and needs. This issue was mainly addressed within the context of two situations: 1) cases involving differential diagnosis, and 2) cases where a child does not meet strict eligibility criteria, despite the psychologist’s impression that the child has an educational disability and needs services.

When presented with a scenario wherein a child may not technically qualify for services but who, in the psychologist’s clinical judgment, needs the services, each of the psychologist’s referred to the central role of professional judgment. **Tom**, for example, contrasted the strict role of “tester” with that of “clinicians and decision-makers:”

Diagnostic criteria are suggestions and guidelines, they are not gospel, and I think that you can be overly dogmatic in adherence to those and really deny that kids are truly handicapped, despite what the numbers say. That’s where we come in as clinicians and decision-makers. We are the people who diagnose, not the individual tests, not a set of numbers. Those are descriptive, but don’t tell the whole story. I sort of approach things that way.

Dave thought that it was important to be honest about whether a specific child meets eligibility criteria but added that actual eligibility and programming decision can be based more on professional judgment and less on the eligibility requirements. Asked how he handles a situation like this, he explained that clinical judgment sometimes superimposes the guidelines:

Actually, when I do this, I will say, 'This doesn't meet the number criteria, but *clinically speaking*, the child meets the guidelines....I talk about standard errors of measurement, I talk about scores, I'll give a range of scores. I'll say that if we look at this range of scores, we can see...this also explains what I mean in terms of how I can do that clinical judgment. I'll try to explain my reasoning to the staff and to the parents.

Asked to address a situation involving a differential diagnosis between a learning disability and an emotional impairment, **Tom** stressed the need for clinical judgment when making this diagnostic decision:

I had a colleague of mine give me some very valuable advice once. She said you have the right as a clinician to make your own judgement. These numbers are there as guidelines. You don't have to place them on the altar. You can look at the whole picture of the kid and decide what you think the whole problem [is]. If you think the kid is LD or you think the kid is EMI, or whatever, you can say that and you can go ahead and report in your report what you concluded and why and

that's the end of it. If somebody wants to disagree with you, let them disagree. I thought it was great advice.

Jennifer, faced with the need to differentiate between and emotional impairment and a learning disability when the problems appear to be mainly emotional, stated that she would be willing to go against her primary diagnostic impression of an emotional impairment, as long as the student did meet LD guidelines and would be getting appropriate services:

I guess as long as the student is getting the services that I want them to get, I can concede to a different label, if they indeed have a discrepancy. There is a huge stigma attached to an EI label. There really is, and it can affect them even sometimes after school, going in the army, maybe even getting a job.

Jennifer supported her decision because she believed that the ultimate concern was the goals and the programming; the eligibility decision was just a means to that end:

You're going to have an IEP with goals. See, that's the piece again with the social worker or whoever is going to be working with him. You would have an IEP that would describe the kid's strengths, weaknesses, concerns, the affective needs, the goal areas, and that's what you would look at for that kid. That's what is supposed to describe the kid to me. So there is that label and obviously....I

would want some kind of services or goals to address the affective part, and that needs to be part of the IEP.

Mike also stressed that special education rules were not meant to be inflexible but were meant as references and guides for decisions:

The laws about special education and the right to special education are guidelines. They are *guidelines*. And they are guidelines because school psychology is hardly a science. At best, it's an art with a little bit of science added, so your position when you evaluate a kid is not what the scores are and do they meet the guidelines. Your position is a clinical judgment of what is wrong with this child, and is that disability severe enough to warrant calling them a diagnostic label.....and I think that fudging the numbers is a term that we've come up with to explain kind of the what I prefer to call 'clinical judgment.' I don't think you have to fudge numbers, because I think that you recognize that the numbers themselves are not absolutes and there is great variance among them and there's reliability issues and probably gender issues in who's testing the kid....your judgment about those numbers and everything you know about the kid is what makes your decision, not the numbers.

Unlike his colleagues, Mike did not view eligibility decisions or “fudging of numbers” as an ethical concern; rather, he drew a distinction between ethical concerns and “professional opinions:”

There should be not issue of “Gee, should I do X or Y.” It should always be, ‘Well, the professional response to this situation is X.” The ethical decision would be not so much....’Does the kid have the numbers to go on caseload?” That’s not an ethical decision, and fudging the numbers, that’s not an ethical decision for me. The decision is, “What’s your professional opinion about what’s wrong with this kid, period.” You know, it’s not like a moral conflict.

Mike regarded this situation as more clear-cut than the other school psychologists, a view which he saw as making the issue less complicated for him:

I don’t think it hinders my ethical practice as much as it hinders the practice of a lot of other school psychologists. You know, there are rules that have numbers and there are guidelines that districts and states set up, or the federal government sets up, and I think that people are very rigid about that, so I think that their rigidity to the rules would create ethical issues for them. But it doesn’t really impact me.....

Mike cited a specific example of another school psychologist in his county who he perceived as “living by the letter of the law,” resulting in delayed services for a child:

I can think of a specific case right now where the difficulty of the person trying to live by the letter of the law has delayed services and appropriate treatment, both

medically and educationally, for this kid since September. And you know, we're halfway through the year, and the kid still isn't medicated, and still has no program because the person has to live by the letter of the law.

When faced with a researcher-generated dilemmas where a school psychologist had to make a differential diagnosis between an emotional impairment and a learning disability in the face of distinct pressure from parents and teachers, Mike did not conceptualize this situation as problematic:

My immediate reaction is that there is no problem presented here. The only problem that this psychologist is going to face is if they're not a very strong person as a professional individual that they are going to feel pressure to make a diagnosis that may be different than what they think is a primary diagnosis."

Jill placed high value on honesty and diagnostic integrity, stating, "Some psychologists don't care about the accuracy of their labels. I happen to be one that cares about the accuracy of the label...." However, she strove to balance this diagnostic integrity with clinical judgment about the child's present and future programming needs:

I feel real strongly about the determination of eligibility, I think it needs to be honest, but I think you need to balance that with the programming and looking down in the future. So I don't think it's as black and white as it sounds. I try to pick the eligibility that is that best descriptor and that will meet the child's needs.

Whereas Jill regarded diagnostic “honesty” as an ethical responsibility, **Mike** clearly sees it not as an ethical responsibility but a professional one. When describing a situation where he disagreed with a previous diagnosis, he reported that he had to tell the parents his impression:

I think I’ve always taken that position. I don’t think there’s a case where I didn’t give that information pretty straightforward, with the parents. And I’m not sure if that was an early training tool that I learned, to be very up-front with the information you have. I guess I consider that to be a professional responsibility more than a professional ethic. It’s a responsibility to tell the parent what you see.

Robert clearly expressed that his clinical judgment is bound by current special education definitions and criteria and gets “lost in the numbers:”

I think unfortunately the current definitions, there are so many definitions now, there is not enough leeway for professional judgment, for how we see the child based on our judgment, on our clinical opinion. Clinical opinions are important but unfortunately, we don’t get to use them enough. They get lost in the numbers.

Joyce echoed the need to consider eligibility criteria as flexible rather than set in stone, though she recognized that school psychologists vary in their philosophy and adherence to eligibility criteria:

Basically, I give myself a little leeway. I know that there are other school psychologists who if, “By golly, it says 20 points in our little book here, it’s 20 points,” but mine is not like that. Looking at where they are and how they are functioning in the classroom... Part of it, too, is I’m not really a “rules person.”....My thing is do what you think is right, and if they ask you questions about it later, then you explain it.

The collaborative team model was another manner in which professional judgment can enter the evaluation and eligibility determination process. **Jennifer** thought that her skills in working within a team and refraining from making unilateral decisions was an important component of ethical practice. If faced with a student who did not qualify by his test scores but who showed clinical evidence of a learning disability, Jennifer would handle it by considering individual factors of each case:

Because we’re supposed to have a certain amount of points, or whatever, but I’ll have this profile that looks so LD to me, and I’ll be like one or two points off, and I’ll say, “Look, we’re this close.” It just depends on all of the issues. There might be a kid like that that I’d say, no way. But then there’ll be this other kid, and I’ll say to that teacher, “We don’t really quite have the points here that we

need, but as a team, we can look at this together” instead of coming in and saying
“There is or is not a learning disability here.”

One of the dilemmas that Nick shared involved a severely impaired student who did not clearly meet the guidelines for autism; thus, when the student reached the age when he was to be exited from the public education system, Nick was faced with the dilemma of whether to exit him without a AI diagnosis, leaving him without services, or support an AI diagnosis in order to gain access to continuing services for the student. Nick explained the situation:

We were getting ready to exit a student, and they, he had a genetic, certified POHI and had a very severe genetic disorders. Lots of dysmorphia, had like a dozen operations, both cranial deformities, webbed toes, missing fingers. A mess, looked like Frankenstein. Also had bipolar disorders, ADHD, probably, if you could get to it, average cognitive functioning, but just socially clueless. Parents had gone to hell and back. And we were doing an exit evaluation.....Well, they, the parents were very reluctant to let this kid go, he was 19, and through the evaluation and during the IEP, it was determined that there would be virtually no services for this individual upon exiting. UNLESS he had an AI diagnosis, in which case, he would qualify as developmentally disabled and get CSDD and the whole panoply of services that are associated with that diagnosis. Was this individual as messed up as an AI kid would be? At least. And going through the record, and in his behavior, he had some perseverative kinds of things....same

difficulties socially. In going through the record there were just so many issues early on, life or death issues that the AI diagnosis was way down on the level of priorities. And he may or may not have been. But it would have been very much a judgment call in terms of going AI at that point in time. So, we did an evaluation.... and talked the rest of the team into going AI on him. He exited and got CSDD services and it worked out.

Nick articulated this conflict as “behaving with diagnostic integrity versus this individual having a life.” This decision was very difficult for Nick, who believed that he was advocating for the student foremost but in a “sub-terranean” sort of way. He explained what made this decision particularly difficult: “I think it pulled me out of the system to a degree that was a little frightening. That I was behaving in a way that was, at least I perceived it to be, very much at variance with what my role, or what the expectations of my role, were.” In talking about his thinking process, Nick drew the distinction between “what I perceived my role to be” and “what I believed to be ethical.” This conflict, particularly highlighted by the emotion with which Nick spoke of this situation, provided a powerful illustration of the role expectations that threaten to confine school psychologists in their work and the clash that can occur between systemic expectations of the school psychologist and the school psychologist’s ethical commitments.

Summary. The school psychologists in this study clearly characterized their ethical commitments and obligations as evolutionary and developmental. They described

personal factors, such as parenthood, religious upbringing and increased sense of civic responsibility, as influential in their moral development and in the ethical commitments to children and child advocacy that they expressed as the driving force behind their practice. Even those who described their ethical commitments as existing prior to their entry into the field of school psychology acknowledged that their ethical commitments had changed and become more refined with time and experience in the profession. Rather than existing as status phenomena, the ethical commitments of school psychologists developed and became clearer with personal and professional experience.

The school psychologists also described contextual factors that allowed them to exercise their ethical commitments and moral voices. Consistent with literature describing the historical and present limitations and misperceptions of the school psychologists' role, these participants reported facing tremendous barriers that made it difficult, if not impossible, to advocate for children and maintain ethical practice. Yet, while factors such as administrative pressure to act unethically, misperceptions of the role, and limited resources threatened to squelch the moral voices of school psychologists, these school psychologists also identified various factors within the system that facilitated their ability to express their moral voice. Thus, although they expressed frustration and feelings of confinement when facing constricting factors, the school psychologists in this study nonetheless reported that their moral voices were sometimes able to *emerge* from these barriers and be heard. The expression of professional judgment, as opposed to strict, mindless adherence to legislation and guidelines, represented one important way that school psychologists have found to break away from

prescribed practice and feel free to express recommendations that are most likely to promote children's welfare.

Finally, as was fully described in Chapter 6, a supportive network of interpersonal relationships within the system created an environment that facilitated and encouraged the emergence of moral voice. The support of ethical colleagues and the support of administrators allowed school psychologists to exhibit the confidence necessary to stand firm in one's ethical convictions in the face of the most intense pressure to compromise. In many cases, the presence of others within the system who are willing to remain committed to unyielding ethical standards also creates a system of accountability among professionals.

Before summarizing and discussing the implications of these present data, I would like to review this analysis to this point. In the first section, *Understanding the Silence*, I reviewed historical and present reasons for the suppression of school psychologists' moral voices. Also included in this section were the methods and design for the present study, proposing how I set out to allow school psychologists to break the silence and let their moral voices be expressed. In the second section, *Breaking the Silence*, my main goal was to represent the moral voices of school psychologists as they discussed their roles and practice. This goal was accomplished through a theme-based analysis of school psychologists' perceptions and understandings of the ethical dimensions of their role.

The final task, based on these intriguing data, was to draw some final conclusions and discuss the implications of these data for school psychology as a practice and an academic discipline. The next and final section of this paper, entitled *Amplifying the Voices*, was devoted to exploring these crucial ideas related to the ways that certain

moral voices are amplified while others are suppressed in school psychology practice. The participants in this study represented ethical practice within the schools as highly complex and challenging. The nature of the system in which they practiced had serious implications for school psychologists as they strove to maintain their ethical responsibilities and commitments. In these final two chapters, I discuss the nature and pattern of the voices that I detected as these participants discussed their ethical practice, focusing on understanding their construals within the multi-leveled contexts in which they lived and practiced. While justice and care were both evident in the discussions of these school psychologists, listening to their voices made it clear to me that these concepts must be understood as intimately embedded within the unique and dynamic contexts of the educational and socio-historical contexts. Thus, what is necessary to reconceptualize these concepts rather than to rely on those presented by Gilligan and Kohlberg, a factor that will be explored fully in the following pages. In this final section, my goal was that by giving school psychologists the opportunity to express their moral voices and allowing them to surpass, if only temporarily, the barriers that they often face in their practice, the ethical dimension of school psychology, and the individual ethical commitments and challenges of school psychologists working on the “front lines” for the welfare of children, families and schools, would be more fully understood and appreciated.

Chapter 8

Understanding Justice and Care Within the Schools

The overriding purpose of this study was to understand how school psychologists think about and construe the ethical dimension of their professional lives. School psychologists are not passive consumers of the professional standards and ethical principles governing the field, nor do they mindlessly and automatically apply these standards to their individual circumstances and contexts; rather, ethical practice is a complex, constructive phenomenon involving cognitive, development, spiritual, and emotional components.

One of the questions driving the present research related to how school psychologists construe the ethical dimension of their practice. The ten school psychologists who participated in this study did not represent their thinking about ethical issues in terms of discrete categories or prescribed, codified ethical guidelines. On the contrary, school psychologists described their ethical obligations and commitments in unique and multi-faceted ways, indicating that an interpretive approach to studying this topic is necessary to develop a more complete understanding of the core ideas from their lives and experiences. This study represents an account of these individuals as they describe their journey through the complex terrain of the schools. They discussed the satisfaction and the trials they have encountered as they attempt to remain committed to their ethical convictions and responsibilities.

