An Exploration of Ethically Challenging Situations Experienced by School Psychologists and Related Outcomes Associated with Those Experiences-A Mixed Methods Study

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An Exploration of Ethically Challenging Situations Experienced by School Psychologists and Related Outcomes Associated with Those Experiences-A Mixed Methods Study

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By

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Dedication

I was 26 years old, and walking on quad of West Chester University campus, I heard myself say, "I am 26 years old. I cannot believe I am 26 years old." I remember that day as it was the first time I contemplated pursuing a doctoral degree. At that time, I enjoyed being a guidance counselor and lived for summer travels. I thought about the practicalities such as costs and the changes the decision would have on my life. Fast forward ten years, I was 36, and I had the same exact thought. I wanted to go back to school to earn my doctorate. I can visualize myself sitting at the dining room table, looking at the cost and the number of years it would take to complete, feeling overwhelmed by the prospect. I had just gotten married, and my dad was very ill. I remember telling Patsy, my mother-in-law, I wanted to go back to school, but that by the time I'd be done, I would be 40 years old. Her response, "You'll be 40 anyway."

Fast forward 20 years later, 20 years married, two teenagers, Patsy and both of my parents gone, and here I am 56 years old, achieving something I have wanted since I was 26. Working towards this degree has been one of the most painful, frustrating, stressful, fantastic personal accomplishments. From the moment I submitted my application, I told no one. From the moment I completed my interview, (1) I knew I would get accepted, and (2) I knew this was a marathon, and marathons are not always pretty. You start the race as prepared as possible, but you experience hurdle after hurdle. People cheer you on; encourage you when they see you slowing down and listen when you need to vent. Now mind you, I have never run a marathon, I've only been a spectator, but in my mind, these past three years have been my marathon. Just when you think you can’t go on and are feeling so overwhelmed both physically and mentally, and tired of all the sacrifices that you have made, you see a sign ahead, the Finish line, and
somehow you muster the strength to push yourself to the feeling stronger than you ever could have imagined.

I appreciate the simple wisdom of my mother-in-law's advice when I was 36 because she was right. I did turn 40, and here I am age 56, and finally achieving a goal I have contemplated for three decades. I know Patsy, my parents, Helen and Ed, and my friend Emily watched over me during these difficult three years and knowing that truly brought me great comfort and confidence. Thank you, my guardian angels.

If anyone picks up this dissertation to read or flip through the pages, you should know that it's never too late to start the marathon of your choice. Just DO YOUR BEST!
Acknowledgments

I need to thank everyone who supported and cheered me on over the past three years. The professors at West Chester University have been outstanding. I cannot thank them enough. I appreciate the time and interest Dr. Colleen Penzone and Dr. Colleen Commissio, my committee members, have shown. The year 2021 was a challenging year to be a committee advisor, so thank you. How Dr. Mimi Staulters could read, re-read, edit, and provide the degree of support and quality feedback weekly is beyond comprehension. I truly appreciate your time, support, and thoroughness, which led to a document to be proud of. I need to thank my husband, who has always encouraged me to do whatever I wanted to do, although he would probably say, "You would do it anyway." He was there to listen when needed and encourage me when I was discouraged. I need to acknowledge friends, family, and colleagues who always had supportive and kind words. The sacrifices related to this undertaking were much larger than I anticipate, and I look forward to spending quality time with my friends and family.

Last but not least, I must acknowledge Courtney, Brittany, Patrick, and Morgan. You have all been a bright spot, full of laughs and guidance during the most challenging stage of this process. We were so lucky to be part of Cohort 3, what a fantastic, fun group of people. We will forever share a special bond of mutual respect, humor, food, and friendship. I hope our paths cross again.
Abstract

This mixed-methods study followed an exploratory sequential methodology to study pressures placed upon school psychologists to engage in unethical practices and the outcomes associated with those experiences. The participants, 27 school psychologists from Pennsylvania, completed a questionnaire focused on the pressure to engage in unethical practices and related outcomes. Ten of those participants were selected for an interview that focused on administrative pressure related to the Social Justice Theory. Findings show that pressure to engage in unethical practice continues to be a problem in the field of school psychology and that school psychologists experience repercussions as a result of advocating on behalf of marginalized students. This research contributes to the literature on the pressure to engage in unethical practice, additional pressures related to Covid-19, and to the relatively new area of research involving Social Justice Theory as it applies to school psychology. Several recommendations applicable for school psychology training programs, school districts, and administrative training programs have also been provided.

Keywords: Social Justice Theory, marginalized students
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Chapter 1: Introduction

School psychologists play multiple roles within the educational setting. They are both employees of a school system as well as advocates for the students in their building. The complexity of this dual role presents various and unique complications for these professionals. School psychologists must earn advanced degrees and certifications and demonstrate expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior. In their multi-faceted roles, they engage in professional relationships with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and multiple school district personnel (Lasser & Klose, 2007).

While school psychologists play a vital and diverse role within the educational system, there is a problem. As a result of this dual role and the unique nature of their position within a school system, school psychologists experience complicated ethical dilemmas and challenges (Lasser & Klose, 2007). Studying pressures to engage in unethical practices and the outcomes associated with those pressures is the focus of this dissertation study.

Focus of the Study

Administrative pressure, as it relates to school psychologists, to engage in unethical practice is not a new problem. It has appeared in the literature for nearly 40 years (Clement et al., 1983). Dailor and Jacob (2011) researched this type of pressure adding that school psychologists have also witnessed colleagues who were pressured and acquiescing to the intimidation. It has also been well researched that not yielding to this type of coercion, can lead to reprimands, criticism, threats to job security, ostracism, job transfers, and termination (Dailor & Jacob, 2011; Jacob-Timm, 1999). The pressure to engage in unethical practice(s), and the outcomes associated with those pressures is the focus of this study. The consequences of these pressures have far-
reaching and long-term outcomes for school psychologists, the profession itself, stakeholders, and most importantly the students we are expected to be advocating on behalf of.

For those working in education, many may be unaware that school psychology is experiencing a shortage. The attrition rate is estimated to be 5% annually (Lund & Reschly, 1998; Schilling et al., 2018). Experts predict the shortage that will continue for the foreseeable future only to increase over the next ten years as practitioners retire or leave the field (Bocanegra et al., 2017; Brock, 2014).

There are a variety of reasons why there is a shortage of school psychologists. One reason is burnout (DeNisco, 2015). Feelings of role overload increase burnout among school psychologists (Proctor & Steadman, 2003). There are other factors leading to burnout that include the type of educational setting, number of schools served, perceptions of one’s worth within the school system, lack of opportunities for advancement, and lack of perceived support from administration (Schilling & Randolph, 2017, Unruh & McKellar, 2013).

Symptoms of burnout include exhaustion, cynicism, detachment, ineffectiveness, and negative feelings (Maslach et al., 2001). Feelings of burnout, particularly emotional exhaustion, are not uncommon, especially among practitioners who lack support from administrators, and who continually are assigned more duties (Filter et al., 2013; Huebner, 1992). Results of a 2002 national survey showed that school psychologists spent 46% of their time on assessments and assessment-related activities (i.e., report writing), 16% of the time consulting, 13% of their time providing direct interventions, 8% counseling, and 1% on research (Bramlett et al., 2002). In 2019, Benson et al. reported that school psychologists spent nearly 60% of their time evaluating students and working with students who have special needs. These percentages may vary
depending on multiple factors such as the district, the student-to-school psychologist ratio, and the duties and skill set of the school psychologist.

**Rationale and Significance**

According to Wise (1985), working with uncooperative administrators was ranked 4th out of 35 tension-producing experiences followed by feelings of conflict between student’s needs and administration constraints. In 2016, Boccio et al. provided updated research findings from 291 school psychologists upon completion of the School Psychology Occupational Well-Being Survey (SPOWS). Of the 291 practitioners, one-third (31.9%) reported pressure by the administration to make unethical decisions, and 39% were encouraged to take actions not compliant with state or federal law. Close to nine percent (8.9%) had left a school psychology position because of administrative intimidation. Intimidation has also been identified as a contributing factor to burnout rates and job dissatisfaction in the field (Boccio et al., 2016).

Clement et al. (1983) conducted one of the earliest studies that raised awareness about school psychologist’s legal and ethical responsibilities in response to lawsuits involving placement recommendations and the evaluation process. Clement et al. (1983) identified conflicts that occurred over pressure to alter or delete recommendations from reports due to budgetary constraints, disagreements with other team members, lack of appropriate teachers, and lack of parental cooperation. The study raised attention to repercussions school psychologists face citing the case of Muriel Forest. She was a New York school psychologist fired in 1982 because she refused to change her recommendation of the services she determined appropriate for children. It was found that administrators deleted recommendations in her report (Clement et al., 1983). Although the court ruled in favor of Muriel Forest, this type of pressure continues. While some educators may be aware of this type of ethical pressure and its outcomes, there is
limited research on this topic suggesting that the problem may be relatively unknown in the broader field of education.

**Gaps in the Research**

Studying pressures to engage in unethical practice and the subsequent outcomes will contribute to the limited research in the field. Updated research may increase awareness that this is not an isolated problem and that it is a problem impacting multiple stakeholders. Boccio et al. (2016) highlighted the need for additional research including strategies that can be implemented by school psychologists in their daily practices and to manage administrative pressure. Data shows that administrative pressure to ignore ethical guidelines is identified as one of the most frequently reported transgression school psychologists’ experience (Boccio et al., 2016; Jacob-Timm, 1999; Pope & Vetter, 1992). Finding appropriate ways to address the problem is essential.

**Problem Statement**

Managing pressures to engage in unethical practices is a conflict for school psychologists and a challenge. Trying to balance the role of employee and student advocate only further compounds the pressures school psychologists experience (Boccio, 2016; Helton & Ray, 2005). Negotiating this dual role can be demoralizing, professionally challenging, and unnerving (NASP, 2010). As a result of this conflict, school psychologists may experience marginalization within the school setting. The concept of marginalization as it applies to school psychologists is explained in detail in Chapter 2 and is an integral part of this dissertation research. This dissertation study hypothesizes that the dual role of a school psychologist’s position can lead to marginalization within their own school system. Based on this hypothesis, Social Justice Theory serves as the theoretical framework used to answer key research questions.
**Social Justice Theory**

As a theoretical framework, Social Justice Theory has recently emerged in the school psychology literature (Johnson et al., 2017). While there are multiple commentaries and articles about social justice and school psychology including recommendations to improve advocacy skills, research is limited (Speight & Vera, 2009; Warren, 2014).

Social Justice Theory is rooted in the ideology that individuals from marginalized groups and those that lack equal power and access should have fair and equitable distribution of resources, rights, and treatment (Linnemeyer et al., 2018). School psychologists are expected to advocate on behalf of these students (Jacob et al., 2011; McMahon, 1993). Advocating for marginalized populations by upholding legislation and following ethical codes and philosophies aligned with Social Justice Theory is just one-way school psychologists can help marginalized populations (NASP, 2020); however, it is being hypothesized that by advocating for marginalized students, school psychologists experience a marginalization of their own.

**Professional and Ethical Expectations**

School psychologists are required to demonstrate expertise in mental health, learning, and behavior, and are to adhere to the Principles for Professional Ethics Code published by the National Association of School Psychologists (NASP, 2020). The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) is an international organization for school psychologists. The code of ethics, originally created in 1974 and revised in 2020, is used in graduate training programs, credentialing purposes, and establishing guidelines for ethical behaviors and practices (NASP, 2020).

Knowing and protecting student’s rights as they apply to federal and state laws is expected. Challenging systems and policies that perpetuate social injustice is also an expectation.
The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) sponsors social justice interest groups, publishes social justice articles, and encourages social justice research to assist school psychologists in their endeavors (Briggs et al., 2008). School psychologists are encouraged to play an active role in promoting social justice by focusing on changes in systems rather than individuals (Vera & Speight, 2003). Since children have no control over their environment, it is critical to seek solutions to address social injustices within the home and school community (Prilleltensky et al., 2001). However, before making systemic change, it is necessary to understand the significance of the identified problem and study how this pressure may impact advocacy.