What does the ethical dimension of school psychology practice look like, and how can we best understand it? Quantitative answers to these questions only scratch the

surface of the complexity of individual construals of this aspect of one's professional role. Henning-Stout (1994) suggested that psychology and education have traditionally downplayed understanding the contextualized nature of experience—in her words, the “connected ways of knowing”—and have thereby gained only limited understandings of the developmental processes and phenomena associated with human learning and functioning. Certainly, this emphasis on objective, positivist, quantitative approaches to inquiry is reflected in the school psychology literature generally and, more specifically, in the studies that have focused on ethics in school psychology. The school psychologists in this study actively made sense of their professional ethical commitments and responsibilities within their specific contexts, acknowledging that contextual factors can both support and hinder ethical practice. They understood their commitments to ethical standards as embedded in a complex web of relationships, suggesting that professional ethics cannot be understood apart from the social realm. Consistent with present views that reject Kantian notions of the moral self as a pure, rational agent that is removed from moral decision-making and action, they did not describe their ethical commitments as isolated from their personal lives and developmental experiences, instead discussing an intimate integration between the personal and professional. In many ways, their professional experiences, roles and contexts, and personal experiences and commitments, formed a complex lens through which they view and construct ethical issues. Hence, these present data suggest that views of ethics that characterize ethical concerns as a facet of practice that can be understood and analyzed apart from the practitioner and apart from the context are inaccurate and run the risk of perpetuating simplified and uni-dimensional understandings of a highly complex profession.

A second question driving the present inquiry related to the ways that theoretical constructs of the moral voices of justice and care could be useful in understanding ways that school psychologists construe their ethical commitments and responsibilities. This question has a complex and multi-faceted answer. Through the process of reading, processing, and reviewing the data gathered in the present study, the ideas of care and justice emerged as the school psychologists discussed their ethical challenges and commitments. However, the manner in which they discussed and conceptualized justice and care did not reflect exactly the same understandings of these concepts as they were discussed by Kohlberg and Gilligan. Instead, these concepts seemed to take on a different life and form within the context of schools and school psychology practice.

In these final two chapters, the remaining task is to amplify, to project and make more apparent, the moral voices of school psychologist. To accomplish this goal, I first explore the school psychologists' understandings of *care* and *justice* in practice, framing the present data within existing research addressing justice and care in schools. Second, in the final chapter, I strive to promote a more comprehensive understanding of these school psychologists' thinking about ethical issues by discussing the implications of this research and suggesting a new way of reframing their moral concerns within the school context. We must adopt a new way of thinking about moral voice and the concepts of justice and care to understand school psychologists' unique experiences in their unique professional contexts.

Concepts of Care within the Schools

To this point, this research has drawn on Gilligan's notion of *care* in attempting to interpret and communicate school psychologists' moral voices. As articulated fully in Chapter 1, Gilligan and her colleagues have conceptualized morality in the form of relationship responsibilities and connection. Morality, according to Gilligan's ethic of care, rests on "an understanding of relationships that entails response to another in that person's terms and contexts" and that seeks to promote the welfare and care of both others and self (Lyons, 1982, p. 42). She contrasts this notion of morality with an ethic of *justice*, which conceptualizes morality as a rational, logical objectivity based on universal principles and rights (Kohlberg, 1982). One of the major goals of this study was to evaluate the utility of these conceptions of justice and care in making sense of a school psychologists' experience with ethical issues in practice.

Before I evaluate the utility of Gilligan's and Kohlberg's models for the present discussion (as will be discussed fully in Chapter 9), I will describe alternate considerations of care that may also prove useful in understanding school psychologists' thinking and experiences within their school context. Of particular utility are those discussions of care that relate specifically to education and school contexts. A review of literature suggests that specific discussion of care in relation to education and schools is a relatively recent trend. The individual most commonly associated with these discussions is Nel Noddings (1984; 1988; 1992), who has advocated for a *relational approach* to schooling, based on caring relationships between students and educational professionals. Exploration of this literature provides an important context for beginning to understand

the school environment and how specific contextual factors can support or hinder the ethical practice of its members. In her work, Noddings (1992) indicated that schools employing on an ethic of care have four characteristics: They model caring relationships among individuals within the schools; they engage students in dialogue and discussion around values and ethics; they encourage children to demonstrate the ethic of care by serving others; and they reinforce care at all levels of the school (as cited in Baker et al., 1997). Thus, she supported a view of relational ethics based on caring and argues that schools and educational professionals should employ an approach that rests on teaching care and virtue to students within a caring community, the school.

Founding their work upon Nodding's ideas of care within the schools, school psychology researchers have also discussed the concept of care as it specifically applies within the school. Baker and colleagues (1997) cite research conducted by the Institute for Education and Transformation (1992) indicating that many of the problems within the schools – declining test scores, drop out rates, substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, violence, suicide rates, and a host of other behavioral and psychological problems—are actually consequences of deep-seated problems of *relationships* (or lack thereof) within the schools. Other researchers (e.g., Etzioni, 1993) have also pointed to interpersonal disconnection and lack of personal relationships as problematic in education. Drawing on the work of Noddings, Baker and colleagues argue that relationally oriented, care-based approaches to education are critical because they “foster the development of caring relationships among children and teachers at school as the means of affecting children’s intellectual, social and emotional growth....[and thereby] allow children to appraise school as a meaningful social context in which to function” (p. 586). Thus, the goal of

education is not solely academic but instead also involves fostering the development of interpersonal connectedness, social and civic responsibility, and dedication to service toward self and others. Within this environment, educators seek to “purposively nurture caring relationships with students.....express greater warmth and supportiveness toward students and spend more time listening to and talking to students about personal and social issues.....facilitate rather than direct learning.....and purposively mentor students in areas other than academics” (Baker et al., 1997, p. 593). From this relationship approach to educational reform, the major goal is “to improve schooling by attending to the broader social context in which academic learning transpires.....so that caring connections to others and to meaningful academic work is fostered” (p. 587). Baker and colleagues conclude that “school psychologists, in their central roles as child advocates, can be instrumental in developing schooling practices that extend caring and community to children” (p. 599). The emphasis is for school psychologists and other educational practitioners to employ *care* concerns as central to their work with and decisions about children and families. Many of the facets of Gilligan’s conception of care—emphasis on knowledge of the individual, consideration of individual circumstances, and the preservation of relationships—are reflected in Noddings’ and Baker’s discussions of care in the schools.

Barriers to Care in the Schools. In addressing the characteristics of a care-based school and care-motivated educational practitioners, I will examine the school environment for potential barriers to care that exist in the schools as they are currently structured and managed. Assuming an ecological perspective, one cannot consider

professional ethics as isolated from the context but must instead consider the multiple levels of the context to understand fully one's ethical thinking and decisions. These contextual barriers to an ethic of care in the schools have been discussed by researchers interested in educational reform. Baker and colleagues (1997) have identified several factors that can hinder the exercise of care in schools: Societal resistance to values education; everyday conventions (e.g., competitive grading practices, centralized lunchrooms) that reflect the formal organizational structure of today's schools; lack of appropriate assessment strategies and tools to measure concepts like care, connectedness, and community-mindedness; and questions regarding the appropriateness of using school reform to effect social change. These problems are deeply rooted in the educational institution and in American society, and they demand serious investigation and consideration in assessing the feasibility of care-based relational approaches to education.

Consistent with Baker's discussion of these potential barriers to care within the schools, the school psychologists in the present study discussed systemic factors that limit their ability to care for and develop intimate relationships with students and teachers. These barriers, discussed specifically in Chapter 5—high caseloads, testing emphasis, limited resources, and administrative pressure to promote the system's interests—create conditions which make sustained contact with students, parents, and educators within the school system very difficult, if not impossible altogether. In Baker's words, the organizational structure of schools creates many barriers to relational care (1997). Therefore, in understanding morality within the schools, I must avoid dissecting ethics apart from context and consider centrally those specific contextual factors that impact one's decisions and thinking about ethical commitments and responsibilities.

In the present study, the need to consider the specific context of schools and school psychology was clearly evident in many areas. **Mike** referred to these barriers as he discussed his ethical commitments, stating, “You don’t have time to even know who these kids really are. You’ve got just ten hours to deal with this kid and family, and then you have to move on.” He described changes that he has seen in his ability to really know kids as the system has changed in his career. As the educational system has become more structured, formalized, and driven by financial concerns, his ability to build and maintain relationships with students and families has diminished:

I think earlier [in my career], you used to be able to get to know the people better and know the kid better and see the kid more regularly. It used to be that I used to go into an EI room every week, I knew every kid in there, I could sit down and talk with every kid in there, they all knew my name. Now, the only reason you go in there is to pick up a kid and test them, and they don’t even know who you are.

Dave, referring to his previous experience working in private practice, also described the characteristics of school psychology practice that hinder the development of an intimate relationship with clients:

I would say the truth is that if you are working in a clinical setting doing therapy with somebody, the relationship becomes more intense. That’s not to say that school psychologists don’t *care* (emphasis added) about their patient, but it’s a less personal type of thing.....you see quite a few kids.....you’re giving the

tradition testing type of thing that might involve an observation for about an hour or so, and the actual contact with the kid might be two and one-half or three hours, and it's in a very structured, standardized setting....I don't think you can have as much contact with them. It's not that you care about them any less, but.....

Along with several other participants, Dave and Mike described conditions that create very strong barriers to the type of care that Gilligan, Noddings and Baker have suggested. Yet, they still feel strongly that they “care” just as much for the child as they would if they were able to form a more sustained relationship, and they view “care for children and families” as central to their ethical commitments. Hence, to suggest that the school psychologist is not embedded in a complex web of relationships and commitments motivated by some form of care is inaccurate. Although the school psychologist's role and context may constrain the types and depths of relationships experienced, the school psychologists in this study nevertheless defined their role and their ethical commitments as situated within a complex web of relationships with people for whom they genuinely care.

The Nature of Care and Relationship in School Psychology. Given this understanding of the context of the schools, how can we best understand the concept and practice of “caring” in the school psychologist's world? Implied in ‘caring’ is the existence of some type of relationship between people, although the details of the nature of caring has been described differently by different theorists. As the school

psychologists in this study discussed their moral and ethical commitments and responsibilities, they described their ethical commitments as inextricably embedded within a complex web of relationships with multiple parties both inside and outside of the school system. However, descriptions of relationship do not automatically translate into what Gilligan conceptualized as an ethic of care. Gilligan and Attanucci (1988) described the ethic of care and the ethic of justice as two different ways of organizing social and moral reality.

The distinction between justice and care orientations pertains to the ways in which moral problems are conceived and reflects different dimensions of human relationships that give rise to moral concern. The justice perspective draws attention to problems of inequality and oppression and holds up an ideal of reciprocity and equal respect. The care perspective draws attention to problems of detachment and abandonment and holds up an ideal of attention and response to need (as cited in Gilligan et al., 1990, p. 102).

For Gilligan, an ethic of care involved intimate knowledge of, care for, and response to specific individuals in specific circumstances, similar to that which a mother experiences for her child. In light of our present emphasis, the question remains: Is the ethic of care that Gilligan conceptualized possible within the professional world of the school psychologist?

To make sense of the nature of care and relationship in practice, and thus to understand the role of these relationships in ethical commitments, I will consider the

distinction that Nel Noddings has drawn between “personal” and “formal” relationships.

First, consistent with Gilligan, Noddings noted that caring is not a general, universal principle but must be understood as situated in a *specific context* with a *specific person*.

Tong (1993) explained this view:

Caring is not simply a matter of feeling favorably disposed toward humankind in general, of being concerned about people with whom we have no concrete connections. There is a fundamental difference between the kind of care a mother has for her child and the kind of ‘care’ that a well-fed American adult has for a starving Somali child s/he has never met. Real care requires actual encounters with specific individuals; it cannot be accomplished through good intentions alone” (p. 110).

However, Noddings recognized and emphasized that the circle of people for whom we care as a mother would her child is highly limited. When addressing issues of care, Noddings (1984) described relationship connections—what she terms “chains”—that are apparent in our relationship circles. She drew an important distinction between the “personal” interpretation and the “formal” interpretation of chains. The “personal interpretation” is when we form and reveal connections between ourselves and those people with whom we are intimately linked on a personal level (e.g., spouse to spouse, mother to child). On the other hand, in the “formal interpretation,” we “widen our circles by virtue of some role we play” (Tong, 1993, p. 110). For example, Noddings suggested that teachers are linked not only to their present students *but also to their future students*.

Interpreting Noddings' point, Tong (1993) suggested that "right now there exist (or will exist) students in the world to whom teachers will eventually be related. *We build caring through the strength of anticipated hypothetical relationships* (emphasis added)" (p. 110). Noddings argued that in addition to caring for specific individuals with whom we have an intimate relationship (e.g., spouse, mother, child), we should also be ready to care for people who are "potential" future members of our circles.

Thus, although the nature of the school psychologist's role may render care, in Gilligan's sense of the word, impossible to fully achieve, to say that school psychologists do not employ a moral voice of care is over-simplified. By virtue of the professional role that they have chosen to pursue, school psychologists describe relationships with "students" in abstract general terms rather than grounding their discussions with particular students. **Joyce** explained how "caring for children" led her to pursue a career as a school psychologist. **Dave** recognized that the nature of school psychology limited the depth of relationships that can be formed with students; nevertheless, he still thinks that care is a major motivation in his practice. Although none of the school psychologists mentioned specific names when describing their ethical commitments, they nonetheless described a strong sense of "care" and "responsibility" for students with whom they had worked and those with whom they anticipate working in the future. By virtue of the nature of school psychology practice, children move in and out of the lives of school psychologists. Although there is an occasional opportunity to form a deep and ongoing relationship with individual students, teachers and families, school psychologists more commonly form what Noddings would call "formal" associations with "students" or "teachers" as a broad category, recognizing that the particular student or teacher will

change frequently across the course of one's career. For many of the school psychologists, this was a frustrating part of their jobs but one that they viewed as characteristic of their chosen role.

Many of the school psychologists also framed their ethical commitments in terms of meeting the "individual needs" of students and families. This reflects an element of response based on need that is consistent with Gilligan's ethic of care. The practitioners described their efforts to get to know the child in his or her individual circumstances as much as possible, given the many demands and limitations of the job. **Emily** feels it is important "to make the best possible decisions for the child that can be made within the community and the environment that that child is in." Likewise, **Ken** also emphasized the need to get to know a child, his or her unique attributes, within his individual circumstances to make recommendations that will promote that child's well-being. He clearly defines his ethical practice as his success in knowing a child individually and recognizing the child's inherent value:

All we're trying to do is help the child live a full life....so they can use all of their abilities and feel confident and feel loved and feel valued.....I think 'How is this child unique?'....and remember the child does not have to change. Sometimes parents will have a handicapped child and they will keep waiting for that child to become better and the point is that that child does not have to change. Their child is OK just the way they are.....

Several of the participants also referred to their need to constantly consider and balance the needs of many people. In her study of the moral thinking and development of adolescent girls, Lyons noted that the girls, when discussing real-life dilemmas, struggled to find a solution “that would integrate the needs of all involved....[while they are] aware of the painful consequences that someone might have to experience as a result of their choice” (1990, p. 103). When discussing their thoughts in relation to real-life dilemmas in their practice, the school psychologists likewise demonstrated awareness of the multiple parties and the desire to find a solution that would benefit everyone involved. Although they expressed concerns about the personal effects of their decisions (e.g., damaged relationships, job threats), they expressed primary concern for the benefit of children and families.

Finally, an element of care was evident in school psychologists’ conceptions of their professional role. Overwhelmingly, school psychologists discussed their roles in terms of child advocacy. Advocacy involves a strong justice component (as will be described later in this chapter), but it may be conceptualized as one way of seeking to advance the welfare of students and to be responsive to their individual needs.

In her description of care, Noddings has made another important distinction that may be useful to the present discussion of care within the schools. In one’s ethical development, according to Noddings, the spontaneous inclination toward “natural caring” is replaced by deliberateness of “ethical caring.” Thus, although a person can “care” about others in a distant and abstract way, that is different from a deliberate commitment to forming relationships with individuals and coming to know and care about that person in a unique, individual way:

The relation of natural caring will be identified as the human condition that we, consciously or unconsciously, perceive as “good.” It is that condition toward which we long and strive, and it is our longing for caring—to be in that special relation—that provides the motivation for us to be moral (Noddings, 1984, p. 5, as cited in Tong, 1993, p. 111).

Natural caring, for Noddings, is a universal principle by nature and can exist apart from specific individuals and specific circumstances. Noddings, in contrast with Gilligan, does not reject outright the idea of a universal nature of ethics, instead acknowledging that there is something ‘properly universal’ about a ‘caring attitude’ (as cited in Tong, 1993, p. 111). Conscious caring, on the other hand, is tied to specific relationships with specific people with whom we have had concrete, specific contact.

One way of making sense of this distinction in light of the school setting and school psychology is to suggest that the school environment allows natural caring; however, inherent in the current structuring of schools are barriers to “ethical caring” and to “personal interpretations” of relationship chains. Residing in this context, school psychologists and their historically defined role and practice may be hindered in the development and exercise of ethical caring and may not have the time or the conditions necessary to exercise a true ethic of care in professional relationships. School psychologists exist in a complex web of relationships with multiple people, and many of them express commitment to balancing needs and finding solutions that promote the benefit of all involved parties. They are motivated by care for the welfare of people with

whom they have professional relationships. However, due to the many barriers described in earlier sections, the nature of these relationships is not similar to the care of a mother for her child. In many cases, these relationships are most appropriately characterized not as relationships with specific people, but rather as relationships with “positions” of student, parent, teacher, administrator, or community professional that individuals fill at a certain point in time. School psychologists describe their relationships less in terms of personal ties with specific individuals and more in terms of commitments to the welfare of people—any people—with whom they come into contact in their professional work. Thus, in Noddings’ words, they develop and build caring through “anticipated hypothetical relationships” to which they are committed, rather than through ongoing relationships with specific people across time.

Concepts of Justice in the Schools

Just as the concept of care was evident in school psychologists’ discussions of the ethical dimensions of practice, the concept of justice was also represented. In this section, several of these factors will be discussed, including the role of fairness and equity in the historical development of education; legislation mandating the fair and just education of students with disabilities; the full inclusion movement; eligibility determination for special education; the school psychologist’s role as child advocate; and the emphasis on non-discriminatory practices that exists in the field of school psychology.

The concept of justice can be traced back into education's early stages of development. Within education's history lies an evolutionary process whereby schools moved from an institution for wealthy, privileged families to an institution emphasizing equal access to all people. With the adoption of compulsory education laws in the late 19th century, schools were faced with and forced to adapt to the task of educating students from diverse background experiences and socioeconomic situations (Fagan & Wise, 1994). The early attempts of school administrators to respond to this diversity involved discriminatory classification practices for sorting students for instruction based on factors such as socioeconomic status and ability level (Milofsky, 1989; Miller, 1985). Hence, compulsory schooling was a major force that contributed to the creation of special education services.

With the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1975, there arose within the educational institution a new emphasis on equality and justice for all students. First, this law outlined and protected the rights of students with handicaps to a free, appropriate public education. Also outlined in this law were assessment and programming approaches that do not discriminate on the basis of language, cultural background, race, ethnicity, or gender. Henning-Stout (1994) described the emphasis on justice and equality that exists within schools and educational philosophies:

Across the history of educational practice in the United States, there is recurrent evidence of efforts made in the spirit of equality and the belief in education as a powerful tool for providing equal opportunity to the children of our country.

Whatever our activity in educating, sooner or later, we must account for how well we provide effective education to *all* children (p. 14).

Thus, in education, and particularly in special education, the concept of fairness exists at the very roots of policy and practice.

Certainly, present practices in special education also reflect a strong justice orientation. The Regular Education Initiative (REI), the movement toward the full inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education environment, is also founded upon the supposition that children with disabilities are entitled to educational experiences that are fair and as equal as possible when compared to students without disabilities (Will, 1986). This fairness-based practice contrasts with early approaches to special education which were characterized by the segregation of students with both mild and severe disabilities into “special classes.”

The practice of deeming certain students as eligible for special education services based on pre-specified criteria, while deeming other students ineligible, is another example of how justice and fairness are inherent in special education. Fagan & Wise (1994) noted that assessment to determine special education eligibility is one of the major functions that school psychologists serve. The eligibility determination process is in place to make reasoned, objective judgments about who should and should not receive resources. Thus, the present system is one that is driven by objective judgments about which students have a right to special education support.

Justice was also evident in school psychologist’s role definitions. Overwhelmingly, as discussed at length in Chapter 3, each of the school psychologists in

this study described their major role and their main ethical obligations as that of child advocacy. Inherent in the child advocacy role is a commitment to promoting rights, in Webster's words, "to support or defend a cause; one who pleads on another's behalf" (1994, p. 81). One of the participants, Nick, indicated that these advocacy responsibilities are a professional's by virtue of the position that he or she holds. This perspective is not rooted in attachment and care but rather communicates a commitment to justice that is based on position, obligation, and mutual rights. The justice and rights-based nature of advocacy is reflected in the NASP ethical guidelines:

School psychologists consider the students or clients to be their primary responsibility, active as advocates of their rights and welfare. When choosing a course of action, school psychologists take into account the rights of each individual involved and the duties of the school personnel. School psychologists' concern for protecting the rights and welfare of students is communicated to the school administration and staff and is the top priority in determining services.

Reviewing the history of the field, child advocacy also held a central position in the conception of school psychology as a profession. In what Fagan & Wise term the "hybrid years of school psychology (1890-1969)", children were viewed as a vulnerable group who needed protection by public policy (Cravens, 1987, as cited in Fagan & Wise, 1994). The school psychologist was looked to as one person who could advocate for the needs of this traditionally underrepresented and disadvantaged population. Recently, within

education, there has been an increasing emphasis on individual needs and child rights, making the role of child advocate even more pronounced.

The school psychologists in the present study also emphasized their need to balance the rights of multiple parties and to serve as a liaison between schools, families, and community agencies. The terms that the school psychologists used to describe this function varied. Robert saw himself as a “negotiator,” Joyce saw herself as “the P.R. person, the liaison,” but the focal point was consistent: These school psychologists viewed themselves as responsible not only for advocating for students’ rights, but also for advancing solutions in a way that will preserve the rights of all individuals with whom they work.. This balancing and negotiating role is based on the idea that all individuals have a right to be treated with respect and to have a problem addressed in a manner that promotes their rights.

Of special significance to this discussion of justice is the manner in which one participant, **Jill**, described her ethical commitment to complete honesty. Both **Jennifer** and **Jill** emphasized being completely honest in their practice, and they viewed honesty as important to advancing the welfare of children. **Jill**, especially, emphasized that a large facet of her ethical commitment involves devotion to honesty. She described situations where she was honest with her recommendations for diagnosis and intervention, even when she knew that her decision would cause rifts, at least temporarily, in her relationships with students, families, or school professionals. Noddings (1984) made a distinction between honesty “in connection to principles” and honesty “in connection to persons and relationships.” **Jill**’s construal of honesty seems to be universal and thus

seems to stem from a justice orientation that all students have the right to honesty and should be given that honesty to demonstrate respect and mutual responsibility.

Clearly, ideas of justice were described by the school psychologists participating in this study. Additionally, on a broader scale, the principle of justice is clearly evident in the work and ethical commitments of school psychologists as an organization.

Educating all children, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or disability is a commitment that is apparent in school psychology, as well as in psychology generally and many other helping professions. In the NASP ethical guidelines, school psychologists have an ethical responsibility to “respect all persons and [be] sensitive to physical, mental, emotional, political, economic, social, cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, sexual preference and religious characteristics.” The motto of NASP—“All children can learn”—clearly communicates this dedication to fairness, justice, and rights of all children.

In conclusion, the principle of justice is reflected in many of the past developments and current practices within education and school psychology. Within the helping professions especially, it may be tempting to elevate the principle of care as superior to the principle of justice. Tong (1993), in addressing criticisms of Gilligan’s dichotomy between justice and care, addressed the tendency to elevate care above justice, suggesting that the picture is much more complex: “Justice may not be dismissed simply as the abstract, alien tool....for it is correctly blind to particulars in order to prevent details or sex, race, and creed from determining whether we care for someone or not” (p. 127). Within school psychology specifically, one may conclude that school psychologists, as helping professionals concerned with the welfare of children and families, may be more devoted to care than to justice. However, this present discussion

indicates that the relationship between care, justice, and school psychologists' ethical commitments is not that simple. Dedication to non-discriminatory practice that will benefit all students is inherent in the profession of school psychology; thus, to elevate care as more admirable or more ethical than justice for a school psychologist is inaccurate.

Summary. Examination of the present data, coupled with an exploration of existing educational and psychological literature, suggests that both care and justice are relevant to education and school psychology practice. The school psychologists in the present study expressed ideas of both care and justice as they described their perceptions of their work with children and families within the school context. On one level, the ideas of moral voices—a morality of justice and a morality of care—have proven useful in exploring the ways that practicing school psychologists conceptualize and construe the ethical dimensions of practice. These theoretical constructs have illuminated and provided words for beginning to describe and conceptualize the often precarious position of school psychologists as they identify an ethical problem, seek to resolve the problem, and evaluate the resolution of the problem.

Nevertheless, Gilligan's conception of the dichotomy between justice and care is not adequate to represent school psychologists' constructions and experiences. Rather, given the present data, I have found it necessary to reinterpret these ideas within the specific contexts of schools and school psychology practice. The exact nature of this complexity is the focus of the next chapter. The goal of this final chapter is to evaluate the utility of moral voices, Gilligan's ethic of care and Kohlberg's ethic of justice, in

understanding school psychologists' ethical commitments and to suggest a way of reinterpreting ideas of justice and care within the school psychologist's world of experience.

Chapter 9

Reframing Moral Voice in School Psychology

Discussion of the present data reveals a complicated tension that exists when discussing an ethic of care and an ethic of justice in relation to schools and school psychology. To say the least, the data gathered in the current study support a main conclusion of Gilligan's critics: To draw a clear justice/care dichotomy is a highly oversimplified and inaccurate representation of moral thinking and ethical commitment. As described in Chapter 8, concepts of both justice and care were reflected in school psychologists' discussions of the ethical issues they face in practice, the manner in which they construe those ethical issues, the way they approach these situations, and the way they actively reflect on their decisions and actions.

Upon launching this investigation, I was intending to discover that Gilligan's theory would in itself be adequate to understand the ethical concerns and commitments of school psychologists. Because this theory has not been employed previously within the school psychology literature in this way, I envisioned that this would be my major contribution to the furthered understanding of ethical issues in practice. However, through this dynamic inquiry process, I have recognized that the nature of these concepts of justice and care in relation to school psychology is much more complex and multifaceted, and that the utility of Gilligan's theory for understanding school psychology practice in its present form and context is limited. I began to see that the process of separating the moral voices and compartmentalizing them into a pre-constructed dichotomy is, at best, artificial and, at worst, a process that perpetuates oversimplified

understandings of school psychologists' ethical commitments in a way that is exemplified in much of the present literature. Thus, I sensed an inherent tension as I attempted to frame the voices of the participants within Gilligan's frame of care and justice. This tension led me to ask several questions which have become the crux of this analysis: What is the nature of this tension, and why does it exist? The desire to explore and reconcile this tension drives the intellectual work in this final chapter.

Given this trend in these data and the tension that exists when attempting to limit school psychologists' ethical thinking and commitments to Gilligan's framework, the remaining task is to describe the nature of care and justice as they have been reflected in the way that school psychologists chose to construe their ethical responsibilities and commitments. If Gilligan's conception of dichotomous voices of justice and care is not adequate to represent school psychologists' understandings of ethical facets of practice, how can we best understand this complex phenomenon? The major goal of this chapter is to propose an alternate view of moral voice that is useful in representing and understanding school psychologists' professional ethical experiences and perceptions.

Understanding Moral Voice as a Contextualized Phenomenon

Ecological theorists argue that to understand any social or psychological phenomenon, one must examine it in the context in which it is embedded, acknowledging the dynamic interaction that occurs between any phenomenon and its social context (Lerner, 1996; Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994). From this perspective, the context within which one lives and practices must be conceptualized as multiple levels of influence that simultaneously exist and interact. Gilligan, in her studies of the moral development of

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women and adolescent girls, suggested that the cultural context has historically suppressed the true moral voices of women. She proposed societal changes that must occur before women's moral voices will be heard. Hence, Gilligan would agree that to understand the moral voices that are heard, one must understand them as embedded within specific cultural and contextual demands.

Likewise, to understand fully the ethical thinking and commitments of school psychologists, one must study them as embedded within real life contexts of relationships, schools, communities, and social history. The importance of the context to school psychology practice is even reflected in the discipline's name. Farley (1996) noted that the school psychologist is the only type of psychologist that is overtly associated with a building and an institution. Whereas specialties like experimental psychology, counseling psychology, and personality psychology are all defined by a process or psychological phenomenon, the defining quality of school psychologists is the context in which they practice. This further supports the argument that school psychology, as a discipline and practice, is defined in relation to the school context and cannot be understood apart from its characteristics and functioning.