**Significance of the Problem**

School psychologists witness and experience intimidation and pressure to engage in unethical practices. In 2007, Dailor reported 90% of school psychologists have witnessed at least one ethical transgression within a year. In 2016, Boccio et al. reported that 76% of practitioners report having witnessed a colleague yield to administrative pressure. Examples of pressure involve making restrictive special education placement recommendations, inappropriate eligibility determinations, using inadequate test materials, and performing services without the appropriate training (Boccio et al., 2016; Dailor & Jacob, 2011).

Refusal to comply with administrative demands can result in threats to job security, unsatisfactory performance evaluations, involuntary reassignment, written reprimands, dismissal, and ostracism (Jacob-Timm, 1999; Zirkel, 2008). The pressure to engage in unethical practices has both short and long-term consequences. Studies show that 8.9% of school psychologists previously left a school psychology position because of administrative intimidation, and 10.0% had requested reassignment (Boccio et al., 2016). Additional research is warranted to understand
this type of pressure, its related outcomes, and what steps need to be taken to rectify the identified problem.

**Researcher Positionality**

The identified problem is one that is of great concern. I have 34 years of experience in the field of education. I have been a school psychologist for 22 years and during that time spent two years as an adjunct instructor at a private university where I taught special education graduate-level courses and oversaw special education student teachers. In addition to working at a private elementary school for students with learning disabilities, the majority of my work experience has been in the public school sector working with students 4-21 years of age. The majority of my experience was in a district with a close to 50% Hispanic/Latino student population. It is during those years, that my interest and the urgency to advocate for marginalized students were ignited. It was also during that time period that I first experienced and witnessed pressure to engage in unethical practices. These experiences led to personal and professional conflict as well as personal and professional growth. These experiences served as the motivating factor behind this study. Understanding the significance of pressure to engage in unethical practices is very important, and understanding how the pressure impacts not only the school psychologist but students and other stakeholders is essential.

**Action Research**

The topic in this mixed-methods study aligns well with the ideology of action research. The expectation that school psychologists are responsible for encouraging change within systems lends itself to Action Research (Vera & Speight, 2003). A mixed-methods design study was selected in part because a need for advocacy research using a mixed-methods design has been identified in the literature (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The methodology provides insights,
understanding of a research problem, enhances culturally sensitive measures, and encourages sharing of personal experiences which can improve procedures (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). Sweetman et al. (2010) also support using a mixed-methods design emphasizing the need for a qualitative component to advocacy research. By using a quantitative and qualitative design results will highlight the types of pressures school psychologists experience and the related outcomes of those pressures. While the quantitative survey collects data on types of administrative pressures and how to manage those pressures, the interviews provide a rich narrative and more in-depth insight into the problem. Using a mixed-methods design provides a comprehensive framework that aligns well with action research and provides guidance on systemic change.

Ho (2002) identified participatory action research as a process whereby researchers work collaboratively with colleagues to create interventions. Participatory action research provides school psychologists an opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills and create research-based interventions. Another component that can assist in promoting change is the focus on problem-solving. Stringer et al. (1999) promoted a 4-step process that involved (a) analyzing a problem, (b) researching, (c) creating additional data, and (d) implementing the results to solve and improve a problem.

research methodologies to create culturally sensitive interventions to promote the empowerment of minorities. This type of intervention can be used to lead systemic change.

Stringer et al. (1999) and Nastasi et al. (2000) provide two research-based options educational institutions can use to address systemic change. Convincing shareholders that the identified problem warrants attention and change is as critical as the plan of action itself. An effective plan can serve multiple purposes, and identification of a problem is where change starts; however, trying to make systemic change when it involves a social justice focus can be very challenging.

**Social Justice Advocates**

As social justice advocates, school psychologists are expected to challenge institutional barriers and policies and promote advocacy for marginalized populations (Field & Baker 2004; Trusty & Brown, 2005). Advocating for school-based change also includes getting involved with community-based advocacy work. In 2015, 20% of children under the age of 18 were living in poverty with 1.3 million public school students being homeless (Child Trends, 2016; Hair et al., 2015). The percentage of minority students (black and brown) and English language learners (ELL) enrolled in public schools continue to increase and with that trend comes issues with equity and social justice (McFarland et al., 2017). Chapter 2 focuses on the marginalized students who need and benefit from school-based advocacy. In order to understand the diverse students in our school population, school psychologists need to learn about their lives including the bias they face, the discrimination they encounter both in and outside of the school building (McCabe, 2014). Understanding more about these marginalized groups and why the social justice theoretical framework has been selected for this study will become clearer in the following chapters as data is gathered to answer the research questions.
Research Questions

Answers to key research questions were attained through quantitative and qualitative methods incorporating triangulation when applicable to confirm findings and provide a more comprehensive, reliable response.

Research Question 1 (RQ1): What are the most common ethically challenging pressures placed upon school psychologists?

Sub-Question (SQ1): How have those experiences impacted motivation to advocate on behalf of students?

Research Question 2 (RQ2): What are the problems and consequences as a result of administrative pressure on decision-making regarding eligibility determinations and placement of students?

Sub-Question 1 (SQ1): How comfortable are school psychologists when it comes to advocating for social justice issues within their school settings?

Sub-Question 2 (SQ2): How may advocating for marginalized students lead to a personal or professional marginalization of the school psychologist?

Research Question 3 (RQ3): How have school psychologists who experienced ethically challenging pressure(s) attempted to address the issue?

Sub-Question 1 (SQ1): What additional supports, training or professional development do school psychologists report are necessary to promote social justice within their educational settings?

Sub-Question 2 (SQ2): What are the biggest challenges in promoting social justice in schools and school communities?
List of Terms

In the following section, relevant terms used in this study are defined.

**Advocacy:** Engaging in actions to promote the development and implementation of policies to protect and promote the well-being, learning, and development of students (Nastasi & Naser, 2014, p. 45).

**Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania (ASPP):** This is an organization for school psychologists in Pennsylvania whose mission is to support school psychology through leadership (ASPP, 2020).

**Burnout:** Burnout is a response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stress related to one’s job and is defined by exhaustion, cynicism, and inefficacy (Maslach et al., 2001).

**Least Restrictive Environment (LRE):** Children with disabilities should be educated with children without disabilities to the maximum extent possible in the least restrictive environment. (US Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2020)

**Marginalization:** For this study, marginalization is applied in two different ways. The first applies to the marginalization of school psychologists which involves a multidimensional process based on the imbalance of power imbalance and may include discrimination, exclusion, oppression, stigmatization, and subordination (Causadias & Umana-Taylor 2018, pp. 709-710). The second use applies to students that experience disadvantage and exclusion based on race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, education, geographic or national origin, socioeconomic status, or special needs (Syed et al., 2018, pp.812–826).

**National Association of School Psychologists (NASP):** This is a national organization for school psychologists whose mission is to represent and support school psychology through leadership and enhance children’s mental health and educational competence (NASP, 2020).
Social Justice: Social justice is the idea that all individuals and groups are to be treated fairly and respectfully. All students (including marginalized students) are entitled to the resources and benefits that a school has to offer and that their rights and opportunities are protected (North, 2006).

Special Education: Special education describes a wide variety of instructional services available within a school setting based on a student’s needs (US Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2020).

Summary

School psychologists play an essential role in the educational system; however, there is a critical issue that needs to be addressed. One of the earliest studies to shed light on this problem of administrative pressure to engage in unethical practices was conducted close to 40 years ago. Clement et al. (1983) studied the issue of administrative pressure to ignore ethical guidelines. This problem continues to be one of the most frequently reported transgressions school psychologists encounter (Jacob-Timm, 1999; Pope & Vetter, 1992). While school psychologists are expected to advocate on behalf of marginalized students, they too can experience marginalization as a result of carrying out their advocacy duties. Research shows that pressure to engage in unethical practices leads to increased burnout rates, occupational health-related issues, and job dissatisfaction (Boccio, et al., 2016). The following chapter will review literature focusing on school psychology specifically related to pressures to engage in unethical practices, the impact related to those pressures including who is impacted, and the relevance of these issues as it relates to Social Justice Theory and student advocacy.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Chapter 2 describes the roles and qualifications required of school psychologists, including the duality of the position and the complications that arise as a result of the duality of the role. This chapter reviews the role of ethics, advocacy, and social justice as it applies to the profession. The selected research includes both earlier and current school psychology studies, specifically involving administrative pressure to engage in unethical practices and the subsequent outcomes. By demonstrating the progression of the research, I illustrate the history of the problem, identify gaps in the research while emphasizing the current research. Chapter 2 provides information to increase awareness of how school psychologists are pressured to engage in unethical practices and highlights the importance of advocacy work and marginalized students. The theoretical framework of Social Justice Theory, as it applies to the hypothesis of the study, is explored in greater detail.

Expected Roles and Qualifications

Educational Qualifications

When entering the field of school psychology, individuals are expected to fulfill the mandatory educational requirements and continue to pursue training and professional development throughout their careers. In 2018, Walcott & Hyson identified 55% of school psychologists as having advanced graduate degrees 20% have master's degrees, and 25% have doctoral degrees in school psychology. Ninety-six percent (96%) have a certification from a state department of education, while 11% hold state licensure (Walcott & Hyson, 2018). At this time, there are only 12 higher education institutions in the state of Pennsylvania offering an approved school psychology certification program [https://www.aspponline.org/certification.php, 2021].
In addition to holding advanced degrees, the specialist degree involves additional graduate coursework and a passing score on the praxis exam. Those who are nationally certified must complete 75 hours of professional development training every three years to maintain the certification (NASP, 2020).

**Responsibilities of School Psychologists**

School psychologists support families, students, and teachers in multiple ways. It is not uncommon for school psychologists to have high caseloads and engage in various duties within a school building or across multiple buildings and grade levels. In addition, school psychologists address issues related to poverty, mental and behavioral health, bullying, and homelessness (Armistead et al., 2013).

School psychologists have high caseloads and multiple obligations within their assigned schools. The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP), a professional organization with over 26,000 dues-paying members, recommends a 1,000 to 1 student-to-school psychologist ratio regardless of a school psychologist's role. If a school psychologist plays a more comprehensive role within a building, a 500-700 to 1 ratio is recommended (NASP, 2010). The ratio of students per school psychologist was estimated to be 1,381 to 1 in the United States during the 2014–2015 school year (Walcott et al., 2016).

According to a 2002 national survey, school psychologists spend 46% of their time conducting evaluations and writing reports, 16% of the time consulting with school teams, 13% of their time providing direct interventions, 8% counseling, and 1% on research (Bramlett et al., 2002). In 2019, updated data showed that school psychologists spend almost 60% of their time assessing and serving students with special needs (Benson et al., 2019). In fulfilling their obligations, school psychologists must adhere to professional expectations created by the NASP.
In May 2020, NASP updated the Professional Standards document. The NASP Practice Model (Figure 1) identifies the roles and duties of a school psychologist to promote consistency of school-based services throughout the United States (NASP, 2020).

Figure 1

School psychologists provide educational, mental, and behavioral health services, implement research-based and culturally responsive interventions, conduct evaluations, and advocate on behalf of others (NASP, 2020). They are required to promote federal and state laws as it applies to education, adheres to ethical standards, and follow the code of conduct (NASP, 2020). Understanding and implementing guided competencies is also an expectation.

Professional Competencies

School psychologists are expected to demonstrate specific competencies designed by NASP. The organization promotes ten professional competencies. They are (1) data-based decision making and accountability, (2) consultation and collaboration, (3) interventions and
instructional supports to develop academic skills, (4) interventions and mental health services to develop social and life skills, (5) school-wide practices to promote learning, (6) preventive and responsive services, (7) family-school collaboration services, (8) diversity in development and learning, (9) research and program evaluation, and (10) legal, ethical, and professional practices (NASP, 2020; Skalski et al., 2015). These competencies guide the practice of school psychology.

In addition to acquiring and demonstrating professional competencies, adhering to a code of ethics is crucial to the job and area of focus in this study.