The discussions with school psychologists in this study confirmed the importance of viewing school psychologists' ethical thinking and commitments as deeply contextualized within a distinct setting and culture that have many different spheres. As discussed in earlier chapters, school psychologists did not construe the ethical facets of their practice as isolated from the rest of their practice, their personal lives, their relationships, or the school context. The psychologists understood their ethical commitments as inherent in their personhood and as deeply rooted in development,

upbringing, and accumulated life experience. However, when discussing ethical concerns and ethical dilemmas, they embedded their thinking and development in real life situations and contexts with which they dealt on a daily basis. They staged their ethical concerns, commitments, and responsibilities in a complex moral terrain comprised of multiple levels of contextual influence: Relationships, school culture, the profession of school psychology, and the socio-historical context of education. Each of these factors has been described at other points in this paper but be will summarized and synthesized below.

Interpersonal Context of Relationships. School psychologists in this study made it clear that they conceptualize their ethical obligations as embedded in a complex web of relationships (as discussed in Chapter 6). They considered their primary relationships within the schools to be with children, but they also described ethical commitments to the welfare of families, other educators, and people outside the school context. School psychologists described this network of relationships as highly complex, creating strong potential for conflicts of interest and ethical dilemmas. A particularly salient and common example arising from the relationship web was the pressure from administrators to make decisions that violated ethical convictions regarding the welfare of children. The existence of multiple relationships and allegiances also made it difficult for the school psychologists to clearly and consistently identify the client to whom they are primarily responsible, a problem that has faced school psychologists since the inception of the field (Fagan & Wise, 1994). Participants described one of their major functions as that of “balancing” needs and “negotiating” concerns of multiple individuals in an attempt to

seek recommendations and solutions that promoted the interest of all involved parties. Their ethical responsibilities and commitments, though ultimately motivated by student welfare, also involved consideration of the entire web of relationships.

Institutional Context of Schools. In this study, the school context and its web of multiple relationships comprised the terrain where school psychologists carried out their work and sought to preserve their professional ethical commitments. When discussing their perspectives on professional ethics in school psychology practice, the school psychologists referred to two types of characteristics of the school context: Those that supported their ethical practice, and those that hindered their ethical practice. The school psychologists identified sustained, trusting relationships with teachers and administrators as the main facet of the school context that allowed them to remain committed to their ethical standards in practice. These relationships were construed as the key to the school psychologists' ability to navigate practice in a way that did not violate their ethical convictions.

The importance of construing school psychologists' ethical concerns as contextualized within the school environment was especially evident when school psychologists discussed constraints to their ability to practice ethically. As discussed fully in Chapter 5, the participants believed that systemic factors sometimes created ethical dilemmas where the welfare of the student was pitted directly against financial or resource limitations, administrative resistance, or some other systemic factor. School psychologists' efforts to develop personal relationships, thereby exercising care of the type Gilligan described, were thwarted by time limits coupled with high caseloads, "test

and place” models of school psychology services, decreasing financial resources available to public schools, and restrictive institutional policies and regulations related to student eligibility for support services. Hyman and Kaplinski (1994) argued that these school contextual factors have “kept school psychologists locked in the crushingly futile role of classification,” thereby preventing them from remaining committed to their ethical convictions about what is right for students. To understand school psychologists’ experiences with negotiating ethical conflict within the web of relationships, the organizational structure and political hierarchy that exists within the school system must be examined.

Socio-Historical Context of the Profession. A significant portion of Chapter 8 was devoted to exploring the importance of understanding the socio-historical context of school psychology and education. This historical perspective was emphasized as a key to understanding school psychologists’ present experiences in the schools. School psychologists do not only reside within a single-level web of relationships in the school system; this web is embedded within the broader contexts of traditions, developments, and transitions that have occurred within school psychology as a profession and within society as a whole.

When discussing barriers to their ethical practice, the participants described many factors related to the historical development of school psychology and present conditions and emphases within the profession. For example, school psychologists continue to face narrow perceptions of their role and express the frustration of being locked into a “test and place” role that is deeply rooted in the development of the field. This barrier creates

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intense ethical conflict for school psychologists who believe that this limited role restricts their ability to work in maximizing the learning and development of children, as well as the effective and efficient functioning of the entire school environment. The school psychologists in this study also pointed to the present organization of the special education system as one that creates intense ethical conflict when determining a child's eligibility for services. Legislation that restricts accessibility to special education only to those students who fit certain prescribed diagnostic categories was cited as a major source of ethical tension in their daily work.

One recent socio-historical change that is worthy of examination in the present discussion is the IDEA Amendments of 1997. The school psychologists expressed a state of ambiguity and even confusion about the implications of this legislation for their roles and functions. In one sense, school psychologists embrace this legislation as a small step toward allowing role transformation that is necessary to meet students' needs beyond the testing role. Yet, the overall attitude of the participants was one of skepticism and uncertainty. In fact, several of the school psychologists did not think that the re-authorized legislation would affect them. This may reflect the idea that despite social and political changes, the role of the school psychologist as a "tester" is firmly grounded in history and will continue to be resistant to change.

In contrast, several participants emphasized that the increased involvement of parents, although positive in many ways, is likely to complicate significantly the ethical domain of practice by increasing the likelihood for conflicts of interests between families and the school. Although the precise nature of the effects on the school psychologists' role has yet to be determined, the participants in this study were certain that the ethical

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issues in practice will only become more complicated as the circle of relationships widens and the potential for conflicts of interest among parties grows.

To summarize this section on contextual influence, the ethical dimension of practice needs to be understood as embedded within a context that has multiple and sometimes conflicting spheres of influence. Before progressing, I will articulate not only what these data suggest, but also what these data do not suggest. First, my argument that school psychologists' ethical thinking and commitments must be understood in the context of schools and school psychology practice does not mean that morality and ethical commitment is relative, depending on the context. I do not support a post-modern notion of morality as completely relative and subjective. On the contrary, school psychologists emphasized that many of their professional ethical commitments stem ultimately from personal values and morals that transcend the boundaries of any particular context. Although contextual factors may influence how moral voice is expressed or heard, school psychologists certainly described an intimate, consistent connection between personal and professional moral convictions and commitments.

Second, this emphasis on the contextualized nature of ethical commitments does not mean that school psychologists are "pawns" moved about by social and institutional forces. Rather, school psychologists interpret these contextual factors, forces, and demands in unique ways. The moral voices of school psychologists are ultimately "filtered through" these contextual spheres, so the contexts must be understood to comprehend and adequately represent their moral voices.

The question remains: Why is it so important to understand school psychologists' ethical practice as contextualized? The purpose of this next section is to investigate more

fully the manner in which school psychologists voices are “filtered” through the contextual levels of influence within which they practice. The concept of “filtering” was chosen deliberately and suggests that certain voices or aspects of a voice are amplified and allowed to resonate, whereas others are suppressed, removed, or prevented from being fully heard. The present data indicate that the moral voices of school psychologists working in school environments are heard through contextual devices that amplify certain voices while suppressing others. School psychology as a discipline provides a unique environment for examining Gilligan’s voices of justice and care, because each of these provide equally valid and justifiable ways of construing practice. School psychologists, as professionals devoted to health, care, and welfare of children, are poised in a position within a system based on justice, fairness, rights, and entitlements. What is the nature of the voice that school psychologists use to represent and describe their ethical commitments and professional work? Providing an answer to this question is the focus of the next section.

Justice as the Amplified Voice and Care as the Suppressed Voice in School Psychology Practice

Through participation in the current study, the school psychologists were afforded the opportunity to articulate their perceptions of ethical responsibilities and commitments. As the participants discussed their perspectives and experiences when facing, dealing with, and reflecting on ethical issues in their practice, the moral voice that was amplified in their discussions was that of **justice**. Although care was cited as one of the principles that drew participants to the profession and motivated their daily work with

children and families, the voice of justice was heard most loudly as they attempted to navigate a terrain of practice characterized by multiple legal and political constraints, many levels of system barriers, and multiple parties and commitments that sometimes conflict.

Evidence for the amplified nature of justice in school psychology practice was prevalent in these present data. Nick emphasized that his ethical responsibilities are rooted in his choice of position as a school psychologist. Though he cited “caring for kids” as his major motivation for practice, he construed this “care” within the confines of children’s rights, justice, and responsibilities that are his because of the role he has chosen to assume.

Jill’s unyielding devotion to “honesty” was not rooted in intimate relationships with individuals but was instead positioned within her ethical thinking and practice as a universally applied principle driven by fairness and rights. Ken, emphasizing his desire to know children and their circumstances intimately on an individual level, nevertheless construed these concerns as universal principles without a particular face and without being grounded in particular relationships. Each of the ten school psychologists described legislative and policy guidelines, prescribed policies and procedures for allocating financial and program resources, and administrative pressures that infiltrated their practice and influenced the way they made sense of their ethical commitments and responsibilities.

Both Ken and Mike, reflecting on over 20 year of experience, provide vivid illustrations of how the changing institutional forces have impacted practice and, as a result, how they construed their ethical commitments. Mike’s reflection on the changes

that he has experienced over his 27-year career in school psychology make apparent the role of the changing school and societal context in how he is able to conduct his practice. Early in his career, Mike was heavily involved in implementing and monitoring programs for students, and he developed some close, intimate, sustained relationships with students and families. As the educational system has evolved, however, he has seen these relational efforts become virtually impossible to establish and sustain within the system. He was adamant that although he does not *care* for students any less, he feels too many systemic pressures, especially of time and finances, to relate on a deeper, ongoing level with students.

Ken's discussion of his professional development provides another notable example of the way that care has been suppressed. During the early years of his 29-year career, Ken worked with severely impaired students and was able to know them personally and form sustained ongoing relationships with the student and their families. However, similar to Mike, the changes within the school system and special education have prevented him from attaining this level of relationship with students and families and have placed barriers to the types of recommendations he makes because he knows that resources are strictly limited and monitored.

Dave, too, described the ways that the organization of the school context and the special education system have thwarted him from developing the close, sustained relationships with students and families that he was able to establish earlier in his career when he was working in a clinical setting. In private practice, he was able to focus his concentration on one child and family for a sustained time period on a regular basis, conditions which facilitated the development of deep and more satisfying relationships.

He does not believe that personal relationships with students are possible within the present educational system. Considering collectively the perspectives of Mike, Ken and Dave, the voice of care that was clearer in their early careers has become silenced as their careers have progressed and as the educational system has changed.

Why is the moral voice of justice amplified, whereas the moral voice of care is suppressed in school psychology practice? There are at least three potential answers to this important question: Contextual filters, adaptive value, and training.

Contextual Filters. First, the power of contextual forces—historical devotion to equity in education, the rights-based and mandate-driven nature of special education programs, the web of relationships comprised of multiple parties and interests—may force the school psychologists to reflect the broader system in their approach to practice. Certain aspects of the system, whether it be others’ perceptions of the role, financial and time constraints, or socio-historical barriers, may filter the voices, allowing only certain aspects of moral voice to be expressed. The concept of *amplification* was chosen purposefully within the present analysis. This word does not merely suggest a voice that becomes louder by its own volition; rather, amplification suggests that there is a medium, device, or system through which the voice is amplified. Extending this metaphor, the voice of justice is not necessarily that of the psychologists, but rather the *voice of the system*. The system serves as the “medium” or “device” that amplifies and pronounces a voice of justice. Thus, the context has a strong influence on the approach that a school psychologist chooses to take when thinking about and dealing with ethical concerns in practice.

Professional Survival Strategy. Second, the voice of justice in the school context has adaptive value for the school psychologist enmeshed in a barrage of potentially complex ethical problems. Given the justice-and-rights-based nature of the school system as it presently exists, the easier choice is to exercise a voice of justice to navigate through the complex moral domain of practice. The professional context within which the school psychologists works encompasses multiple prescriptions for how to support student learning and development. Thus, the nature of the contexts affords a legalistic, entitlement-based approach that has the appearance of being clearer, straightforward and more objective, rather than a relational, care-based approach, to navigating practice.

The educational system is replete with legal markers and signposts that school psychologists can rely on to guide them through their daily practice. When a school psychologist is faced with intense conflicts of interest among parties, attempts to maintain a care perspective by considering all parties and seeking a solution that will maintain relationships is the more difficult route. In Gilligan's study of the moral thinking of adolescent girls, she noted that the girls in her study, when discussing real-life moral dilemmas, struggled to find a solution "that would integrate the needs of all involved....[while they were] aware of the painful consequences that someone might have to experience as a result of their choice" (1990, p. 103). One way to avoid this intense dissonance and pain is to revert to the broader system to deal with ethical situations, thus allowing one's moral voice to be suppressed and filtered by the system. One example of this in the present study was found in school psychologists' description of the inevitability of interpersonal conflict in the field. On one hand, this may represent the true nature of practice; on the other hand, this insistence on "balancing the needs of

everyone” to prevent interpersonal conflict may represent a strategy for professional survival, a way of helping oneself and shielding one’s ego to survive the complex ethical challenges that arise in practice. Thus, assuming a predominant voice of justice simplifies the work of the school psychologist and provides one important adaptive strategy for trekking through the sometime treacherous ethical terrain of practice.

Training. Third, the training experiences of school psychologists and other helping professionals often encourage the suppression of the voice of care. This suppression is often considered to be an adaptive strategy for professional survival. Because the helping professions often attract individuals who are naturally care- and people-oriented, Ken referred to this fact when he talked about refraining from being a “rescuer” because it can be too painful and stressful when one becomes personally involved with children. Others, like Robert and Jennifer, emphasized the importance of “maintaining objectivity” to ensure that recommendations are not biased or do not infringe upon the rights of others within the system.

Explanation of these three reasons demonstrates how certain aspects of moral voice can be amplified in school psychology, whereas at other times, there is the threat of subverting the voice altogether. Interestingly, as was discussed in Chapter 3, at least three of the school psychologists, when discussing the extent that ethical and moral concerns infiltrate practice, suggested that ethical dilemmas in school psychology are rare. Mike believed that few of the situations that he faced in practice had ethical implications, although he thought that his ethical commitments stemmed from his personhood. Dave thought that school psychology practice is so heavily legislated and prescribed that he

encounters few difficult ethical dilemmas. Jill, contrasting her work in schools to work in hospitals, thought that school psychologists are not really making many ethical decisions because “we’re not making life and death decisions here.” One possibility is that these school psychologists really do not consider their work as ethically laden in nature. However, their simultaneous insistence of the integration of their personhood and their professional moral commitments serves as evidence that this is not likely the case.

A second and more plausible explanation is that these school psychologists, in one sense, may be similar to the adolescent girls of Gilligan’s study in the difficulty that they have in calling a moral problem a “moral problem.” Some (i.e., Tronto, 1993) have argued that the difference that Gilligan has identified in the moral reasoning of males and females is not an inherent gender difference but rather “a function of their subordinate or tentative social position” (p. 243). Extending this line of reasoning, one might likewise argue that one’s position within an organization or system may also influence the moral voice one employs. When discussing this phenomenon in relationship to adolescent girls, Gilligan refers to Blasi’s understanding (1990) of the moral identity and self as intimately interrelated. In Blasi’s words,

....the concepts of responsibility...and integrity...are closely related and derive their meaning from a view of moral action as an extension of the essential self into the domain of the possible, of what is not but needs to be, if the agent has to remain true to himself or herself” (1984, p. 132, as cited in Gilligan, 1990, p. 106)

Gilligan has contended that if the culture and context within which people exist do not value their moral perspective or consider it truly “moral,” then people may be expected to lose trust in their own perspective and to doubt their ability to act according to their own moral convictions. She described the adolescent girl as holding a position within society that suppresses her moral voice.

The loss may be of a sense of self as a moral, caring self and of trust in a logic of interdependence and responsiveness derived from personal experience. These cases suggest that evidence of this loss may be found in females during adolescence, a time when young women come face to face with cultural traditions and social conventions that may not legitimize their understanding of themselves or their perspectives on the world (Gilligan, 1990, p. 108).

This quote reflects how institutional and cultural contextual factors can suppress expression of moral voice. How can this important idea be useful in making sense of school psychology practice?

Interesting parallels can be drawn between the adolescent girls of Gilligan’s study and the school psychologists participating in this study. School psychologists who come into the professional environment with a care-orientation may “lose a sense of moral self” when faced with the intense contextual demands and pressures of the school. Mike, Dave and, to some extent, Robert, described this type of process across their careers and the practice of school psychology became more prescribed and legislated and as the school faced increasing financial and programming limitations. Thus, the moral voice expressed

by school psychologists and amplified within the schools may be less a function of gender or personhood and more a function of their professional role and context.

Worthy of special examination, in light of this present discussion, is Tom's representation of his position within the system as it relates to his ethical commitments and responsibilities. Tom understood himself and other school psychologists as the "moral conscience of the system" who, because they did not have an interest in whether or not a student qualifies for services, were the "holders of the truth" and served as the monitor of the ethical functioning of the entire system. Tom's conception was replete with justice, as he objectified and detached school psychologists from the "messiness" of making ethical decisions. This is a very clear example of how school psychologists can employ a voice of justice to simplify the ethical terrain of practice and make an otherwise seemingly insurmountable task more manageable. As was evident with the three school psychologists who denied the ethical nature of practice, Tom may have been employing a self-protective strategy that has professional survival value.

Reframing Care in School Psychology: The Multiple Faces of Care

Analysis of the present data suggests that justice is a voice that has been amplified both historically and presently in school psychology practice, but that care is not altogether absent. The school psychologists referred to "care" as a principle motivating their professional decisions and actions. In the psychologists' discussions, there remained the clear presence of a professional commitment to caring for and promoting the welfare of children and families. In light of these present data, what does "care" look

like in the practice of school psychology? Rather than restricting care to any one definition, these data reflected multiple types of care that may be possible within the school context. In this section, I propose an alternate view of care—care as a *range* of meanings and understandings—that is more helpful when attempting to make sense of school psychologists’ professional ethical commitments.

First, on one end of the spectrum lies care, as conceptualized by Gilligan and colleagues. This type of care, outlined fully in Chapter 1, is characterized by responsiveness to and interconnection with others, and efforts to preserve interpersonal commitments and relationships. Care is not borne out of obligations, entitlements, or fairness, but is rather rooted in knowledge of people on an individual basis and commitments to sustaining those interactions and relationships. Evidence of this type of care was scarce in the present data. For many of the reasons described earlier in this chapter—contextual restraints, strategic coping efforts, and training—this type of care does not appear to be normative in school psychology practice. By nature of the professional and socio-historical context, school psychologists are faced with tremendous financial limitations, time constraints, and attitudes that thrust them into a highly prescribed role and prevent them from developing close, sustained relationships with children and families over time. They express strong commitments to “children” and “families” as abstract categories. School psychologists rarely speak of these commitments as tied to specific people and specific relationships. Many of the school psychologists desired to be able to develop close, ongoing relationships with children and families, but describe these conditions almost as a “luxury” that is rarely if ever afforded by the present role and context. Several of the school psychologists noted that this type

of care was more possible early in their careers, prior to the heightened legislation and prescription of school psychological services. Although most of them do not believe that this is possible presently, they did not altogether reject the idea that this type of care would ever be possible. Gilligan's care *may be* possible within schools, but many contextual changes are needed before this idea is translated into reality for school psychologists.

At the other extreme lies a type of "care" that is entirely objective and abstract, assigned by the profession, and removed from strong and sustained emotional commitment. By choosing to enter into a field that involves working on behalf of children and families, school psychologists assume the responsibility to "care" for their clients. Thus, this type of care can be completely reduced to mandates, professional responsibilities, and entitlements. Undoubtedly, Gilligan and her colleagues would not call this a type of care at all, as it is fundamentally different than the type of care that Gilligan has described. Although it may look like Gilligan's care on the surface, a closer examination reveals that it is a legally motivated, universally applied, abstract type of care that is born completely out of justice, rights, and assigned responsibilities. As was true of Gilligan's conception of care, this second type of care was rarely evident in the data. School psychologists did not describe their ethical commitments to children and families as completely mandated, legislated, objectified, emotionally void, and rights-based.

If neither of these extreme types of care was evident in the present data, what did "care" look like to these participants? Because the school psychologist's role and context presently place constraints on moral voice, justice and care may assume unique forms

within the boundaries of the settings within which school psychologists practice. The type of care that was most represented in the present data lies somewhere in between the two extremes and reflected care and justice as enmeshed. It is clear that “care,” in some form, is central to how school psychologist describe and construct their work and practice. The school psychologists discussed being motivated by genuine care and concern for children and families. Joyce, among others, expressed “care for children and families” as one of the main factors that drew her to the profession. Both Ken and Emily emphasized knowing students and their unique abilities in their unique contexts and cultures, an important facet of Gilligan’s ethic of care. Nick stated that he would not be in the field if he did not “care” about children and families. Care occupied a central role in these school psychologists’ understandings of their professional ethical commitments.

The care-orientation of the field is also reflected in the school psychology literature. For instance, Farley (1996) has suggested that those practitioners who have historically been called “school psychologists” should instead be called “*edu-care* psychologists” because of what he perceives as the “centrality of care” in the speciality” (p. 32). He views this care-focused practice as a key to making psychologists in the schools indispensable and instrumental to student success.

To comprehend fully the nature of care and its relationship to justice in school psychology, however, I will attempt to delve beneath these surface-level representations. The school psychologists in this study talked about care in the abstract, emphasizing the impact of contextual barriers on their ability to practice ethically. They described strong commitments not to particular children but to “children” and “families” broadly, reflecting the type of care embodied in Noddings’ “*formal interpretation*” of relationships

(discussed in Chapter 8). This abstract, universal construction of “care” is evident at many levels of the profession from the individual meanings expressed by the participants in this study, to the national motto for the NASP which asserts that “*All* children can learn.” Notions of care, then, were de-contextualized and spoken as truth apart from any individual relationship with any individual person. In many ways, these representations of care do not reflect care of the type that Gilligan has described.

Yet, to suggest the total absence of “care” without understanding the broader context is to simplify the highly complex work of school psychologists. The prevalence of justice concerns does not translate automatically into the absence of care concerns. Shogan (1988) argued that “someone can both care that others are treated well and care that others are treated fairly...justice does not preclude connection to those in conflict” (p. 54). In some sense, the care of school psychologists is a “prescribed care” that is, in the words of Nick, their’s “by virtue of their chosen role and profession.” Yet, Nick also emphasized his devotion to the welfare of children, describing this as his reason for pursuing the profession. As previously mentioned, Dave and Mike expressed concern that the field no longer affords the development of close sustained relationships with children and families. This concern about barriers to deep interpersonal relationships with students and families was reflected in individual ways by each of the participants in this study.

Data of this type suggest that care and justice go hand-in-hand in school psychology practice. In the words of Shogan, “It may be possible to see those who are concerned with interpersonal connections as people who directly respond to others both in moral situations in which others’ welfare is at stake and in situations in which fair

treatment is at stake” (1988, p. 59). *For school psychologists, justice and care are intimately connected within the constraints of the professional context, and clear dichotomous lines cannot be drawn between them.*

Shogan (1998) described two types of care—“direct care” and “duty care.” While “duty care” may stem partially from the roles or positions one holds, it does not reduce the purity of care concerns. This understanding of care is important to the present study because it combines the ideas of fairness and care. In another distinction that is useful to our present discussion, Prilleltensky (1994) has differentiated “social ethics” and “individual ethics.” Social ethics differs from individual ethics “in that while the latter seeks to care for and enhance the well-being of a particular person, the former endeavors to promote the welfare of a society as a whole” (p. 202). Thus, to be concerned about justice and rights universally does not eliminate ideas of care and concern. Prilleltensky has argued that school psychologists, by virtue of their position, are and should be more concerned with social ethics.

On one level, I argue that school psychologists, by the very nature of their position, cannot fulfill all of their responsibilities and maintain a pure ethic of care orientation, as described by Gilligan. Due to the complex system and web of relationships within which school psychologists are engaged by virtue of their roles within the school context, intimate, sustained relationships are difficult to develop. Likewise, it is equally difficult to restore all relationships within the system.

The nature of school psychology practice therefore illuminates the need to address the contextual factors as they influence moral reasoning and to understand moral voice as contextualized in nature. Tronto (1993) has argued that theoretical positions must

recognize that “morality must be situated concretely, that is, for particular actors in a particular society” (Tronto, 1993, p. 248). Tronto went on to explain her evaluation of the relationships between an ethic of care and an ethic of justice:

The perspective of care requires that conflict be worked out without damage to the continuing relationships. Moral problems can be expressed in terms of accommodating the needs of the self and of others, of balancing competition and cooperation, and of maintaining the social web of relations in which one finds oneself. Quite obviously, if such caretaking is the quintessential moral task, *the context within which conflicting demands occur will be an important factor in determining the morally correct act* (emphasis added). To resort to abstract, universal principles is to go outside of the web of relationships. Thus, despite Kohlberg’s dismissal of care as secondary to and dependent on justice reasoning, from a different metaethical perspective, *care may set the boundaries of when justice concerns are appropriate* (emphasis added) (1993, p. 248).

A widespread belief is that caring people are naturally drawn into the helping professions. Thus, if we assume that people enter the profession of school psychology with a moral voice of care, we have seen in the present study how the voice of care can be suppressed in the system. Thus, the voice of care may actually look like or be “translated into” justice concerns because “care sets the boundaries of when justice concerns are appropriate.” A school psychologist may have to assume a voice of justice to navigate the system and exercise care concerns. On a deeper level, then, justice concerns about

fairness, equity, and universal rights, though looking like justice concerns on the surface, can actually be motivated by a morality of care. To interpret school psychologists' abstract and universal concerns about fairness and justice as a pure justice orientation does not tell the whole story; rather, the most accurate view of their understandings appears to be that of an intimate melding of the voice of justice and care. Thus, although one voice may be amplified over the other depending on contextual circumstances, both are present.

Which moral voice gets amplified in the ethical practice of school psychology? In this study, it was the voice of justice that resounded most loudly. Where is the voice of care in schools and in school psychology? Because of the commanding presence of justice in educational systems and in school psychology practice, I could easily conclude that care is absent in school psychology. On the contrary, rather than forcing school psychologists' perceptions into prescribed categories, we must reframe our notion of care, recognizing that care may look different in school psychology practice. One must look very closely to understand that care, for many school psychologists working in the school context, is a principle that is in many ways defined and molded by the context in which they practice. Care may take on different forms, but each is equally valid. Given the position of school psychologists within the system, the ability to adopt a moral voice that involves facets of both justice and care, and that often looks like justice concerns, may be necessary to meet the needs of others and to meet the needs of self, thereby ensuring professional survival.

Where is a place in school psychology practice where the voices of justice and care, as intimately interconnected, are the most evident? Reflecting on the present data,

there was one facet of school psychologist's roles wherein the voices of justice and care were most loudly heard: The role of child and family advocate. The next section will describe how advocacy may be one place in practice where school psychologists are afforded the opportunity to express both moral voices of justice and care.

Advocacy as a Navigation Strategy: Melding Justice and Care in the Ethical Terrain of Practice

One of the questions driving the present study related to the resources and strategies that school psychologists use to navigate the ethical terrain of practice. Common understandings of resources and strategies might include ethical codes, research literature, consultation with colleagues, or other sources of information to guide ethical decision-making. The participants in this study cited colleagues, rather than formal codes and literature, as one of the main resources that they consulted when facing ethical dilemmas. Overall, however, the data in this study reflect an alternate way of understanding the resources and strategies that school psychologists use to understand and find their way through the complicated ethical terrain of practice.

First, as described earlier in this chapter, moral voice can be conceptualized as a *strategy* employed in navigating the ethical terrain of practice. Considering the unique professional role and context, when school psychologists are enmeshed in ethical conflict, it can be easy to listen to the voice that is most clear and most loudly expressed. In present-day schools, that is the voice of justice. Thus, assuming the voice of justice can be one strategy that school psychologists use as they try to survive the ethical demands of practice. Even if school psychologists are motivated by an ethic of care, they

may exercise a voice of justice to guide themselves through the system and to try to access services for children.

A second strategy that school psychologists may employ in finding their way through the ethical situations that arise in practice is that of assuming the role of child advocate. How, one may ask, can this role serve as a strategy? Based on the present data, there appears to be one place, one function, in school psychology practice where care and justice intersect and meld: *The role of child advocate*. Advocacy, as one possible facet of the school psychologists' role, can be conceptualized as a "smaller scale" replica of practice, a microcosm for examining the interrelationship of justice and care in school psychology practice.

School psychologists' conceptions of their roles as advocates are not uni-dimensional or uniform ; rather, the present conversations suggest that school psychologists vary in how they construct their roles as advocates. Thus, as discussed fully in Chapter 3, child advocacy can assume many different faces: Liaison, tester, gatekeeper, consultant, problem-solver, and facilitator. Although these psychologists varied in how they defined and constructed their roles as child advocates, they had in common their use of both justice and care when describing their commitments to working on behalf of children and families.