**Code of Ethics**

Having a code of ethics is essential in school psychology to serve as a guideline for professionals. In 1974, NASP adopted its first code of ethics, known as the Principles for Professional Ethics (NASP, 2000). The code is revised every ten years, with the most recent update occurring in May 2020 resulting in a comprehensive 81-page document entitled "Professional Standards of The National Association of School Psychologists." The document provides guidance on multiple areas, including Model for Comprehensive and Integrated School Psychological Services, Standards for Graduate Preparation of School Psychologists, Standards for Credentialing, and Principles for Professional Ethics.

School psychologists must honor the code of ethics and take the necessary steps to help students and families they serve (NASP, 2020). These steps also include advocacy work in the name of social justice. Examples of legal, ethical, and professional practice include the following:

- School psychologists practice in ways consistent with ethical, professional, and legal standards and regulations.
• School psychologists engage in effective, collaborative, and ethical professional relationships.

• School psychologists seek and use professional supervision, peer consultation, and mentoring for effective practice.

• School psychologists support the retention and growth of fellow school psychologists by providing supervision, peer consultation, and mentoring to those seeking such support.

• School psychologists access, evaluate, and use information sources and technology in ways that safeguard and enhance the quality of services, security of confidential information, and responsible record keeping.

• School psychologists assist administrators, teachers, other school personnel, and parents/guardians in understanding and adhering to legislation and regulations relevant to general and special education services.

• School psychologists advocate for professional roles as providers of effective services and evidence-based practices that enhance all children and youth's learning and mental health.

• School psychologists stand up for the welfare and rights of children and use expertise to promote changes in individual education programs, systems, schools, and legislation.

• School psychologists actively contribute to conversations about matters of public concern, using factual and verifiable statements that enhance the use of evidence-based practices and policies.
• School psychologists collect data to evaluate and document the effectiveness of their own services.

• School psychologists engage in lifelong learning and formulate personal plans for ongoing professional growth.

• School psychologists are knowledgeable about standards that define contemporary professional practice and organizational principles that provide context for their work.

• School psychologists participate in continuing professional development activities at a level consistent with maintenance of the Nationally Certified School Psychologist credential (i.e., a minimum of 75 hours of professional development every three years). (NASP, 2020, pg. 23).

Duality of the Role

When considering the role that ethics and advocacy play in school psychology, one must also recognize that school psychologists are district employees. Working on systematic change, as suggested by NASP, is a difficult task. Challenging institutional power was rated as the least realistic action taken by school psychologists (Shriberg et al., 2011). As a result of balancing the duality of the position, conflicts may occur, including an ethical dilemma between competing loyalties, thus further compounding the pressures school psychologists face (Boccio, 2017; Helton & Ray, 2005).

Advocacy and Social Justice Theory

School psychologists are expected to improve school practices that unjustly discriminate or deny students their legal rights. They can do this by creating safe, supportive inclusive,
environments accepting and respectful to all (NASP, 2020). The following recommendations are from the Professional Standards created by NASP:

- School psychologists apply their understanding of culture, background, and individual learner characteristics when designing and implementing interventions to achieve optimal learning and behavioral outcomes.

- School psychologists, in collaboration with others, consider individual differences, strengths, backgrounds, talents, and needs in the design, implementation, and evaluation of services to improve learning and mental and behavioral health outcomes for all children in their family, school, and community settings.

- School psychologists use inclusive language and provide culturally responsive and equitable practices in all service delivery domains for diverse individuals, families, schools, and communities.

- School psychologists have advanced knowledge about special education and related services. They use that knowledge to promote specialized instructional and support practices within special education that meet the diverse needs of children with disabilities.

- School psychologists work collaboratively with families and community liaisons to understand and address the needs of diverse learners.

- School psychologists employ a strengths-based approach to address the learning needs of English learners.
• School psychologists acknowledge the subtle racial, class, gender, cultural, and other biases and personal beliefs they may bring to their work and their impact on their professional decisions, interactions, and activities.

• School psychologists also remain aware of the negative impact that biases such as racism, sexism, and others have on students, families, schools, and communities; thus, they collaborate with education professionals to promote respect for diversity for an inclusive and supportive school setting.

• School psychologists recognize both within- and between-group differences when working with diverse student populations.

• School psychologists promote equity and social justice in educational programs and services by ensuring that all children and youth learn in safe, supportive, and inclusive environments.

• School psychologists actively engage in efforts to address factors that limit equity and access to educational opportunity (pg. 22, NASP, 2020).

Social Justice Theory

The Social Justice Theory is the theoretical framework used as the blueprint for this study. The theory has emerged in school psychology literature over the past few years (Johnson et al., 2017). NASP created guidelines rooted in social justice for school psychologists which are updated every ten years. They serve as a guide for practitioners, as stated in this summary:

School psychologists should uphold the protection of all children's educational rights, opportunities, and well-being, especially those whose voices are muted, identities obscured, or needs ignored. Social justice requires promoting non-discriminatory practices and the empowerment of families and communities. School psychologists enact
social justice through culturally responsive professional practice and advocacy to create schools, communities, and systems that ensure equity and fairness for all children and youth. (Adopted by the NASP Board of Directors, April 2017).

Additionally, school psychologists are expected to know and protect students’ rights as they apply to federal and state law under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This law, created in 1975, mandates public special education services be provided to children with identified needs from ages 3-21 (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2020). School psychologists need to know and uphold Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (U.S. Department of Education, Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services, 2020). Both acts address civil rights prohibiting discrimination against individuals with disabilities.

School psychologists are expected to protect student’s rights and challenge systems and policies that perpetuate the practice of social injustice (NASP, 2020). Understanding the origins of Social Justice Theory helps school psychologists to advocate on behalf of their students.

Origins of Social Justice

The origins of Social Justice Theory are rooted in social work and gained recognition during the Civil Rights Movement (McGrath-Morris, 2002). John Rawls is credited with creating the term Theory of Social Justice, although Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, and Kant influenced the development of the theory (Figueira-McDonough, 1993). Other prominent educators of this philosophy were John Dewey and liberal-minded thinkers Kohl, Kozol, Illich, and Friere (Bates, 2013). The goal is to achieve equal participation of all groups so their needs can be met and emancipation from social injustices occurs (Carr & Kemmis, 1983). Social justice is rooted in the belief that all individuals and groups should receive fair and respectful treatment and that all
students should have access to resources and benefits that a school offers (North, 2006). The lack of social justice within a system correlates with the mental health and well-being of children (Speight & Vera, 2008). Educators and supporters of Social Justice Theory seek a proactive approach to a social justice agenda to address racism, classism, and other types of marginalization (Speight & Vera, 2009). School psychologists are encouraged to support community efforts that promote social change (Speight & Vera, 2009).

As advocates, school psychologists must be willing to challenge institutional barriers or policies (Field & Baker 2004; Trusty & Brown, 2005). Trusty and Brown (2005) identify three forms of advocacy. The first is focusing on helping clients advocate for themselves, the second advocating directly with institutions on behalf of the marginalized groups, and the last involves advocating indirectly through training and professional development.

In addition to issuing a statement promoting social justice, NASP sponsors social justice interest groups, publishes social justice articles, created a podcast in June 2010, and encouraged social justice research (Briggs, et al., 2008; Shriberg et al., 2011). These resources are available to NASP members.

School psychologists are encouraged to play an active role in promoting social justice by focusing on changes in systems rather than individuals (Vera & Speight, 2003). While this may be a motivator for some, adopting a social justice stance is not without controversy. Some school psychologists are uncomfortable with the political overtones and the call for social action and change (Vera & Speight, 2003). Exploring this potential vulnerability is addressed in this dissertation. Reviewing studies involving social justice and school psychologist provides further insight into the complexity of advocacy work and how advocating for marginalized students may lead to the marginalization of the school psychologist.
Studies in School Psychology and Social Justice

To better understand the challenges in researching social justice and the field of school psychology, Shriberg et al. (2008) presented one of the first empirical studies to examine social justice through the eyes of a school psychologist. The team used a Delphi method to gather clarity and a consensus from a group with expertise on a topic that is difficult to define (Lopez & Rogers, 2001). The Delphi panel size ranged from 15 to hundreds of participants before decreasing to a more manageable panel by the end of the process (Delbecq et al., 1975). In this study, the initial group was 773 ultimately resulting in 44 participants. The participants completed a two-phase process using a Delphi questionnaire. The first phase was completed by 20 select participants, followed by 17 participants that completed the second phase. When the criteria for the final panelist were determined, the participants defined social justice from a school psychology perspective, identifying priority social justice topics, social justice advocacy strategies, and opportunities and barriers to social justice work in the field of school psychology. Coded responses and inter-rater reliability was established. The researchers identified several limitations in the study. One particular limitation was that the expert views did not reflect the views of typical school psychologists. The researchers identified a need for additional research from the broader school psychology community to generate a broader range of views and generalizability.

As a follow-up to the 2008 study, Shriberg et al. (2011) surveyed 214 NASP members to study how they would define, prioritize, and apply social justice. From this information, they created recommendations for future practice and research. Of the 214 participants, 141 were females and 38 male, 39 had doctorate degrees, 139 were Caucasia, six were Latino/Hispanic, five African American, three Asian American, and ten identified as other. The age of participants
ranged from the 20-50’s. The participants completed the Social Justice in School Psychology Survey (SJSP) containing 27 items on a Likert scale. Based on responses of the 214 participants, participants identified promoting best practices, conducting culturally fair assessments, and advocating for the rights of children and families as the most realistic actions practitioners will take. Taking personal risks to promote institutional change earned the lowest rating. There were notable differences in patterns of response. Gender was not a significant factor, but age was a factor. Younger participants (20-29 years of age) had more exposure to social justice concepts in their graduate training programs. However, they were less likely to take personal risks to pursue social justice causes when compared to those aged 50 years and over. Another difference between the two groups was that the 20–29 age range rated ethical codes of conduct as less critical than the 50+ age group. Respondents in the 50 + age group and those with doctoral degrees rated taking risks to promote change as more realistic than their younger colleagues and those without doctoral degrees (p < 0.05). Another difference found among the age ranges involved opinions about ethical codes of conduct and psychological theories. Participants aged 20-29 rated these factors as less important than the 50+ age range participants. Identifiable variables impacting social justice efforts included time, resources, administrative and faculty support, and school climate.

The integration of social justice and school psychology research is relatively new. However, the literature on ethical pressures as it applies to school psychology has appeared in journals for the past three decades. Understanding the evolution of this research helps to understand the complexity of the problem.
Ethical Dilemmas and Associated Pressure

According to Knauss (2001), school psychologists encounter two types of ethically challenging situations: ethical dilemmas and transgressions. Dilemmas are when good but contradictory ethical reasons cause conflict and potential incompatible outcomes. Some ethical dilemmas can be resolved, but others are more complicated and challenging (Sinclair, 1998). Ethical transgressions involve actions that go against professional expectations and violate ethical codes. Addressing these dilemmas can result in a formal complaint to NASP where sanctions or loss of certification or license may occur (Dailor & Jacob, 2010).

One of the earliest research studies on school psychologists and ethical pressure occurred in 1983 by Clement et al. The motivating factor for the research was the increase in lawsuits over evaluations and placement decisions. Limited research existed which focused on the legal and ethical responsibilities of school psychologists. Clement et al. (1983) distributed 225 questionnaires to school psychologists in Vermont, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island. Names were attained from a list of certified professionals in the state resulting in 70 eligible participants. At the time of the study, Rhode Island had 112 school psychologists, Vermont had three, and New Hampshire had 13. The questionnaire contained three parts. The first included three scenarios with a choice of ethically challenging recommendations asking individuals to respond how they would like to respond and how they would respond. The scenarios involved school pressure to adapt existing inadequate services instead of recommending optimal services, the second involved non-English speaking students and placing them in an entirely English speaking educational system, and the third involved residential placement recommendations for moderately handicapped students whose parents were unable or unwilling to provide
independent living experiences. The second part of the questionnaire explored other ethical problems they might encounter. The third step involved rating the effectiveness of their team.