Regardless of how they constructed their roles as child advocates, evidence for both justice and care emerged from their descriptions. For example, school psychologists like Jennifer, who defined their role largely in relation to assessment, discussed their concerns both about justice (meeting eligibility criteria, remaining objective and refraining from bias) and about care (making recommendations to support the students'

welfare). She relied heavily on testing and assessment functions, but she did not construct her role in a uni-dimensional way but viewed assessment as a means of seeking care for children. Those participants, like Ken, Tom, Joyce, and Robert, who viewed their role more broadly as that of problem-solver, facilitator, and consultant, also constructed these roles using the moral voices of both justice and care. To view oneself as a child advocate does not necessarily preclude the view of oneself as a liaison between the family and the school system. Joyce, viewing herself as motivated by care and concern for individual children (care), simultaneously views herself as a liaison between the family and the school system who seeks to balance interests (justice). Yet her ultimate motivation is the welfare of individual children and families, a commitment that she shares with each of the school psychologists in this study.

Nick provided one example where the voices of both justice and care were clearly reflected and where the advocacy role allowed him to exercise a voice of care, despite the demands and pressures of the broader system. The case, described fully in Chapter 5, involves a student with autism, and the students' parents wanted their son to have a full-time aide paid for by the district. When describing his efforts to advocate for the services for this student, Nick stated that his everyday moral sense was that the amount of money needed for this student to have an individual aid was excessive. In one way, he thought that this high expense was depriving other children of certain benefits that they might otherwise have been able to access. Thus, he had concerns about justice and rights. Nevertheless, he supported obtaining the aide for the student because he regarded it to be his professional responsibility to advocate for the student's educational welfare. He both cared about the student's welfare (care), and he believed that it was the student's right to

obtain the support (justice). In this situation, his role as a child advocate allowed him to meld the voices of justice and care—though justice continued to be the louder voice—in making an ethical decision.

The role of child advocate, more so than a strict uni-dimensional, mandate-driven role of assessor or tester, seems to afford the opportunity to express both justice and care within one's work. Advocacy provides school psychologists with a language for expressing both justice and care concerns and navigating through a sometimes hostile system in efforts to help children have access to needed supports. Advocacy has a strong justice-orientation, however, it involves not only rights and responsibilities but also care, commitment, and involvement in the lives of children and families. Child advocacy can remain the focus of a school psychologist's practice, regardless of who the client is and regardless of what the psychologist's prescribed role is. This role therefore provides direction in a difficult, complex ethical world of practice. This desire and responsibility of putting the child's needs at the center of one's practice involves implications for school psychologists, because one runs the risk of alienating everyone in the system. Thus, one can appear to be uncaring or callused, when one's motives are actually care-based.

This discussion of advocacy provides an answer to one question driving the present study: How do the ways that school psychologists construe ethical problems reflect their role definitions? The present discussion of advocacy indicates that school psychologists, viewing their main role as that of child advocate, use both voices of justice and care to construe ethical problems. Although the present role, with its context and constraints, may not allow the voice of care to emerge fully in such a way that Gilligan

conceptualized it, advocacy is one place where both voices are allowed to be expressed and melded. This may provide one reason why school psychologists overwhelmingly define their work in terms of advocacy for children and families. This role allows them, while focusing ultimately on children, to also recognize the needs of others and the needs of the system when making recommendations on behalf of children. Just as the school context can be conceptualized as a *device* that amplified a voice of justice, the role of *advocate* can be conceptualized as a device that allows the voice of care to be heard more fully.

Hearing the Future Moral Voice of School Psychologists: Conclusions and Implications

Conclusions

School psychology, as a role and a discipline, is on the verge of rapid shifts and dynamic evolutions. This study was intended to examine the ethical implications of these changes, focusing on the voices and strategies that school psychologists use in making sense of their ethical commitments and responsibilities in practice. My purpose was to build upon existing school psychology research casting ethical issues as discrete categories and frequencies. School psychologists did not construe their professional ethical concerns as uni-dimensional and isolated from other aspects of their personal and professional lives. Central to the school psychologists' professional ethical commitments were personal ethical convictions and values. They described inextricable connections between personal development and experiences and the evolution of professional ethical commitments.

In their active constructions of their roles and ethical dimensions of their roles, the ten school psychologists in this study painted a picture of a complex ethical domain that involves many moral twists and turns, many road signs and markers that provide conflicting direction, and many bumps that threaten to throw them off of their course. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Jacob-Timm, 1999), the school psychologists recognized that the system within which they work presents some difficult challenges to their commitment to practice ethically in a consistent manner. They construed themselves as poised in a sometimes precarious position between a *system* with many rules, demands, resource limitations, and conflicting interests, and a *child* who is in need of care, advocacy, and support. Within this system, they see themselves as embedded in a complex web of relationships that often involves conflicts of interest and necessitates balancing and reconciling the principles of fairness and care. Just as Gilligan found in her study of adolescent girls (1990), I discovered that the school psychologists in this study discussed dilemmas that “pits the principle of fairness directly against responsibility for the weal and woe of others” (p. 41). One of their main jobs is to balance these relationships and principles to seek solutions that are mutually beneficial, a grueling if not impossible task with many ethical implications.

Drawing on Gilligan’s distinction between a voice of justice and a voice of care, it was the voice of justice was most readily apparent as the school psychologists described their efforts to navigate through a system that presented challenges and barriers in the form of strict policies and prescriptions, legal mandates, time limitations, financial constraints, and limited role perceptions. Thus, the voice of care is often suppressed within the system, raising the possibility that children and families will, in the words of

Ken, “get lost in the rules and numbers.” Why is the voice of justice amplified, whereas the voice of care is suppressed in school psychologists’ discussions of ethical concerns? In addition to contextual demands, the justice orientation may provide some semblance of predictability and order within the system, and may provide a strategy for exercising care and helping children gain access to services and resources that will support their learning and development. Within the school context, care may take on a different face in practice, necessitating an understanding of care that embraces a range of meanings that are contextualized in real situations with real people.

The barriers of the role and context were described as a very real source of frustration for the participants striving to maintain ethical practice. In response to these present conditions, some of the participants expressed a degree of resignation and hopelessness in the face of these pressures. They dealt with the difficulty and ambiguity of ethical commitments by trying to cling to the prescriptions and objective roles that make the ethical domain appear less ambiguous and more manageable. Most participants, however, remain committed to make their moral voices heard within the system and were willing to stand by their convictions of working for the benefit of children and families. They employed their professional judgment to find ways to move beyond the prescriptions of the system.

The practitioners in this study reflected the limitations of the system to varying degrees. Yet, each of the participants construed their major role as one of child advocacy, recognizing this as an area in practice that allowed them to balance justice concerns—policies, entitlements, objectivity, and balancing rights and perspectives—and care concerns—relationships, knowledge of individual children and families, and

contextualized understandings of circumstances. Advocacy became a strategy, or a device, that allowed them to exercise both moral voices of justice and care within the confines of the role and context. Looking to the future of educational and special education reform, participants realized that the changing context will affect their roles and create new ethical issues and challenges for school psychologists. They are unsure of what the future of practice will look like, but they are not without hope and optimism.

Overall, the results of this study paint a somewhat dismal picture, but they also contain examples of how school psychologists have begun to work against barriers to ethical practice to maintain care for children at the center of their professional decision-making and behavior. What position *should* care occupy in the practice of school psychology? It is my contention, based on these data and review of existing data, that to contribute to positive changes in the lives of children, school psychologists must find ways to reintegrate more strongly the voice of care within the educational context. The voice of care must be amplified, and one way to achieve this goal is to implement a renewed focus on *relationship* in schools. This idea will be discussed further in the implications section below.

What is clear, as a result of this study, is that the ethical commitments of school psychologists and their thinking about ethical issues are highly complex and cannot be reduced to numbers and lists, nor can they be pigeon-holed cleanly into prescribed theoretical categories. Although Gilligan's discussions of the moral voices of justice and care have been extremely useful as the starting point for thinking about moral voice, the moral concerns of school psychologists must be understood as complex, dynamic phenomena that are deeply contextualized within a system that involves highly complex

challenges and pressures. Only then can we begin to understand and appreciate fully how school psychologists think about their very important work and their commitments to the learning and development of children and families. Only then can we begin to identify and implement reform efforts that will allow the voice of care and relationship to be amplified in the school environment.

The results of this study have contributed to the understanding of school psychology practice and has several important implications for training, practice, and research. This final section will outline these implications and suggested future directions.

Implications for Training and Practice: A Call for *Relationship and Care*

Based on the present data, school psychologists, if desiring to remain committed to being ethical practitioners, must be equipped with crucial knowledge and skills for navigating this complex domain of practice. Several changes in present models of graduate training and ongoing professional development are required.

Understanding and Assessing Broader Contexts. First, the results of this study emphasize the need for school psychologists to master a more thorough understanding of the multi-level contexts in which they practice. The school psychologists in this study, when discussing their roles and practice, clearly referred to contextual factors as major factors and recognized the unique environments of their individual relationships, schools, and districts. As they redefine and reframe their individual professional roles across their

careers, school psychologists must also constantly reflect on and critically analyze the impact of broader political, legal and social changes on their professional ethical commitment and responsibilities. More attention must be given to the social context of schools and the broader societal context (Fagan & Wise, 1994; Henning-Stout, 1994) and to understanding professional ethical decisions as embedded in a broader multi-level context of influence.

Relatedly, given the strong contextual influence on ethical commitments and decisions, it is necessary for school psychologists to gain more knowledge and tools that will allow them to conduct broader, system-wide assessments. Not only are there factors that are unique to the educational context and the school psychology profession in general, but there are also unique characteristics of each school system that must be assessed and understood. According to Curtis and Stollar (1996), “Organizational change should be built upon careful analysis of a *specific school* (emphasis added) and a change plan should be developed that is designed to address *the unique needs and characteristics of that school* (emphasis added)” (p. 412). Much of the school psychology literature (Nagle, 1995; Ysseldyke & Geenen, 1996) has recognized the need for school psychologists to expand their assessment skills to include assessment of broader educational systems if they hope to be change agents. How, specifically, will a heightened awareness of the context support school psychologists’ ethical practice?

Understanding the Contextualized Nature of Ethical Commitments. To navigate successfully the complex ethical domain of practice and remain committed to their ethical convictions, school psychologists must conceptualize their ethical

commitments as embedded within a complex and dynamic context. The school psychologists in this study reported multiple and highly complicated environmental forces—administrative support, budget constraints, role misperceptions from others in the school environment, for example—that either support or threaten their ability to practice ethically. Awareness of these factors is an essential first step in preparing school psychologists to deal effectively with them and thereby to remain committed to providing ethical service.

How can school psychologists be educated on the importance of a contextualized understanding of ethical concerns in practice? This awareness must be addressed both at the level of training programs, as well as in ongoing professional development initiatives. They must learn to recognize system pressures and organizational structures, practices, and assumptions that impact their ethical practice and threaten to suppress care concerns in practice. Despite the intuitive appeal of care, these ideas are difficult to translate into practice. This heightened awareness will also assist them in making more meaningful contributions to educational reform efforts, because effective reform efforts must account for all levels of the context. This task is not easy, given the quickly shifting nature of the profession. Joyce, for instance, expressed that she wasn't even sure "what ethical practice in school psychology really is," and this statement may be an expression of the dramatic shifts that are occurring within the field, affecting the clarity of one's ethical commitments that may be in flux. Rather than viewing their ethical commitments and the surrounding context as static, school psychologists must constantly re-evaluate the relationship between ethical commitments and the professional context. Clearly, this understanding must be implemented both at the level of training programs, as well as to

individual practitioners currently practicing in the field. Conferences, professional development seminars, and written literature focusing on the impact of systemic changes for ethical practice will be crucial in this effort. In short, these data support a new conceptualization of and approach to the ethical training of school psychologists.

Reconceptualizing and Reforming Training Practices. Present training practices in the area of ethics tend to focus on familiarizing students with the ethical codes of NASP and APA, reviewing common ethical dilemmas and providing students with prescribed models for resolving the dilemmas (Bersoff, 1995; Eberlein, 1987; Kitchener, 1986; Meara, Schmidt & Day, 1996). This training approach does not challenge students to explore critical questions about their own moral convictions and the relationship between their personal values and their professional ethical commitments. The school psychologists in this study, on the contrary, reported their own personal developmental experiences, family backgrounds, and personal value sets as major influences on their ethical commitments in practice. Considering the person as separate from moral concerns is detrimental to understanding and supporting ethical practice. These present data, coupled with many studies that have reported a gap between moral thinking and moral action (e.g., Bernard & Jana, 1986; Smith, McGuire, Abbott & Blau, 1991), suggest that ethical training must move beyond prescriptive approaches to address the interpretive, constructive nature of ethical practice. Within the field of school psychology specifically, what can be done to move beyond traditional, prescriptive training approaches? The answer, I firmly assert, is to employ *relationship* as both a

training tool in preparation programs and as a tool to be used to facilitate therapeutic change in schools, families and individuals' lives.

First, school psychology students preparing to enter the field must be given safe opportunities to explore their own moral beliefs, values, and developmental experiences that shape their perceptions of practice. As reflected in present data and in existing discussions (Damon & Hart, 1992; Punzo, 1996), morality and moral concerns are integrated within personhood but nonetheless hold different positions within the lives of individuals. For participants in the present study, the process of articulating the nature and substance of their ethical commitments was difficult as they struggled to locate and express their moral voices. The expression of one's moral and ethical values and commitments, as well as how personal values intersect with professional work, must become an everyday topic of discussion in graduate-level training courses. Recognizing this need, many clinical and counseling psychology programs require graduate students to participate in psychological counseling as an integral part of their graduate-level preparation for the helping professions. Because the present data indicate that ethical commitments are actively constructed based on individual perceptions, values, and experiences, this experience may be helpful for school psychologists as they think through the ethical commitments that will drive and infiltrate their practice.

Second, given the participants' descriptions of an intimate connection between personhood, personal values and professional ethical practice, selection committees for school psychology training programs must recognize the vast importance of *the initial selection* of students for entry into the profession. Considering the well-documented discrepancy that exists between ethical codes and ethics training, on one hand, and actual

decisions in practice, it appears that most professional ethical decisions stem more from a person's individual values and commitments than from codified, prescribed processes that can be taught in university courses or internship settings. Many of the participants in the present study conceptualized their ethical commitments as stemming primarily from the essence of their personhood rather than from a prescribed set of ethical standards. Thus, graduate program admissions committees must recognize the challenge that they have in identifying and allowing entry to students whose personal values and morals are consistent with ethical practice. This raises major questions regarding the identification and application of valid, reliable and ethical ways to assess students' personal ethical convictions and commitments; nevertheless, while this undoubtedly introduces complex and controversial factors into the already complicated graduate admissions process, the present data suggest the need to reconsider present admissions decision processes.

Third, the present data indicate that the internship experience, more so than formal university courses, plays a critical role in the development of school psychologists' ethical commitments. The participants in this study, in addition to citing their own internships as influential, stressed their role as internship supervisors in helping students to think more seriously about ethical issues. They viewed ethical training as an important part of their responsibility as internship supervisors. Yet, the participants did not describe a detached working relationship with their interns; rather, many of them described a "mentorship" that allowed them the opportunity to invest themselves as people into their intern's personal and professional development. This *relationship model* of intern supervision holds tremendous potential to support the moral development of school psychologists as they enter the profession. To implement this relational model

of field-based training successfully, however, the current university practices for selecting, monitoring and evaluating supervising school psychologists would need to be re-evaluated.

Fourth, given that school psychology practice and ethical commitments are all situated within a complex social context, increasing attention should be given in ethics training to developing and honing interpersonal skills. The most difficult ethical challenges described by the school psychologists in this study involved working simultaneously with multiple parties with conflicting needs and agendas. To be prepared to work successfully within this complex web, school psychologists must have the communication and relational skills necessary to negotiate these sometimes heated interchanges. This will become even more crucial with the increasingly integrated involvement of parents and community agency representatives.

Fifth, in light of the present data, training practices should also be reevaluated to ascertain ways that they may unknowingly encourage novice practitioners to suppress their voice of care. Many times, people preparing to enter the helping professions are encouraged to remain objective and detached to prevent bias when investing in the lives of clients. On the contrary, I believe that this sterile approach is more detrimental than beneficial to the effectiveness of a helping professional. Because one's ethical commitments and therapeutic approaches are so closely tied to one's personhood and personal experiences, one's effectiveness as a therapist is heightened through the sharing of personal beliefs, constructions, assumptions, and experiences. The emphasis should be placed on *articulating* clearly one's moral and ethical commitments and ensuring that clients are aware of the values, morals, and ethical assumptions from which one operates

in their professional work. As will be discussed next, I believe that a school psychologist's most effective and life-changing work will come through care-based relationships with students and families.

Finally, the present study supports the need for ongoing professional development in the area of ethics in school psychology practice. Rather than relying upon codes, training, or written resources to guide their ethical decisions, the school psychologists in this study expressed the importance of collaborating and consulting with colleagues around issues of ethical significance. Additionally, given the emergent and development nature of ethical commitments and thinking about ethical issues, school psychologists must be given ongoing opportunities to reflect upon and discuss the ethical challenges that they face in their daily work. School districts, intermediate school districts, and professional organizations at both the state and national levels should include training and discussions about ethical issues in their seminars and conventions. The value of informal ethics discussions among school psychologists should also be emphasized to both graduate students and practitioners. One way that this might be accomplished is through the formation of informal consultation networks among school psychologists. Further, mentoring relationships between practicing school psychologists will be valuable in facilitating development of relationship and discussion of moral concerns. Several of the school psychologists felt that their relationship with mentors in the field was one of the most influential factors in their ethical development both as people and professionals.

In sum, I believe that training programs must be committed to the development of reflective practitioners who are aware of their ethical commitments and who are willing to remain committed to high ethical standards. This goal will most likely be

accomplished by creating training environments based on *relationships*—relationships between faculty and students, relationships between interns and field supervisors, relationships among students, and mentoring relationships among practitioners. This relational approach to training, emphasizing care for the self and others, may create a safe environment for exploring, articulating, and challenging issues of ethical and moral development and commitment. By creating this type of care-based context, training programs can provide novice practitioners with a solid foundations for entering the profession and building a care-based practice in their individual schools and communities.

Revisiting Ethical Codes. In addition to implications for training and practice, these findings have several implications for the development and revision of formal ethical codes. The present procedure for developing and revising professional ethical guidelines is complex, time-consuming and expensive. It involves multiple experts working together for a considerable period of time, gathering data from the field regarding necessary revisions, debating proposed changes, and working to create a dynamic document that will provide guidance to practitioners in a variety of settings and specialty areas. Nevertheless, despite the tremendous resources that are devoted to this process, the present data indicate that the codified ethical guidelines are not a major source of information in the midst of ethical problems. When asked to discuss the ethical resources that they utilize in practice, the participants in this study did not mention formal codified resources; only when I directly inquired about the utility of ethical codes in practice did they address this resource. To many of the school psychologists, the code

existed at more of a detached conceptual, theoretical level than at a level that influenced their daily practice directly. Given the tremendous expense and expertise, this present process of code development and revision must be evaluated. A first step in this evaluation process might be a survey of a representative sample of practicing school psychologists regarding the utility of the code, suggestions for making the code more applicable to practice, and possible alternative approaches to disseminating guidelines for ethical practice.

Returning to Relationship: A Challenge to Reform for School Psychologists.

The most important implication of this study, I believe, is its support of a return to emphasis on the “human factor” of the practice of school psychology. Overwhelmingly, the school psychologists in this study agreed that their main work is to *affect people*. In this study, school psychologists’ ethical commitments were not isolated to assessment and intervention procedures but were focused on their *interactions with people*.

However, the school psychologists struggled to maintain this focus within the confines of historical role prescriptions, budget limitations, and legislative mandates. With the present call for expanded roles, the actual role and functions of the school psychologist are, in many ways, ambiguous, undefined, and “in flux.” More than ever, school psychologists are in a position to have a voice in the shaping, definition and identification of the profession within the broader educational and societal contexts.

Within this present climate, I believe that school psychology, as a profession, must clarify its mission and make clear where its energy will be channeled in future educational reform efforts. I do not believe that positive change in the lives of children

and families will come about through testing or even through special education programs for students with disabilities. Although these functions are and will continue to be an important part of school psychologists' work, I strongly believe that *relationships* and genuine care are the tool through which therapeutic change will occur. School psychologists must relocate their voice of care and take a stand within a system that currently validates mainly concerns for justice, rights, and objective detachment. Research has indicated that many of the problems that school psychologists deal with—dropping out of school, teenage pregnancy, juvenile delinquency, crime—have at their roots problems of relationship. One key to at-risk children and adolescents who successfully break the risk cycle is relationships between caring adults and at-risk youths (McWhirter, McWhirter, McWhirter & McWhirter, 1998). Extending this reasoning, school psychologists' most powerful tool in effecting change resides in their voice of care expressed through developing and maintaining meaningful relationships with students and families.

How will reform of this magnitude be translated into reality? Grimes and Tilly (1996) assert that "Meaningful change in the fabric of schools comes about from within schools rather than from without" (p. 470). The school psychologist holds the potential for being a powerful determinant in these change efforts. According to a recent feasibility study examining the barriers and sources of support that school psychologists encounter in contributing to reform efforts (Geenen, 1995), the school psychologist, with their training and expertise, is prepared to be an agent of systems change. Baker and colleagues (1997) agreed, asserting that in reform movements emphasizing an ethic of care in schools, "School psychologists, in their central role as child advocates, can be

instrumental in developing school practices that extend caring and community to children” (p. 599).

I agree with Baker (1996) and Noddings (1984), who argued that education is, at its core, a moral endeavor which should be guided by care and relationship. However, schools, in their present state, are a long way away from achieving this noble standard. Educators and educational reformers know that this task is monumental in nature. Schools and educational communities are resistant to change. Sarason (1982) asserted that “the more sensitive you become to the complicated embeddedness, the more you realize how many different ‘systems’ have to change if the change you seek in the schools can be successfully introduced and maintained” (p. 11). As identified in the present study, school psychologists face many barriers, namely that “they are often too busy providing eligibility-related services to actively participate in reform and they may be overlooked as potential agents of change because of their strong ties to special education” (Geenen, 1996, p.).

Although this task may seem daunting the ability of any one professional group to elicit change may be diminished, one must recognize the tenet of systemic theory which emphasizes that one change anywhere in the system, no matter how small or seemingly insignificant, necessarily impacts the system in its entirety. Thus, small changes that school psychologists make in their practice can contribute to larger systemic changes that will be necessary before the voice of care can be heard within the schools.

The immediate challenge to school psychologists is to begin with *one child* and *one small step toward relationship*. Grimes & Tilly (1996) argue that school psychologists can most effectively contribute to large reform efforts by “beginning

innovation on a small scale with one's own caseload and then generalizing successes as further commitments and resources become available" (p. 472). Each practitioner can seek to devote 30 minutes out of each week to build a relationship with that student and that student's family. Soon, a relationship may develop and, hence, a tool for lasting therapeutic change with that student and family. Through these small efforts, school psychologists may become sensitive to other opportunities to develop and sustain ongoing relationships. Documenting data and disseminating the effectiveness of this relational approach to school psychology may be the way of overcoming systemic barriers to care that were painfully apparent in the present study.

Implications for Research

The present data involve at least four substantive implications for research. First, the profession of school psychology is undoubtedly in a critical stage marked by many calls for change, expansion, and reform. These attempts to broaden the roles and functions of school psychologists, reflected in recent legislation and policy initiatives, actually may be conceptualized as efforts to push the barriers to allow more care to be realized within schools. These changes and shifts represent fertile ground for researchers interested in the role of school psychologists in educational reform. For example, as the call for role expansion with families and communities becomes translated into the reality of practice, empirical research will be needed to identify the influence of these expanded roles on school psychologists' ability to practice ethically and the strategies that they use to maintain their ethical commitments. Additionally, researchers will play a critical role

in documenting the effectiveness of care-based relational approaches to education and to school psychology practice. They must tackle the incredible challenge of how to operationalize and empirically investigate the impact of *relationship* in the learning and development of students and families.

Second, several questions that are worthy of empirical investigation have emerged from the present study. The precise nature of the interplay between personal morality and professional ethical commitments is particularly intriguing. For example, a growing number of researchers (e.g., Lownsdale, 1997) have become interested in how religion and faith development play out in psychological therapy and practice. In the present study, Jill clearly believed that her religious upbringing played a significant role in her professional commitment to complete honesty in her work with families. While in-depth examination of this specific issue was not the focus of the present study, a more thorough investigation of the relationships of personal faith and values and professional ethical commitments is warranted. Given that many school psychologists practice within public school settings, the examination of how issues of faith and religion impact psychologists working with children and families in schools must be further explored.

Third, given the tremendous time and resources that are devoted to developing and revising formal codes of ethics, the report “irrelevance” of formal ethics codes warrants serious empirical investigation. The school psychologists in this study characterized the code as being minimally applicable to their everyday practice. At best, the code seems to serve as a background document that exists in concept but evades practical daily application. A survey of practicing school psychologists, coupled with in-depth qualitative data, may be useful in determining how to improve the practical utility

of ethical codes. On the contrary, alternate approaches to articulating and distributing agreed upon ethical standards for the profession of school psychology should be explored.

Finally, this present study provides further validation for the interpretive investigation of school psychology and school psychologists. At present, the field is dominated by quantitative approaches to inquiry. To my knowledge, the only other study that has employed this research to study school psychologists and their concerns is Gomaa's (1999) dissertation study exploring the active nature of school psychologists' professional role construction. Both studies have suggested that school psychologists actively understand and construct various aspects of their practice, based on their unique perspectives, experiences and contexts. Yet, while these studies have provided an important starting point, we know relatively little about *who* school psychologists are as people and *how* they actively think about their work with children, and *what* they use to construct their professional roles and responsibilities. To represent school psychologists in their full complexity and multiplicity of dimensions, future researchers should consider this approach to inquiry to be a valid alternative and complement to quantitative, objectified means of inquiry that continue to dominate the school psychology literature. Only when we recognize the active meaning-making that school psychologists engage in when working with children and families can we begin to delve underneath the surface to understand highly complex phenomenon such as the ethical commitments that drive their professional work.

In closing, it is my hope that this study has contributed to knowledge about the complex and dynamic nature of the people, practices, processes, and ethical commitments

that comprise the profession of school psychology. School psychologists, as professionals and as people, are entrusted with a precious resource in children and families, and they possess the tremendous opportunity of entering into and influencing many lives in lasting ways. This work represents my passionate challenge to school psychologists to strive toward the next level of service by reflecting upon the nature and substance of their ethical practice and committing to uncompromised, care-based ethical standards in their relationships with children, families, schools, and communities. The voices of school psychologists, though once silenced, have begun to be heard: To meet the increasingly complex demands of a diverse population with unique needs and circumstances, *care* and *relationship* must become the unwavering foundation of the ethical work of school psychologists.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

Participant Characteristics

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Employer</u>	<u>Yrs. Of Experience</u>	<u>Education Level</u>
"Joyce"	ISD	16	Ed.S.
"Mike"	ISD	27	Ph.D.
"Jennifer"	ISD	4	Ed.S.
"Robert"	Contract (ISD/Retired)	32	Ed.S.
"Ken"	Local District	29	Ed.S.
"Jill"	ISD	15	Ed.S.
"Nick"	ISD	8	Ph.D.
"Emily"	Local District	12	Ed.S.
"Dave"	ISD	18	Ph.D.
"Tom"	Local District	14	Ed.S.

APPENDIX B

APPENDIX B

INITIAL INVITATION LETTER

Dear School Psychology Colleague:

I am writing to invite you to participate in a study for my doctoral dissertation entitled

Exploring Ethical Dimensions of Practice: Listening to Voices of School

Psychologists. In this study, I would like to explore how we, as school psychologists, make sense of and deal with the multiplicity of ethical concerns that we face in our practices as we work with children and families. In reviewing the literature, I suggest that we have much to learn about the ethical aspects of practice. I believe that understanding these issues is important, as school psychologists are being asked to fill an increasingly large spectrum of roles in today's schools. With your help, I am hoping my study will contribute to the profession of school psychology by expanding our knowledge of these critical issues and by suggesting ways that the future ethical practice of school psychologists can be supported.

To learn more about the experiences of school psychologists in the ethical domain of practice, I will ask each participant in my study to engage in individual interviews. I anticipate meeting with each person once, for approximately 90 minutes. During the meeting, we will discuss various topics including one's current professional role and responsibilities, one's perceptions of the nature of ethics in the field of school

psychology, how one thinks about ethics in one's own practice, the nature of ethical dilemmas that one has encountered, and one's strategies for dealing with ethical concerns that arise in day-to-day responsibilities. I want you to know that I recognize that these issues are complex and may initially be difficult to talk about; hence, I would be happy to send you a copy of the interview questions prior to our meeting. This will allow you a chance to preview the questions and to think about your responses in preparation for the interview. It is my goal that this will increase your comfort in dealing with these sensitive matters. School psychologists are unique individuals, and the interview questions are intended to solicit your unique perspectives and understandings. Because I am interested in the various ways that school psychologists may think about ethics in practice, I want to emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers. I am in no way interested in evaluating your responses against a standard of practice or making judgments about what is right or wrong; rather, my goal is to be able to depict how individual school psychologists navigate and make sense of the ethical concerns that they encounter as they work with children, teachers, administrators and families.

Having practiced as a school psychologist, I recognize that you are very busy. To make participation in this study easier for you, I would be happy to meet with you at a time and location that is most convenient and comfortable for you. At this point, I am hoping to conduct the interviews during February and early March.