Of the 70 participants, 14% reported being required to use specific tests as mandated by their administrators, 5% chaired their school decision-making team while principals chaired the majority of the teams, and 63% rated their team as "good." Over 80% reported the head of the team influenced decision making to some extent which they felt was significant since principals do not perform the assessments, but are in a role of power and able to coerce decisions. When asked if funding impacted placement, 59% reported that this occasionally occurred, 13% reported it happened several times, and 20% reported it never occurred. The researchers felt this outcome indicated that budget restrictions do impact placement decisions. On top of this, 20% of the participants reported being restricted from placing students due to waiting lists and lack of appropriate placement options. Other concerns raised by participants involved compromising on support services due to limited availability from related service specialists.

Clement et al. (1983) recognized the study was small but that the results suggest that the law is not always being followed when it comes to placements and evaluations. On a note of interest, the 1983 study identified a trend in the United States. That trend involved reducing school funding due to complaints about high taxes; thus, there was a call for school psychologists to spend more time on decision-making processes and the need to arrive at equitable solutions. This type of pressure has implications related to social justice ideology.

Sixteen years later, Jacob-Timm (1999) conducted a study using the critical incident technique to collect descriptions of ethical problems school psychologists experience. Participants were asked to describe an ethically challenging incident they witnessed or experienced over the past two years. The questionnaire provided to a random sampling of 1,035
NASP members resulted in 226 participants identifying 222 ethically troubling incidents categorized into one of 19 categories. The categories were (1) administrative pressure to act unethically, (2) assessment-related concerns, (3) confidentiality, (4) unsound educational practices, (5) job competence and performance, (6) parent conflicts, (7) school record keeping, (8) divided or conflicting interests that might impair the delivery of services, (9) informed consent and (10) client self-determination, and intervention practices.

Participants also identified implied threats to job security, reprimands, criticism, and ostracism. Some specific examples shared by participants included being threatened with relocation or accused of not being a team player if they did not serve as a disciplinarian in a special program, not making a diagnosis that the school wanted which served the school's interest rather than the student, pressure to slant assessment findings to qualify a student as emotionally disturbed so the school could get more funding despite the recommendation, and team members afraid to vocally challenging the administrators.

The most common source of conflict between school psychologists and administrators involved eligibility, placement, and services. Participants noted 20 incidents. Other dilemmas included directives to put test results in the IEP rather than in a report as report writing was taking too much time, being required to administer certain assessments even when not appropriate, refusal to include a child in the regular education environment, and discouraging out of district placements due to costs.

Several limitations were identified by Jacob-Timm (1999), acknowledging that 222 (82%) of the incidents reported involved questionable situations rather than clear-cut violations. Another limitation was the time factor of two years suggesting that only the most problematic situations were recalled, the low response rate was a factor as well as the incidents reported may
not be typical. Recommendations showed a need for continued ethics training, improved systemic decision-making procedures, strategies to resist pressure, and the need to find ways to lessen organizational pressures on school psychologists.

One year later, Helton et al. (2000) contributed to the research on administrative pressure to act unethically by conducting a study with 141 school psychologists and 130 special education teachers. The average age was 42 and 21% held an advanced degree. The original target group was much higher, with a cover letter and survey originally mailed to 800 professionals. What was unique to this study was including the special education teachers in the sampling. All participants completed a survey asking them to review four scenarios involving ethical dilemmas and how they predict they and others would respond. The scenarios were (1) involved a superintendent's directive to withhold mention of related services, (2) supervisor pressure to present incorrect assessment data from a private contractor, (3) a supervisor's instruction to ignore a regular education teacher's failure to implement an Individual Educational Program (IEP), (4) whether or not to inform parents that supplies guaranteed by administrators would not be provided. Three of the scenarios were based on actual experiences, and one was taken from a book on ethics in special education.

The researchers attempted to determine to what degree participants would predict they and others would resist pressures across various ethical dilemmas. Analyses of variance (ANOVA) compared ethical responses across prediction and comparisons to test their initial hypotheses. Results yielded several findings, with participants being more likely than not to predict they would respond ethically to each dilemma. They viewed mandates to advocate for students to be taken seriously despite pressure to act differently. Findings showed that if respondents perceived their colleagues as supportive of autonomous decision-making practices,
they were more likely to predict ethical choices than those with a different impression of their colleagues.

As with most studies, there are limitations. The limitations included the impact of prior education and exposure to ethics and law, sample restrictions, over-representation of females vs. males, and educational level. Helton et al. (2000) made several recommendations. Recommendations included pre-service and in-service training, improving hiring practices to hire and retain professionals that favor autonomous decision-making, improving support systems for staff, and promoting interactions among school psychologists and special education teachers from nearby districts.

Eleven years later, Dailor and Jacob (2011) contributed to the research by conducting a study on ethically challenging situations and the implications for training. Four hundred randomly selected school psychologists who held NASP membership were contacted, resulting in 208 eligible participants. The sampling included 77% female, with 38% falling in the 51-60 age range, 32% of participants holding a master's degree plus certificate, and 19% having a doctoral degree. Forty percent worked in suburban settings, 24% in rural, and 21% in urban settings. Exposure and training in ethics were assessed, with 54% reporting that they were taught ethics in multiple graduate courses, 70% having ethics addressed in practicum/training programs, and 24% receiving multilevel university ethics training. Respondents completed an 88-item questionnaire designed by the second author of the study. Multiple faculty members reviewed the questionnaire to ensure clarity and content, and two advanced doctoral students provided feedback before distribution. Participants used a 3-point Likert scale to rate how they perceived themselves to handle ethical issues. Sixty-three percent reported feeling "very prepared," and 37% rated themselves as "somewhat prepared." A significant correlation existed between
multilevel ethics training and confidence in being "very well prepared." There was no correlation between perceived preparedness to manage ethical issues and degree level or years of experience. A chi-square test indicated a significant connection between perceived preparedness to manage ethical dilemmas and advanced degrees (doctoral vs. non-doctoral).

The scale also included 35 questions focusing on ethical transgressions witnessed over the past year affiliated with nine broad categories. The most witnessed broad category involved assessment-related incidents. Failing to follow up on an intervention, conducting assessments in unsatisfactory locations, and avoiding recommendations due to administrative concerns about costs were the specific concerns observed by the largest number of respondents. The four issues experienced by the greatest number of respondents involved whether to contact child protective services, whether to disclose a student's risky behavior to his or her parents, how to address unethical conduct by a colleague, and how to balance a parent's request to view test protocols with the ethical obligation to maintain test security. Seventeen percent of participants reported an administrator had pressured them to make decisions or take unethical actions.

Along with this pressure came an implied threat to job standing (e.g., negative evaluation, moving to a less desirable assignment, or losing job) for noncompliance. Fourteen percent reported that an administrator had pressured them to make decisions or take actions that were not in compliance with federal or state law and faced an implied threat to job standing if they did not comply. Chi-square tests showed a significant connection between years of experience and experience with specific ethical dilemmas. School psychologists with less than five years of experience experienced more pressure than those with more than five years of experience, $\chi^2(1, N = 205) = 5.505, p = .019$. Dailor and Jacob (2011) noted that administrative pressure to act unethically was ranked as the number one concern by 28% of respondents, while the second
most common concern was unsound educational practices. The top three ethical concerns were administrative pressure to act unethically (43%), unsound educational practices (41%), and assessment-related concerns (27%). Limitations of the study involved relying on retrospective memory of events from the past year, recalling the most dramatic experiences, or the most frequently occurring or stressful pressure. A recommendation for future research included using a confidential online diary encouraging participants to write about ethically challenging experiences when they occur. Findings support the need to practice ethical decision-making in training programs and continue professional development in ethics training to promote confidence and competence.

Following the 2011 study completed by Dailor and Jacob was a study conducted by Boccio et al. (2016). While surveys involving burnout and ranking of stressful events experienced by school psychologists appeared in literature in the early 1980s (Wise, 1985), Boccio et al. (2016) focused specifically on unethical pressures and burnout. The 291 participants in the 2016 study completed the School Psychology Occupational Well-Being Survey (SPOWS), including the Maslach Burnout Inventory-Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS). Demographic data shows that 80% were female, 92.4% identified as Caucasian, 2.4% Asian/Pacific, 1.4% as Black, 1.4% Hispanic, and 2.4% as multicultural. Thirty-eight percent (38.3%) worked in rural communities, 35.9% suburban, 14.5% urban, and 11.3% a combination.

Results show that one-third (31.9%) of the respondents encountered administrative pressure to make unethical decisions, and 39% experienced pressured to take actions that were not in compliance with state or federal mandates. The most common pressures involved withholding recommendations for supports, using inadequate assessments and interventions, and making inappropriate placement decisions. Thirty-three percent acknowledged decisions were
not in the best interest of the student but were motivated by costs and reflection of state scores on a district. Another theme to develop out of this research involved conflicts about contractual obligations (e.g. workload). Other elevated concerns involved pressure related to prioritizing unnecessary evaluations, workplace bullying, and directives to be untruthful about a child's mental health or the actual assessment results. A small number of participants reported being assigned duties without adequate training and pressured to go along with administrators' unilateral decisions. Participants who had tenure or were part of a union were no less likely to experience these administrative pressures.

Findings support the hypotheses that administrative pressure to engage in unethical practice contributes to burnout, occupational health-related issues, and job dissatisfaction (Boccio et al., 2016). Schilling and Randolph (2017) identified that 92% of school psychologists report experiencing some degree of burnout in their careers, thus supporting earlier findings. To further address the outcomes related to burnout, Boccio et al. (2016) identified one in six school psychologists interested in leaving the field within five years due to administrative pressure. One in 11 school psychologists had already left a position because of intimidation, and 8% indicated a mild to mildly high desire to leave the field. These findings are significant considering the current shortage in the field.

Boccio et al. (2016) recommended longitudinal studies to determine if the pressure did result in these professionals leaving the field. The researchers provided suggestions for school psychologists to consider in an attempt to remediate the problem. The suggestions were (1) educating staff and administration about legal and ethical mandates, (2) creating positive and productive work environments, (3) accessing colleagues and NASP for guidance, and (4) adopting strategies in self-care to manage stressors. The researchers also identified the
importance of making self-care and well-being a priority, considering the extensive costs related to burnout and shortages in the field.

Schilling and Randolph (2017) contributed to the research on school psychologists and burnout. Participants in the 2017 study included 38 graduates from a school psychology program in the Southeastern United States who reported first experiencing feelings of burnout three to four years into their careers ($M = 3.74; SD = 2.39$). Participants reported some feelings of burnout, while all participants reported feeling a moderate degree of burnout. It was also documented that 63% of participants left or considered leaving the field of school psychology. Reasons for wanting to leave the field included being overloaded with responsibilities, lack of resources, salary, insufficient recognition of work, and work setting. These results are similar to other findings relevant to job satisfaction and feelings of burnout (Brown et al., 2006; VanVoorhis & Levinson, 2006). Updated findings in Schilling et al. (2018) supported earlier studies involving work overload and job burnout with 122 participants identifying emotional exhaustion as the highest burnout factor.

In reviewing the research on ethical pressures and outcomes, administrative pressure to ignore ethical guidelines is one of the most frequently reported types of ethically challenging situations encountered by school psychologists (Jacob-Timm, 1999; Pope & Vetter, 1992). Further complicating matters is that while school psychologists work to protect students' educational rights, their well-being and act as a voice for the voiceless, they are also school employees. Thus this dual role places additional pressure on school psychologists (Boccio, 2017).
Dual Roles and Implications for Marginalization

The dual role and demands a school psychologist face is a reality that complicates the problem being addressed in this study. It is hypothesized that school psychologists themselves experience marginalization in their attempts to advocate on behalf of marginalized populations. Research shows that 8.9% of school psychologists had previously left a school psychology position due to administrative intimidation, and 10% had requested reassignment (Boccio et al., 2016). Refusal to comply with administrative pressure can lead to unsatisfactory performance evaluations, reassignment, dismissal, and ostracism (Jacob-Timm, 1999; Zirkel, 2008). Examples of ostracism include being avoided at work, shut out of conversations, or having one's greetings go unanswered. Ostracism is defined as either "the extent to which an individual perceives that he or she is ignored or excluded by others" (Ferris et al., 2008, p. 1348). These compounding issues and outcomes are displayed in Figure 2.

Figure 2

*Social Justice Theory as it applies to pressures placed on school psychologists*

**Administrative Pressure** placed on school psychologists to engage in unethical practices despite the fact that school psychologists are expected to serve as advocates for marginalized students and are looked upon as agents of change according to the Social Justice Theory.

**Legal and Ethical Pressure** to uphold ideology of Social Justice Theory, honor the NASP Code of Ethics, follow state and federal mandates for all students and advocate for marginalized populations, increases the pressures school psychologists experience.

The outcomes and conflicts related to these pressures result in school psychologist being marginalized leading to increased burnout rates, fear of job loss, reprimands, unsatisfactory performance evaluations, involuntary reassignment, dismissal, ostracism, and health concerns (Zirkel, 2008). It also can lead to a further marginalization of students.
The pressure to engage in unethical practice not only impacts school psychologists but, more importantly, the students we serve. Often this occurs unbeknownst to others, and the decisions made behind closed doors have significant and, in some cases, life-altering outcomes. Despite the possibility of repercussions, school psychologists need to advocate on behalf of marginalized populations. Understanding who these marginalized populations are helps to improve the ability to advocate on multiple levels, as encouraged by NASP.

**Impact on Minority and Lower Socio-Economic Students**

According to 2018 data published by the United States Census Bureau, more than 39 million people, or 12.3% of the U.S. population, lived below the federal poverty level in 2017. These statistics mean that a family of four earning less than $25,465.00 annually fell within the poverty level, including 12.8 million or 17.5% of our students under age 18 (Fontenot et al., 2018). Further distribution of children and race reflect 10.9% were Non-Hispanic/White, 12.2% were Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 31.1% were American Indian/Alaska Native, 28.7% of Black/African American, and 25% were Hispanic/Latino (Children's Defense Fund, 2018). These statistics are important as children from lower socio-economic families are disproportionately exposed to environmental factors that can impair cognitive, social-emotional development, behavior, and physical health (Hair et al., 2015; Kaiser et al., 2017; Kuo et al., 2016). Hair et al. (2015) reported 1.3 million public school students were homeless. On average, 16% of students that are homeless miss more than three weeks of school per year which causes them to fall further behind (Bassuk et al., 2014).

**English Language Learners**

The percentage of minority students (black and brown) enrolled in public schools was 50.5% in 2014, up from 42% in 2004 and 4.6 million (9.4%) were English Language Learners
These trends have implications applicable to this study as they play a role in equity and social justice issues within our school buildings and communities. In looking at trends involving minority students, Ortiz and Yates (1983) shed light on the problem of overrepresentation by reporting on data from Texas where Latino students were placed in learning-disability programs by more than 300%. In another study from Texas, a team of bilingual special education specialists studied the testing data from 21 bilingual students classified as learning disabled. The specialists found that 10 (49%) of the students did not have a disability but that their learning difficulties resulted from cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Wilkinson et al., 2006).

This practice continues despite political intervention and legal mandates requiring bilingual programming. Overrepresentation of ELLs in special education continues to be a significant problem. Teachers reported that they did not feel competent when making decisions involving ELL's so they placed students into special education programs (Becker and Deris, 2019). According to Wilkinson et al. (2006), 70% of students classified as learning disabled were either over-identified or misidentified. Often, Hispanic/Latino students were identified with learning disabilities or speech-language impairments as schools were not considering language and culture in their programming or evaluations, and teachers and school administrators lacked the training to work effectively with this population. This was confirmed in a 2004 study involving over 200 speech and language pathologists. Over a third of the therapists indicated that they had not received any training to work with multicultural or multilingual populations (Hammer et al., 2004). This is significant as these specialists evaluate students for special education placement on a regular basis.
Guiberson (2009) studied the placement of minority students in three areas; overrepresentation, underrepresentation, and misidentification. Overrepresentation is when the percentage of minority students in special education is greater than other populations compared to the school population. Underrepresentation is students with disabilities who are not identified and do not receive supports. Misidentification is those students that have been incorrectly classified (Meyer & Patton, 2001; Wilkinson et al., 2006).

Data continues to show that students placed in special education are more likely to experience long-term adverse outcomes connected with systemic racism and social injustice. One clear example is dropout rates. The dropout rate for students in special education was over 30% in 2002 (Donovan & Cross, 2002), with students unable to pass their graduation examinations (Heubert, 2002).

In 2006, Skiba et al. highlighted that students identified as culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) were not receiving the supports they needed to be successful in school (Artiles & Ortiz, 2002). There are significant disparities in funding for this population, and these differences contribute to the high retention and dropout rates (Brayboy et al., 2007; Duran, 2008). An estimated 30% of all students identified as ELLs live in areas where English-only legislation mandates the type and amount of language support schools can provide. These restrictions lead to behavioral issues, limited engagement, retention, dropout, disengagement, and referrals to special education (Plant et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2000). Limited availability of language supports in schools, and a shortage of bilingual educators, including school psychologists, has significant implications (Plant et al., 2009). The shortage of school psychologists in itself is a problem and could have a particularly severe impact on culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students (NASP, 2016). An additional concern is that 86% of school
psychologists are English-only speakers while less than 8% are bilingual (Walcott et al., 2016). Latino/Hispanic school psychologists are in short supply, with only 6% being represented in the workforce (Walcott et al., 2016).

As a result of being placed in special education classes, several factors need to be considered. They are (1) students are less likely to be exposed to a challenging curriculum, (2) teachers have lower expectations, (3) They are not placed in classrooms with typically performing peers, (4) there is a negative social stigma, (5) There is a racial separation which adds to the challenges these marginalized students face (NEA, 2005).

**Lack of Cultural Understanding**

Pedagogical approaches within school systems also need to be considered. This is part of the advocacy school psychologists need to be involved with as the curriculum is not well-matched to meet students' needs (Causadia & Umana-Taylor, 2018). While we often hear about students being over-identified, we also need to look at the other end of the spectrum. Data indicates that Latino elementary-aged students are actually under-referred and over-diagnosed due to a lack of cultural understanding (Case & Taylor, 2005). Factors contributing to this problem include poorly designed language assessments and culturally biased psycho-educational assessments (Figueroa & Newsome, 2006; MacSwan & Rolstad, 2006). Another ongoing problem impacting ELLs is underrepresentation in gifted education (King et al., 2009). School psychologists find it challenging to complete cognitive, academic, and behavioral assessments on ELLs due to limited availability of testing instruments, lack of specialized training, and a shortage of bilingual psychologists (Figueroa & Newsome, 2006). It is not uncommon for language acquisition to be interpreted as a learning problem (Artiles & Klingner, 2006). Inadequate or inappropriate testing practices, restricted access to effective instruction, lack of
understanding about language acquisition, inappropriate special education referral practices, and limited training contribute to this persistent problem (Sullivan, 2011).

In an attempt to address this ongoing systemic problem on behalf of marginalized students, advocacy groups intervened. The Latino Action Network vs. New Jersey filed a lawsuit on May 17, 2018, the Brown v. Board of Education anniversary. The group claimed that the State of New Jersey provided separate and unequal schools to minority students in violation of their constitutional rights. The group has accused N.J. public schools of segregation practices. The teacher's union, the New Jersey Education Association, advocated for the case agreeing that Black and Latino students are deprived of educational benefits and education (O'Dea, 2018). Another advocacy case that also took place in 2018 was Yazzie and Martinez vs. State of New Mexico. This case focused on school finance and equal resources for lower socioeconomic students. Advocates cited low graduation rates and high rates of students taking remedial courses in college due to poor academic skills due to lack of prior instruction (O'Dea, 2018). These lawsuits serve to catalyze systemic change. School psychologists need to be aware of what is happening in the courts to promote social justice efforts within their schools and communities.

**Black/African American Students**

Another marginalized group that requires support from school psychologists is Black/African American students. Data shows that black students are disproportionately placed in special education programs. Black/African American students account for only 14.8% of the general population of 6-to-21-year-old students; however, they make up 20% of the special education population (Losen & Orfield, 2002). Black/African American students are 2.41 times more likely than white students to be identified as having intellectual impairments, 1.13 times more likely to be labeled learning disabled, and 1.68 times more likely to be classified as having
an emotional or behavioral disorder (Klingner et al., 2005). Black/African American students continue to face an increased risk for suspension for minor misbehaviors and increased risk of school suspension and expulsion for the same behavior as students from other racial/ethnic groups (Skiba et al., 2011). Limited access to general education classrooms and lack of access to typical peers contributes to high dropout rates, low academic performance, and instruction from a weaker curriculum (Ferri & Connor, 2005).

In an attempt to study the influence of race, Sullivan et al. (2011) worked with 302 school psychologists to measure race and assessment data on perceptions of students' eligibility for special education, focusing on emotional disturbance, intellectual disability, and autism. There was little evidence of racial disparity, but participants made decisions unsupported by evaluation data. This practice is in conflict with the ethical, legal, and social justice practices school psychologists are expected to uphold. In addition to Latino/Hispanic students and Black/African American students, other marginalized student populations suffer when unethical decisions are made and when educators do not advocate on their behalf.

**Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer Students (LGBTQ)**

The third group of marginalized students to be featured is those who identify as LGBTQ. School psychologists need to understand the lives of these students, including the bias and discrimination they encounter, and the challenges involved with the coming-out process (McCabe, 2014). In 2000, the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) started to conduct school climate surveys every two years. The data shows that changes in school climate are slow and that in some cases there is an increase in physical assaults and verbal harassment, making school an unsafe place to be (McCabe, 2014). LGBTQ students are up to 140% more likely to miss school over concerns involving their safety (Human Rights Campaign Foundation,
In 2011, educators reported hearing derogatory homophobic language and seeing harassment in the hallways, including colleagues making homophobic remarks (Dragowski et al., 2014). This behavior adds a further layer of complications and concerns for this marginalized population which is why it is important for school psychologists to advocate on their behalf despite the potential for the adversity they may face. These professionals can be an ally to these students and promote equality and equity within their schools and communities (McCabe, 2014).

According to the 2017 Human Rights Campaign (HRC) Foundation, LGBTQ students are more than twice as likely to feel suicidal and four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts (Kann, 2016; Marshal, 2011). Mental health and substance abuse issues are also prevalent within this marginalized group. In 2017, the HRC Foundation found transgender youth had a higher rate of depression than non-LGBTQ students, and a third had seriously considered suicide, with 1 in 5 making a suicide attempt (Reisner, 2015).

To assist this group of students, school psychologists require additional training and increased self-awareness. Data shows that graduate students indicated a lack of awareness that LGBTQ individuals are part of an oppressed group, and that 83% of the graduate students admitted they would not intervene in LGBTQ bias and harassment out of concern of not having administrative support (McCabe & Rubinson, 2008).

The data summarized in this chapter supports the need for school psychologists to demonstrate an understanding of these marginalized groups, have the skill set to act on their behalf, and be an ally for their cause despite the fear of retribution or lack of administrative support. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology, the demographic data collection, details of the study including instruments, and information to help understand and analyze the data collection.
Chapter 3: Methodology

The purpose of this study is to explore ethically challenging situations experienced by school psychologists and outcomes associated with those experiences. Pressure to engage in unethical practices is identified as the problem. It not only impacts the school psychologist but the students they are expected to advocate on behalf of (Prilleltensky et al., 2001). This type of pressure is not a trend or a new phenomenon. Researchers have been studying these types of pressures for close to 40 years (Clement et al., 1983). This study demonstrates that pressure to engage in unethical practices continues to be a problem, that the outcomes of this type of pressure negatively impact school psychologists personally and professionally, and that this type of pressure impacts marginalized students.

In this chapter, the justification for this mixed methods design is summarized along with the participants, the setting, the instruments used, the procedures, the data collection process, and data analyses leading to information to answer key research questions.