If you would like to participate in this study, please complete the attached Informed Consent Form and return it to me in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope at

your earliest convenience. Upon receipt of your form, I will contact you to schedule our meeting. If you do not wish to participate, you do not need to complete the form but can simply return it in the enclosed envelope. This will assist me in keeping participation records. Finally, if you are unsure and would like further information, please mark that option of the consent form, and I will contact you to answer any questions that you have.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to participate. Additionally, you are free to discontinue the study at any time without penalty. The data gathered during this study will be treated with strict security and confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used to keep your identity confidential. All possible measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of your responses. However, given the limited number of participants, there remains a risk that if your colleagues would happen to read my dissertation or attend a presentation of this project, they might suspect that you were a participant in my study. For this reason, you will have the option to answer some responses “off the record” or to turn the tape recorder off at any time. Such responses will not be included in written reports or oral presentations. When this dissertation is completed, I would be happy to provide you with the results in written form, at your request. All interviews and discussions will be tape-recorded, unless you choose to omit portions of the meeting from the tape. The final report will be published as a dissertation research project that will be accessible through the Michigan State University College of Education. Additionally, parts of the study may be published in journals or presented at state or national conferences.

If you would like further information or have questions, please feel free to contact me at (616) 949-5300, Ext. 1909, or via e-mail at stahl nic@pilot.msu.edu. The Chairperson of my dissertation committee is Dr. Evelyn Oka, who can be reached at (517) 355-6683, or via e-mail at evoka@msu.edu. Additionally, if you have further questions relating specifically to your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact Dr. David Wright at (517) 355-2180.

Your participation in this study would contribute to our practice as school psychologists. Also, you would have the opportunity to talk about and think through some complex issues in a way that could directly benefit you in your own professional practice. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Nicole D. Stahl
Doctoral Candidate
School Psychology Program
Michigan State University

APPENDIX C

APPENDIX C

FOLLOW-UP INVITATION LETTER

Dear School Psychology Colleague:

You may remember my earlier letter about a study for my doctoral dissertation entitled

Exploring Ethical Dimensions of Practice: Listening to Voices of School

Psychologists. I am writing to thank those of you who have accepted my invitation. For those who have not yet responded, I would also like to renew my invitation to participate.

I would like to take the opportunity to review briefly my goals for this study. I am hoping to learn how we, as school psychologists, think about and actively make sense of the ethical issues and concerns that are encountered in practice. The role of school psychologists is sometimes perceived as uni-dimensional and limited to testing only; however, I believe that the role is highly complex and involves a challenging ethical dimension that has not been accurately portrayed within the school psychology literature. Individual school psychologists make sense of ethical issues and concerns in unique ways, and, with your help, I am hoping to demonstrate the complexity of this ethical dimension of practice. I believe that this information can be invaluable in helping people understand the complexity of school psychology practice, informing ethical training and professional development practices, and supporting school psychologists as they seek to maintain the highest quality services. I also feel that the opportunity to participate in this

interview can benefit you professionally by helping you to think about these complex issues as they relate to your own practice.

To learn more about the experiences of school psychologists in the ethical domain of practice, I will ask each participant in my study to engage in individual interviews. I anticipate meeting with each person once, for approximately 90 minutes. During the meeting, we will discuss various topics including one's current professional role and responsibilities, one's perceptions of the nature of ethics in the field of school psychology, how one thinks about ethics in one's own practice, the nature of ethical dilemmas that one has encountered, and one's strategies for dealing with ethical concerns that arise in day-to-day responsibilities. I want you to know that I recognize that these issues are complex and may initially be difficult to talk about; hence, I would be happy to send you a copy of the interview questions prior to our meeting. This will allow you a chance to preview the questions and to think about your responses in preparation for the interview. It is my goal that this will increase your comfort in dealing with these sensitive matters. School psychologists are unique individuals, and the interview questions are intended to solicit your unique perspectives and understandings. Because I am interested in the various ways that school psychologists may think about ethics in practice, I want to emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers. I am in no way interested in evaluating your responses against a standard of practice or making judgments about what is right or wrong; rather, my goal is to be able to depict how individual school psychologists navigate and make sense of the ethical concerns that they encounter as they work with children, teachers, administrators and families.

If you would like to participate in this study, please complete the attached Informed Consent Form and return it to me in the enclosed self-addressed stamped envelope at your earliest convenience. Upon receipt of your form, I will contact you to schedule our meeting. If you do not wish to participate, you do not need to complete the form but can simply return it in the enclosed envelope. This will assist me in keeping participation records. Finally, if you are unsure and would like further information, please mark that option of the consent form, and I will contact you to answer any questions that you have.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary, and you are under no obligation to participate. Additionally, you are free to discontinue the study at any time without penalty. The data gathered during this study will be treated with strict security and confidentiality. Pseudonyms will be used to keep your identity confidential. All possible measures will be taken to ensure the confidentiality of your responses. However, given the limited number of participants, there remains a risk that if your colleagues would happen to read my dissertation or attend a presentation of this project, they might suspect that you were a participant in my study. For this reason, you will have the option to answer some responses “off the record” or to turn the tape recorder off at any time. Such responses will not be included in written reports or oral presentations. When this dissertation is completed, I would be happy to provide you with the results in written form, at your request.

All interviews and discussions will be tape-recorded, unless you choose to omit portions of the meetings from the tape. The final report will be published as a dissertation

research project that will be accessible through the Michigan State University College of Education. Additionally, parts of the study may be published in journals or presented at state or national conferences.

If you would like further information or have questions, please feel free to contact me at (616) 949-5300, Ext. 1909, or via e-mail at stahl nic@pilot.msu.edu. The Chairperson of my dissertation committee is Dr. Evelyn Oka, who can be reached at (517) 355-6683, or via e-mail at evoka@msu.edu. Additionally, if you have further questions relating specifically to your rights as a participant in this research, you may contact Dr. David Wright at (517) 355-2180.

Thank you for once again considering participation in my project.

Sincerely,

Nicole D. Stahl
Doctoral Candidate
School Psychology Program
Michigan State University

APPENDIX D

APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Current Role:

I would like to begin our time together by discussing some questions that will help me to learn about your experience and your role as a school psychologist.

- How long have you been in the field of school psychology?
- Please describe your graduate level training experience.
- Please describe for me the different positions that you have held prior to your present position.
- Would you describe for me your present school psychology position?
 - Describe your caseload? (Probes: Number? Type of cases?)
 - How would you characterize the nature of your district (size; urban/suburban/rural; political/economic influence)?
 - Would you describe for me a typical week in your work?
- Time Spent in Assessment
- Time Spent in Intervention (types of interventions)
- Time Spent in Consultation
- Time Spent in other functions
- What are the multiple functions that you serve in your job?
- What attracted you to the field of school psychology?
- What do you most like about your role?
- What do you dislike most about your role?
- How have your roles and functions changed over time?
- Within the literature, school psychologists have been described as having many different roles and functions. How would you describe your role in one or two words (Tester, advocate, consultant, gate-keeper of special education)?
- Why did you choose this particular description?

- In what ways has this view changed over the course of your career?
- In what ways has this view stayed the same over the course of your career?
- If you were able to design your perfect role as a school psychologist, what would that look like (what would it involve?)?
- What might prevent this role from being possible?
- How do you see IDEA '97 influencing the role of school psychologists in general?
- How do you see IDEA '97 influencing your role, in particular?

Professional Ethics:

The main focus of my study is gaining a better understanding of ethics in school psychology. While a lot has been written about ethical concerns in psychology generally, there is not a lot that specifically addresses the unique ethical concerns of school psychologists. I would now like to spend some time talking about ethics in school psychology.

- In general, what do *ethics* mean to you?
- What kinds of ethical issues do you encounter in your practice?
- Please give me a specific example of a way that ethics enters into your practice.
- How might these differ from those faced by other school psychologists?
- From your perspective, what ethical concerns are unique to school psychologists, as opposed to clinical psychologists?
- How does the school setting in which you work support your ethical practice? Please explain.
- How does the school setting in which you work hinder your ethical practice? Please explain.
- What does it mean to you to be an “ethical school psychologist?”
- In what ways has your definition of what is ethical changes over the course of your career?

- What makes it difficult to be an ethical school psychologist?
- When you encounter an ethical problem or issue in practice, how do you know it is an ethical problem?
- What do you do when you recognize that you are facing an ethical problem?
- What new ethical concerns and challenges have, or are, arising because of the recent enactment of IDEA '97?
- What would help you deal with these new ethical concerns? Please explain your answer.

Ethical Dilemmas:

I. Generation of Two Real-Life Dilemmas

Every school psychologist has had the experience of being in a situation where they had to make a professional decision but weren't sure what was the best course of action. This is called a dilemma. (Give the card that defines an ethical dilemma, and read it aloud: An ethical dilemma is "a problem for which no course of action seems satisfactory. The dilemma exists because there are good, but contradictory, ethical reasons to take conflicting and incompatible courses of action" (Kitchener, 1984)).

Would you please describe for me a situation in your job where you weren't sure what was the best course of action.

- If you were not a school psychologist, how would you have responded to the situation? In other words, what was your personal moral sense about this situation?
- What were the conflicts for you in your situation?
- What were your options?
- In thinking about what to do, what factors did you consider?
- What resources did you utilize in making your decision?
- What did you do?
- What made the decision difficult?
- Looking back at it now, do you think it was the best thing to do?
- Would you make the same decision if faced with a similar situation?
Why or why not?
- Do you think you would have made this same decision at the beginning of your career? Please explain.
- Thinking back over the whole situation, what did you learn from

it?

Probe (used throughout section, as appropriate): How did you make sense of this?

I would now like you to describe a second ethical dilemma that you have faced in your work. (Repeat above questions)

- Are there other ways that you think about ethics in your practice that are not adequately captured by dilemmas or problems? Please explain.

II. Researcher-Generated Dilemmas

I will now describe to you some ethical dilemmas that other school psychologists have faced. After we have read the scenario, I will ask you some questions about it.

Dilemma #1

A school psychologist in a rural district has received a request to provide individual counseling services to a middle school student who appears depressed. The request was initiated by both the parent and the student=s teachers. After a brief assessment of the student=s functioning, the school psychologist agrees that counseling is appropriate. The school psychologist has minimal formal training or supervised experience in individual counseling and is uncertain how to proceed with the referral.

- What are your immediate reactions to this situation?
- What is the dilemma that this school psychologist is facing?
- What do you think the school psychologist should do?
- Why? What factors might this psychologist have considered?
- What resources might this school psychologist consult in making his or her decision?

Let me come at this a different way. The dilemma is this situation is that the school psychologist could make at least two decisions: 1) give the student counseling services, even though he or she has not had the training to attain competency in this area, or 2) do not give the student counseling services and take the risk that the student=s needs will not be met

Dilemma #2

A school psychologist has just completed an evaluation of an elementary school student who was referred for both academic and emotional problems. Assessment data suggest that the student has ongoing behavioral problems, including aggression toward other students, that have interfered with academic and social progress. A history of depression is also present. Along with these significant emotional concerns, the school psychologist has documented a severe discrepancy between intelligence and basic reading skills. Based on the assessment, the school psychologist feels that the child needs special education services. The general education and school principle feel that the child should be qualified for services under the Emotionally Impaired category. However, the parents are highly concerned about social stigma associated with this label and desire that their child be certified as a student with a specific learning disability. Further, the parents have stated that if the evaluation team recommends an EI label, they will refuse services.

- What is the problem that this school psychologist is facing?
- What do you think the school psychologist should do?
- Why? What factors might this psychologist have considered?
- What resources might this school psychologist consult in making his or her decision?

Let me come at this a different way. The dilemma is this situation is that the school psychologist could make at least two decisions: 1) the school psychologist can support the LD label in order to ensure that the student gets the services that are needed, or 2) the school psychologist can insist on the EI label because the school staff support this label and because it may be a more accurate picture of this child=s difficulties.

III. Discussion of Researcher-Generated Statements (modeled after Belenky's work in "Women's Ways of Knowing")

I am now going to show you some sets of statements. After you have read both statements, I will ask you some questions about what you have read.

1. A. In my work as a school psychologist, it is important that I identify those children who have the right to special education because they meet the criteria and guidelines. The guidelines for eligibility must be met in order to ensure that all children have an equal chance at getting services, if they need them.
- B. In my work as a school psychologist, it is important that I identify those children who need special education services because they need the extra support in order to reach their full potential and to benefit maximally from the education process. This might mean sometimes "fudging" the numbers to ensure that the child's needs are met.
- Which of these statements is most like you?
Please explain your answer.
- How does the other statement fail to characterize your work?
- What other reactions do you have as you read these statements and think about your own practice?
2. A. In doing an evaluation, I believe that it is first important to determine whether a child qualifies to receive the services. Then, based on the determination of eligibility, I believe that the services should be planned. The actual

determination of eligibility is often driven by the district guidelines and legal mandates in special education.

B. In doing an evaluation, I believe that it is first important to make decisions about the needs of child for certain services. The actual determination of eligibility is often, in reality, driven by my professional impression of the needs of the individual child.

- Which of these statements is most like you?
Please explain your answer.
- How does the other statement fail to characterize your work?
- What other reactions do you have as you read these statements and think about your own practice?

3. A. When I am consulting with a teacher regarding a student with behavior problems, I believe that it is important that the responsibilities of the problem be shared equally by myself, the teacher, and others who work with the child. It is important to me that the decisions made are fair to the problemed student and to all other students in the classroom. By promoting fairness and equity, I will have the best change of intervening in an effective way to benefit the child and all others involved.

B. When I am consulting with a teacher regarding a student with behavior problems, I believe that my main responsibility is to develop a relationship with the teacher and to do all that I can to maintain a good relationship with him or her. It is important that everyone is comfortable with the decisions that are made. By promoting the relationships and sharing the teacher=s burdens, I will have the best chance of intervening in an effective way to benefit the child and all others involved.

- Which of these statements is most like you?
Please explain your answer.
- How does the other statement fail to characterize your work?

■ What other reactions do you have as you read these statements and think about your own practice?

IV. Ethical Resources

- In what ways are the ethical codes useful to you in your practice?
- In what ways could the ethical codes be improved?
- In what ways is your graduate-level training in ethics useful to you in your present career?
- In what ways could graduate-level training in ethics be improved so as to be more useful to you in your present career?
- What other factors or resources influence how you think about ethics in school psychology?

V. Concluding Questions:

- What do you think will be the greatest ethical challenges that school psychologists will face in the future?
- What can school psychologists do to prepare themselves for these challenges?
- What can be done to support your ethical practice in school psychology?
- In closing, is there anything else that you would like to tell me that would help me to further understand the ethical dimensions of your practice as a school psychologist?

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