Mixed Methods Research

There is a need for mixed methods research in both school psychology and Social Justice Theory. Creswell and Plano Clark (2017) identify a need for more advocacy research using mixed-methods design because the methodology provides insights, understanding of a research problem, enhances culturally sensitive measures, encourages sharing of personal experiences, and improves procedures. Sweetman et al., (2010) also support using a mixed-methods design emphasizing the need for a qualitative component to advocacy research. Both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of this study provide important details on the types of pressures school psychologists experience, related outcomes to those pressures, and the challenges involved with advocacy as it relates to social justice in the field of school psychology. Using a mixed-methods
design provides a practical and intuitive approach to review problems found in everyday life (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2018). This philosophy is well suited for the study and its connection to the Social Justice Theory.

As described in Chapter 2, advocacy and attempts to make systemic change is challenging. It involves the pursuit of justice with the goal of empowering and improving human rights and requires a collaborative approach to stimulate change (Cresswell, 2013). The findings of this study contribute to the research on pressures to engage in unethical practices and related outcomes. It enhances the limited research on school psychology as it applies to social justice theory. The data can be utilized to promote social justice within our school and local communities, be used for action research and lead to the pursuit of equal and human rights within our educational systems (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018).

**Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods**

The Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods design is also referred to as a two-phase model whereby the first data collection is quantitative followed by qualitative data to elaborate and expand on the initial results (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The logic behind this approach is that the quantitative data provides a general overview of the research problem while the qualitative data refines, extends, and helps to provide a more detailed picture or explanation of the problem (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2018). Figure 3 summarizes the methodology process.

**Figure 3 Explanatory Sequential Design**
Sampling

In 2012 there were approximately 30,000 school psychologists working in the United States (Curtis et al., 2012). In consulting with the Pennsylvania Department of Education, the department does not track school psychologists thus an accurate count could not be reported. In consulting with the Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania (ASPP), a professional organization with a membership of 744, it was estimated that there are 1,700 school psychologists in the state of Pennsylvania.

The majority of school psychologists in the United States are Caucasian and female. In 1999, Curtis et al. reported school psychologists from minority backgrounds made up 5.5% of the total number of school psychologists practicing in the United States. Reschly (2000) reported that 1:10 school psychologists were Black/African American and that Hispanic/Latino represents a slightly higher percentage (1.5%). Changes in those demographics have occurred. According to NASP’s 2015 survey completed by 1,274 NASP members, there was an increase from 1990 to 2015 of 5% in Black/African American school psychologists, an increase in Asian school psychologists from .80% in 1990 to 2.80% in 2015 with the largest increase in Hispanic/Latino school psychologists from 1.50% in 1990 to 6% in 2015. Females continue to dominate the field increasing in numbers from 65% in 1990 to 83% in 2015 with males decreasing from 35% in 1990 to 16% in 2015. The other trend noted was an increase in the average age of school psychologists from 38.8 in 1990 to 42.4 in 2015.

Study Participants

Participants for this dissertation study were sought through snowball sampling and recruitment through the ASPP. The recruitment period lasted two months with interviews being completed by the third month. Eligible candidates needed to fulfill the eligibility criteria as it
appeared in the recruitment materials (Appendix E). To meet the inclusion criteria, participants needed to be certified school psychologists in the United States, employed full-time, and have a minimum of one year of experience. The initial goal of this study was to have 25-75 participants complete the questionnaire and ten of those participants complete the interview. The study yielded 27 participants from the state of Pennsylvania. Of the 27 participants, 62.96% (n=17) held tenure, 22.22% (n=6) did not hold tenure, and 14.81% (n=4) denied having that option in their school. Eleven (36.67%) were members of ASPP, and 56.67% (n=17) held NASP membership. Demographic information is detailed in Table 3.1.
Table 3.1

Demographics and Descriptive Data of Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>n</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>30.77</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>38.46</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>23.08</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
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<td>Black/African American</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>88.89</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>88.89</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years of Experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Year</td>
<td>7.41</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5 Years</td>
<td>11.10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 Years</td>
<td>40.74</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15 Years</td>
<td>14.81</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-20 Years</td>
<td>7.41</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
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<td>Geographical Area</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
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<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Doctoral</td>
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<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>29.63</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>81.48</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>18.52</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. n=participants, % =percentage of the participants

Eighteen participants volunteered to be interviewed for the second phase of this study.

Ten volunteers were selected. To maximize variation and ensure representation and diversity, the ten participants were chosen by years of experience, race/ethnicity, and gender. Demographic data of interview participants are identified in Table 3.2.
Table 3.2

*Descriptive Data of Interview Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years of Experience</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Identified Gender</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-5</td>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11-15</td>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+</td>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20+</td>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Procedure**

Following approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of West Chester University (Appendix A), two recruitment methods were pursued. Recruitment material was emailed to school psychologist colleagues (Appendix E). Those initial recipients were asked to forward the recruitment material to other school psychologists to promote snowball sampling.

The second means of promotion was through ASPP, a dues-based organization. Each year, ASPP selects a limited number of studies to promote through their organization. Following IRB approval, this dissertation study was submitted to ASPP and was selected for promotion by the organization. ASPP posted recruitment material to their Facebook page, which has 1,200 followers (not all of which are dues-paying members), one time. A second communication from ASPP involved contacting dues-paying members via email one time followed by a post to the organization’s website. Snowball sampling and promotion through ASPP were the two recruitment methods for this study.
Interested and eligible participants submitted an electronic consent form using the Qualtrics link before completing the SPOWS questionnaire which took approximately 15 minutes (Appendix B). No special accommodations were needed. Participants were made aware that they were not required to answer all of the questions.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, in-person interviews were prohibited; therefore, three interview methods were available (Zoom, phone, type and submit). One individual selected a phone call, and nine selected to type and submit responses via a Qualtrics link. Interview questions were emailed in advance to the individual that selected the phone interview (Appendix G). The type and submit option allowed individuals to submit responses in their own time and at their own pace with the ability to return to the Qualtrics link before submitting responses. The interview lasted approximately 15 minutes. Upon completion of the interview, a pre-selected $10 electronic gift card was sent to the ten interviewees as an appreciation of their time.

The type and submit option was the most preferred choice in this study with candidates offering to be available to answer additional questions if needed. While this method has limitations which are identified in Chapter 5, I perceived it was a necessary option for interview participants. At the time of data collection, schools were in a state of flux due to COVID-19 restrictions, each school district was following a different instructional schedule (i.e. fully virtual, hybrid) which was further impacted by sporadic mandatory closures as well as health issues of participants and their family.

Within two weeks of the interview, a transcribed narrative was emailed to the participant who completed the phone interview for final review to enhance credibility and accuracy. No requests for changes were made. All the paperwork that was produced in this study was kept in a locked filing cabinet per the IRB protocol and will remain there for three years before being
shredded. To ensure participant confidentiality, individuals were not asked to provide identifying information and any names of people or places mentioned in responses to the interview questions did not appear in the interview transcription or dissertation. Any data that was received from the research questionnaires were stored on a password-protected system. Qualtrics uses Transport Layer Security (TLS) encryption (also known as HTTPS) for all transmitted data. Surveys are protected with passwords. Qualtrics are hosted by trusted data centers that are independently audited using the industry-standard SSAE-18 method.

**Research Questions**

In an attempt to contribute to the research in the field of school psychology and social justice, three key research questions along with sub-questions were answered using the quantitative and qualitative data gathered in this mixed-methods study. The questions are documented below:

RQ1: What are the most common ethically challenging pressures placed upon school psychologists?

SQ1: How have those experiences impacted motivation to advocate on behalf of students?

RQ2: What are the problems and consequences as a result of administrative pressure on decision-making regarding eligibility determinations and placement of students?

SQ1: How comfortable are school psychologists when it comes to advocating for social justice issues within their school settings?

SQ2: How may advocating for marginalized students lead to a personal or professional marginalization of the school psychologist?
RQ3: How have school psychologists who experience ethically challenging pressure(s) attempted to address the issue?

SQ1: What additional supports, training, or professional development do school psychologists report are necessary to promote social justice within their educational settings?

SQ2: What are the biggest challenges in promoting social justice in schools and school communities?

Instrumentation

The School Psychology Occupational Well-Being Survey (SPOWS), designed by Dr. Boccio in 2016 and approved for use (Appendix F), was the questionnaire used in this study. The SPOWS originally consisted of four sections with one section being the demographic section and another being the Maslach Burnout Inventory Human Services Survey (MBI-HSS) (Maslach & Jackson, 1981). The MBI-HSS was not used in this study as burnout was not the focus.

One section of the SPOWS contained 13 items involving specific experiences with pressure from administrators to engage in unethical practice. Participants were asked to respond if they had encountered eight specific forms of administrative pressure (e.g., avoiding recommending services or eligibility, recommending restrictive placements). Participants indicated either “yes” or “no” in response to a series of statements such as, “I have experienced pressure from administrators to make decisions or take actions that I believed were unethical.”

Six of these examples were originally from a questionnaire developed by Dailor & Jacob in 2011 with two additional items being added to explore unethical administrative directives in response to previous research findings. These additional items looked at pressure to remove a student from school ignoring due process and the sharing of confidential information. Participants were asked
to indicate if they experienced pressure to take actions, not in compliance with federal or state law and if they experienced threats to their employment.

Another section of the SPOWS focused on job satisfaction, attitudes toward administrators, and strategies to deal with reported pressure. Participants used a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree), to rate 13 statements. The first three items involved themes of job satisfaction while the remaining items assessed perceptions of interactions with administrators. Two items involved a 6-point Likert scale (1 = very low to 6 = very high) to rate their desire to leave their position or the field.

Following this section, came a statement and a list of strategies. The statement was “If you have experienced administrative pressure to behave unethically and/or illegally, was there any action you took to manage or cope with the situation?” Thirteen options were provided including “other” and “not applicable” with respondents instructed to “check all that apply”. The choices ranged from educating administrators about ethical and legal requirements, seeking support from colleagues, and bringing concerns to supervisors.

Two open-ended questions were added by this researcher. One was related to Covid-19 and if Covid-19 created additional administrative pressure while the second open-ended question involved experiences related to personal or professional marginalization as a result of administrative pressure to engage in unethical practices. These questions were reviewed with two school psychologists prior to being added to the Qualtrics questionnaire.

Validity of Instrument

Dr. Boccio, who designed the SPOWS, reported that the response options were created from limited empirical literature, and personal experiences. Two practicing school psychologists and a third-year graduate student reviewed the options listed in the SPOWS to ensure they were
comprehensive (Boccio et al., 2016). Dr. Boccio used content analysis on practitioners’ responses which involved a multistage analysis process, with the initial step involving a review of respondents’ recommended strategies. Extended responses were then provided to two individuals (a practicing school psychologist and a third-year graduate student) who served as independent raters. Once the category labels and definitions were explained to the raters, the individuals worked separately to classify behavior under the most appropriate strategy heading. Cohen’s kappa was calculated at .91 ($p < .001$), revealing substantial inter-rater reliability. The first author and two raters collaborated to resolve any lack of consensus that emerged during the categorization process. When initial differences arose, strategies were included under a category heading only if all three individuals agreed with the decision (Boccio et al., 2016). This process led to a reliable, inter-rater reliability tool that has been used in the study of administrative pressures, and was the chosen instrument in this dissertation study.

**Interview Questions**

The second instrument used in this study was created to gather qualitative data (Appendix G). The seven questions for the interview were initially designed by the primary investigator and reviewed by the doctoral advisor, a school psychologist, and two dissertation committee members for clarity, intelligibility, and applicability. Upon receipt of feedback, questions were revised and finalized.

The interview questions are documented below:

1. According to the National Association School Psychologist (NASP) 2019 Policy Playbook, 2020 Code of Ethics, and the NASP Practice Model, school psychologists are expected to advocate for marginalized students and promote social justice within school settings. Please
share with me, your comfort level, as it pertains to this role, including your ability to embrace the challenges to make the necessary changes within your current school setting.

2 Please describe 2-3 experiences related to the pressure to act unethically that you personally encountered including how those experiences impacted your motivation to advocate for students?

3 How do you believe administrative pressure could impact a school psychologist’s recommendations related to eligibility determinations and placement decisions and what are the potential problems or consequences associated with those two types of pressures?

4 In your efforts to advocate on behalf of students, what type of repercussions (i.e. ostracized, reprimanded, intimidation, reassignment) have you experienced, if any, and how did you manage these repercussions?

5 Given that school psychologists are expected to advocate for marginalized students, how could advocating for marginalized students lead to the personal or professional marginalization of school psychologists?

6 What additional supports or training do you believe are needed to better prepare school psychologists to promote social justice within their school settings?

7 In your role as school psychologist, what do you see as the biggest challenges in promoting social justice causes in schools and school communities?

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Approval was sought and attained through West Chester University’s Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). Information about the study including potential risks was included in the consent forms (Appendix C). Documentation in the consent forms informed participants that they could stop the interview or refrain from answering questions at any time. No
participants opted to stop the interview and all ten interview participants answered all seven questions. All attempts to protect the privacy of the participants and the materials used in this study were documented in the approved IRB application and in the consent form. Prior to the interview, this was also verbally shared with the individual to increase their level of comfort. These steps demonstrated the protection of all participants.

**Data Collection Schedule**

Figure 4 summarizes the phases of the data collection which commenced upon IRB approval lasting in duration of three months. The remaining time was spent on data analyses and dissertation writing.

**Data Collection Schedule**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 1</th>
<th>• Begin snow ball sampling to seek consent from participants. ASPP approved study and promoted it to members of the organization.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2</td>
<td>• Distribute recruitment material, monitor signed consent forms, survey completion, schedule and hold interviews.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Phase 3 | • Data Analysis using Qualtrics and Coding  
• Dissertation writing |

**Analysis and Coding Procedures**

After data collection, the quantitative data were analyzed using Qualtrics software to configure the descriptive statistics. In addition, t-tests were run on select questionnaire items to determine if there was any statistical difference between two selected groups. A fixed mixed methods design was selected as the use of quantitative and qualitative methods was pre-determined at the start of this research proposal. The proposed typology was an explanatory
sequential design in which the quantitative methods occurred first followed by the qualitative
(Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017). The strand is QUAN→qual as the research process builds upon
the original findings of the quantitative data and then incorporates the views of the researcher
and participants (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2017).

**Quantitative Analysis**

Once participants submitted responses to the questionnaire through the Qualtrics Link
provided, the data was calculated in Qualtrics to attain the percentages used in the application of
descriptive statistics to answer research questions (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). Qualtrics’ data and
analysis provided percentages and means used to answer research questions requiring
quantitative data analysis. In an attempt to establish any differences in reporting patterns between
the sample of school psychologists, t-tests were run on selected items according to two
independent variable years of age experience (under 10 years and over 10 years) and setting
(urban vs. suburban).

**Qualitative Analysis**

The one phone interview was recorded, transcribed, and de-identified in a word
document. The type and submit responses allowed participants to review and print out a copy of
their responses. No changes were made or requested from participants. Once interviews were
completed, all responses were printed once Qualtrics was used to systematically compile and
consolidate responses to keep information organized under each interview question. Using the
Qualtrics document as a guide to confirm accuracy, the data was organized and grouped
according to research questions. Coding occurred with colored highlighters with notations being
made to identify emergent codes and themes. Coding is a process used to identify words or
phrases that captures what is occurring in the data to allow the information to then be analyzed in
more detail (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). The codes created a conceptual framework for broader concepts which upon further review leads to the identification of themes or sub-themes to help explain, provide examples and conclusions which are part of the study (Creswell, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

Pre-set codes were not used in this study instead emergent codes were used. After the initial coding process was completed, notes and interviews were reviewed to make sure all relevant data was included. Tesch’s Eight Steps Coding Process (Tesch, 1990) served as a guide for analyses:

1. Get a sense of the whole by reading all the transcriptions carefully and making notes on ideas that come to mind.
2. Pick one interview and go through it, asking yourself, “What is this about?” Do not think about the substance of the information but focus on the underlying meaning while writing thoughts in the margin.
3. When you have completed this task for several participants, make a list of the topics and begin to cluster together similar topics. Then put the topics in columns.
4. Once this step is completed, you go back to the data and abbreviate the topics as codes and write the codes next to the appropriate text. New categories and codes may emerge.
5. Look for the most descriptive wording for the topics and turn them into categories and look for ways to reduce the categories by grouping topics that relate to each other.
6. Make a final decision on the abbreviation for each category and alphabetize these codes.
7. Assemble the data material that belong to each category in one place and perform a preliminary analysis.
8. Recode existing data, if necessary.

The primary researcher was the primary coder for this study; however, as stated in the IRB, a doctoral student was consulted in order to confirm thematic similarities, differences, or trends. There were no differences to report. The fact that the majority of responses were typed and submitted directly from the participants yielded submissions that were succinct and clear thus making the data easier to code. A final review from the primary investigator took place to enhance the credibility of the findings before they were reported in the dissertation. Tashakkori and Teddlie (2008) support this technique as it improves inter-rater reliability.

**Triangulation**

Creswell (2012) encouraged researchers to use triangulation to make findings more accurate by drawing on multiple sources. Coordinating qualitative and quantitative methodologies successfully incorporates the two methods of research to best comprehend and support the research findings (Tashakori A. & Teddie C., 2008). Triangulation of data gathered from the SPOWS questionnaire, in conjunction with open-ended items from the questionnaire, and the interview responses were triangulated to provide and support research findings. Integration of findings reflects the implementation of this process. Triangulation was implemented for RQ2 whereby findings from the SPOWS (items #2, 3, 4, 7), was supported by an open-ended question, and an interview question (#3).

**Researcher Bias**

Having used a published instrument may have limited bias with respect to the questionnaire; however, the designer of the SPOWS is a school psychologist and the primary investigator in this dissertation study is a school psychologist thus bias is a factor to consider. In
regard to the qualitative component of the instrument, which included seven interview questions, there is also some degree of subjectivity and possible bias even when following a script.

**Threats to Internal and External Validity**

There are a few factors to consider when reviewing threats to internal and external validity. Some of the potential threats are identified. External validity may be impacted by the sample size thus making it difficult to generalize to a larger population. Although not intentional, researcher bias may be a factor. This may occur if a researcher is behaving in a different way with different participants in a study. Historical events may have impacted validity. This involves the outcome of studies that may result in responses being impacted by changes in political issues or natural disasters that can influence responses. It is important to mention that the United States was experiencing a high degree of stress from racial tensions, a pandemic, a presidential election, and political controversy at the time this study was being conducted. Other factors to consider were the research instruments used and if the questions or format impacted or skewed participant’s reactions or responses in any way. Including clear and specific inclusion and exclusion criteria was helpful in establishing a defined population, but selection bias is also a potential threat to internal validity. Lastly to enhance external validity, offering three interview methods to accommodate the participants helps to alleviate any potential situational factors such as time of day, location, noise, etc. The fact that the questionnaire (SPOWS) was a published instrument helps to improve the validity of the results.

**Scheduling Effects**

Unique pressures were placed on school psychologists during the 2020-2021 school year due to Covid-19. Since in-person interviews were prohibited and it was important to respect the increased work demands and subsequent stress, participants were able to choose from three
interview methods to best suit their needs. Offering participants the three options was an appropriate step to take in light of the unique circumstances facing the professionals.

Generalizability

Due to the small sample size, generalizability is an issue. Reviewing findings as they align or compare with earlier studies may help to increase the generalizability of the research results.

Limitations to the Methodology

There are multiple limitations to note. One involves rater reliability (self-reporting) and the retrospective nature of this study. These two factors may impact the internal validity and findings due to the possible pressure to provide socially desirable responses. For some, reporting on events that happened in the past may lead to inaccurate interpretation or recall. The three interview options also have limitations. While the type and submit response option was the most preferred option, this method prohibited the ability to make observations about personal reactions, monitor the participant’s tone of voice and intonations, and prompt or encourage expanded responses. When the questionnaires were being completed, several significant social and political crises were occurring in the United States and may have had an impact on responses. These included but were not limited to a contentious presidential election, refugee crisis (i.e. South American and Mexican individuals crossing the border), worldwide pandemic (Covid-19), racial and law enforcement crisis and civil unrest (civil unrest sparked by the killing of unarmed black men/women). Lastly, the pre-determined time frame established by the university created limitations.
Summary

In this chapter, I explained and justified my selection for this mixed methods design, described the participants, the setting, the instruments used, the procedures, the data collection process, and the data analysis. I included the theoretical framework which justified the reasoning behind my choices and how it was applicable to the identified problem. I described in detail the coding process, those that were interviewed, and the demographic data which adds insight into my sample population. I provided a detailed summary of the SPOWS as well as the interview questions and interview options. Lastly, I addressed limitations to the selected methodology as well as potential threats to validity and reliability as the potential for bias.

In Chapter 4, I will report on the results of data analysis and provide answers to the research questions that have driven the study.
Chapter 4: Results

School psychologists play a vital role within the educational system, but due to the unique nature and the duality of their role, they experience a variety of ethical dilemmas and challenges when it comes to carrying out their duties (Lasser & Klose, 2007). The identified problem of this study is pressure to engage in unethical practices and the outcomes associated with those pressures.

Pressure to engage in unethical practice, as it relates to school psychologists, is not a new problem or trend. The topic first appeared in research almost 40 years ago (Clement et al., 1983). Dailor and Jacob (2011) expanded the research on this topic when they reported that school psychologists have witnessed colleagues being pressured and acquiescing. Examples of these pressures include recommending restrictive special educational placements, inappropriate eligibility determinations, using inadequate assessment materials, and performing services without the appropriate training (Boccio et al., 2016; Dailor & Jacob, 2011). As a result of refusing to adhere to administrative pressure in their efforts to advocate for marginalized students, school psychologists have experienced a marginalization that includes reprimands, criticism, threats to job security, ostracism, and termination (Dailor & Jacob, 2011; Jacob-Timm, 1999). The pressure to engage in unethical practice(s), and the outcomes associated with those pressures was the focus of this study. Consequences related to this problem are far-reaching and affect school psychologists, the profession, the communities we serve, and most importantly the students for which we are advocating.

Data Analysis

The Explanatory Sequential Mixed Methods design was used to integrate and interpret data. The first phase of the study includes collecting quantitative data via the Qualtrics
questionnaire that provided the analysis needed to answer the research questions. Each participant that completed the questionnaire was assigned a number for tracking purposes (1-27). The second phase of the study involved interviews with ten volunteers and focused on qualitative data collection gathered through an interview using pre-determined questions not matched to questionnaire responses. The interview participants were assigned a letter-number code for tracking purposes (i.e. K1). Conducting the second phase of the study helped to refine, extend, and provide a more detailed picture of the problem, and comprehensive answers to research questions (Cresswell, 2015). The interviews were transcribed and each response was subsequently organized under the related question to prepare for review and analysis. Qualitative data analysis was carried out by using a system of open coding, note-taking, and theme analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006). Codes and themes were not pre-determined and were reviewed with a doctoral student for reliability purposes once they were identified. In order to highlight potential variables in responses among participants, meaningful differences or similarities between urban and suburban school psychologists have been included. Triangulation from three sources served to provide consistency and confirmation in the collected data leading to a more comprehensive and valid outcome. These three sources were the SPOWS questionnaire, open-ended prompts, and interview questions.

Research Questions and Responses

Research Question 1

The first question addressed in this study focused on types of ethical pressures school psychologists may experience. RQ1 asked, “What are the most common ethically challenging pressures placed upon school psychologists?”
To answer this question, data collected from the quantitative analysis was acquired in the first section of the SPOWS followed by an open-ended item that encouraged participants to expand on pressures not included on the list. In response to the prompt “I have experienced pressure from administrators to…” three items (#2, #5, #9) were rated as the most frequently reported administrative pressures experienced by 15 participants (57.69%). Over 50% (57.68%) of participants experienced pressure to agree with a special education placement that was not the least restrictive appropriate environment for the student, “make do” with inadequate assessment/or intervention materials, and make decisions or take actions believed to be unethical.

In response to item #1, 55.56% (n=15) reported they experienced pressure to avoid recommending certain support services due to costs to the district. In reviewing submitted responses from urban school psychologists for item #1, 6 (75%) indicated they experienced pressure to avoid recommending certain support services due to costs to the district. Fourteen participants (53.85%) experienced pressure to make a student eligible for special education who did not meet eligibility requirements (item #3). Ten participants (38.46%) experienced pressure to perform job duties outside the scope of training and expertise (item #6). Ten participants (38.46%) experienced pressure to make decisions or take actions believed were not in compliance with federal or state law (item #11). Seven school psychologists (26.92%) reported pressure to remove a student from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavioral or safety concerns. In comparing responses between suburban and urban school psychologists on item #7, none of the urban school psychologists responded “yes”; however, 42.85% (n=6) suburban school psychologists reported they had experienced pressure to remove a student from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavioral or safety concerns. Table 4.1 displays the results of a prompted response.
Table 4.1

Types of Administrative Pressure Encountered by School Psychologists

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Pressures</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Avoid recommending certain support services due to costs to the district.</td>
<td>55.56%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Agree with a special education placement that was not the least restrictive appropriate environment for the student.</td>
<td>57.69%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42.31%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Make a student eligible for special education who did not meet eligibility requirements.</td>
<td>53.85%</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46.15%</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Avoid finding a student eligible for special education who did meet eligibility requirements.</td>
<td>11.54%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>88.46%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 “Make do” with inadequate assessment and/or intervention materials.</td>
<td>57.69%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42.31%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Perform job duties that are outside the scope of my training and expertise.</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>61.54%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Remove a student from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavioral and/or safety concerns.</td>
<td>26.92%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>73.08%</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Disclose information about a client that I considered confidential.</td>
<td>8.00%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>92.00%</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Make decisions or take actions that I believed were unethical.</td>
<td>57.69%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>42.31%</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Make decisions or take actions that I believed were unethical, with an implied threat to my job standing (e.g., negative evaluation, move to less desirable assignment, loss of job) if I did not comply.</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>92.31%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Make decisions or take actions that I believed were not in compliance with federal or state law.</td>
<td>38.46%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>61.54%</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Make decisions or take actions that I believed were not in compliance with federal or state law, with an implied threat to my job standing (e.g., negative evaluation, move to less desirable assignment, loss of job) if I did not comply.</td>
<td>7.69%</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>92.31%</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. N = total number of responses, n = individual response to the item, Yes%, No% = percentage of Yes or No responses

To expand on this data collection, an open-ended item on the questionnaire invited participants to include other types of pressures they encountered that were not identified on the
The main theme to emerge was pressure to engage in unethical practices. Additional examples provided by participants were prioritize and fast track students with behavior issues, make a diagnosis that is medical in nature (i.e. ADHD, autism, anxiety, depression), complete paperwork and make recommendations based on administrator’s desired outcomes, pressure to sign an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) when the school psychologist was not present at the IEP meeting nor invited, pressure to qualify students to thwart legal action in fear of parents seeking legal counsel and educational advocates, pressure to include additional disability classifications, pressure to conduct widespread testing to minimize legal action, pressure to find a way to make students eligible for gifted, and pressure to find students identified as a problem eligible for special education and referred to an out of district placement.

**Sub-Question One**

Sub-question one asked participants “How have those experiences impacted motivation to advocate on behalf of students?

Answers to this sub-question were attained through the second interview question. Qualitative data confirmed that past experiences involving pressure to act unethically have an impact on motivation to advocate on behalf of students. Based on identified themes, these experiences have both a positive and negative impact on school psychologists. A second theme was fear of repercussions and personal detriment.

Participants indicate that having these experiences have increased the desire to advocate for students and has better prepared them for future incidents that may occur. On the other hand, having experiences involving pressure to act unethically, has also contributed to a more cautionary stance when it comes to advocacy due to concerns about repercussions. These repercussions were from colleagues, families, and administrators, and led to internal conflict (i.e.
self-confidence, self-worth and feelings of disrespect). Participant K2 shared an experience that reflects both main and sub-themes related to motivation and repercussions. It also captures the personal frustration that may occur when trying to advocate on behalf of students. Participant K2 reported:

A student I was working with for a reevaluation, who was placed out of district for aggressive behavior, told me that he was told he was not allowed to attend school-related community events (i.e. football games, multi-cultural conference, use school outdoor basketball courts, etc.). I immediately called my administrator who did in fact reiterate this "rule" despite that it was unethical and illegal. While I continued to advocate for the student and his rights, I did not get very far as I learned that the superintendent was the one who implemented it. Going forward, it made me think about how to balance keeping a job while also advocating for students.

Participant 2 shared frustrations related to ethical pressures.

I have brought to administration's attention that students are often being referred for special education evaluations; however, no substantial interventions have been attempted with the student, yet a permission to evaluate is sent. I then evaluate the student and they have scores that are significantly below peers. This puts me in the position to either qualify the student, when it could really be a curricular issue, or not qualify the student and say our district isn't providing appropriate instruction. It's really a no-win situation and what if the student really does have a disability, not qualifying them and recommending an intervention may be a disservice to the student because they likely still won't receive appropriate interventions through general education. With other
administrators, I felt that we were moving toward setting up an RTI model within the district; however, with current administration, it seems to have regressed.

Participant 7 highlights the positive motivation as well as the frustration related to pressures to engage in unethical practices.

Classifying a student under a particular educational disability because they were underachieving, but not disabled-this has motivated me to become more involved in the RTI process so that all students can be served according to their need, whether they have disabilities or not. Rushing to finalize evaluations that were not legally defensible or thorough is also a problem. Though compliance is important, I believe that providing children with valid, accurate, and thorough evaluations so that school teams can make educational decisions is more important.

Participant D10 reflects on how the pressure to engage can motivate self-advocacy as well as the motivation to advocate on behalf of students.

I've had a principal tell me I needed to redact what I put into a report. I remember it was one of the first ones I did. I had said that a student was not ID (at the time it was MR). I said they are not MR and I had all the justification for it. The principal of the building said, “I need you to redact your report and I need you to rewrite the report.” I said, “I can't do that. I can't. I will write a dissenting opinion but you're going to write the report because what you want me to say is unethical, and I'm not putting my name on that.” I held firm and I said, “You know, whether the kid is identified MR or not, isn't necessarily going to change what we do for the child, but I'm not going to call the child something that they aren’t, and I'm not going to do that just because you're telling me I need to do that.
Research Question Two

The second research question was, “What are the problems and consequences as a result of administrative pressure on decision-making regarding eligibility determinations and placement of students? Followed by two sub-questions, “How comfortable are school psychologists when it comes to advocating for social justice issues within their school settings?”, and “How may advocating for marginalized students lead to a personal or professional marginalization of the school psychologist?”

To address the first question, “What are the problems and consequences as a result of administrative pressure on decision-making regarding eligibility determinations and placement of students?” both quantitative and qualitative data were utilized.

Based on quantitative data analysis (Table 4.1), items #2, #3, #4, and #7 provide information to answer this question. Over 50% of respondents (57.69%) (n=15), reported they had experienced pressure to agree with special education placements that were not the least restrictive appropriate environments for students (item #2). Fourteen of the 26 respondents (53.85%) experienced pressure to make a student eligible for special education who did not meet the eligibility requirements (item #3). Over 11% (11.54%) (n=3) reported being pressured to avoid finding a student eligible for special education who did meet the eligibility criteria (item #4). In looking at urban vs. suburban responses (Table 4.2), none of the urban school psychologists reported experiencing pressure to avoid finding a student eligible for special education who did meet eligibility requirements; however, 3 of the 14 suburban school psychologists (21.42%) reported experiencing this type of pressure. Item # 7 involves pressure to remove a student from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavioral or safety concerns. Seven of the 26 respondents (26.92%) acknowledged
experiencing this pressure. In comparing responses between suburban and urban school psychologists, none of the urban school psychologists responded “yes” to this question; however, 6 of the 14 suburban school psychologists (42.85%) reported the opposite indicating that they had experienced pressure to remove a student from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavioral or safety concerns.

Table 4.2

Urban vs. Suburban Responses to Items #1, #3, #4, #5, #7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Urban Yes</th>
<th>Urban No</th>
<th>Suburban Yes</th>
<th>Suburban No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Avoid recommending certain support services due to costs to the district.</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>5 (33.33%)</td>
<td>10 (66.66%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Make a student eligible for special education who did not meet eligibility requirements</td>
<td>5 (62.50%)</td>
<td>3 (37.50%)</td>
<td>7 (50%)</td>
<td>7 (50%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Avoid finding a student eligible for special education who did meet eligibility requirements.</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>3 (21.42%)</td>
<td>11 (78.57%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. “Make do” with inadequate assessment and/or intervention materials.</td>
<td>6 (75%)</td>
<td>2 (25%)</td>
<td>6 (42.85%)</td>
<td>8 (67.14%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Remove a student from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavioral and/or safety concerns</td>
<td>0 (0%)</td>
<td>8 (100%)</td>
<td>6 (42.85%)</td>
<td>8 (67.14%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Top number reflects the number of responses followed by percentage.

The Qualtrics questionnaire also included an open-ended question that encouraged participants to submit additional pressures they may have encountered related to administrative pressure on decision-making regarding eligibility determinations and placement of students.

Emerging themes centered on pressure to place students out of fear. Participants reported pressure to qualify students to thwart legal action in fear of parents seeking legal counsel and educational advocates, the pressure to include additional disability classifications even when a child was already identified, the pressure to conduct widespread testing to minimize legal action, the pressure to find a way to make students eligible for gifted, and pressure to find students that
have been identified as a problem being made eligible for special education and making an out of
district placement recommendation. All of these pressures have implications related to decision-
making and placement of students.

In addition to responses from the SPOWS, and the open ended question in the
questionnaire, a third means of data collection resulting in triangulation was attained in the third
interview question “What are the problems and consequences as a result of administrative
pressure on decision-making regarding eligibility determinations and placement of students?” is
taken from the third interview question. Participant 3 shared:

Generally, there is pressure to qualify kids no matter what, in an attempt to thwart legal
action. That is, when children are found ineligible, parents seek attorneys so in order to
avoid that, there is pressure to qualify any kids we test. There has also been pressure to
add on disabilities even when the child is found eligible as if to say the more disabilities
the better. That pressure comes from parent council as well as administration.
Administration pushes for widespread testing under the idea that this will minimize legal
actions. That was actually said to me by an administrator.

Sub-Question One

In order to answer the sub-question, “How comfortable are school psychologists when it
comes to advocating for social justice issues within their school settings?” interview participants
were asked about their comfort level and their ability to embrace the challenges to make the
necessary change.

In response to the first interview question, 10/10 interview participants self-identified as
being comfortable advocating for social justice issues within their school setting; however, there
were different levels of comfort reported as well as parameters to the comfort level. Four
identified themselves as “very comfortable”, one as “fairly good”, one as “comfortable”, one as “okay with it”, one as “somewhat comfortable” and two as “most comfortable as it applies to individual students.” Emerging themes included an overwhelmingly positive response when it comes to advocating for individual students, along with the emerging theme of challenge that ultimately impacts comfort level. Examples of challenges include lack of preparation and skill in dealing with various stakeholders (e.g. administrators, parents, school systems). With respect to level of comfort and subsequent challenges as they relate to stakeholders, Participant 2 shared:

As a school psychologist, I feel very comfortable advocating for marginalized students and promoting social justice within school settings. This, however, does not come without challenges. To start, you have to have an administration that is willing to grow. If they are of a fixed mindset that what is happening is working, it will be hard to advocate for change. While I feel confident to explain my points and direct my thoughts to the appropriate people, I do not feel that a school psychologist, alone, can create the necessary change.

Participant 4 provided insight related to skill level and stakeholders:

I feel most comfortable advocating for students at an individual level. I have tried to advocate for groups of students with administration for policy changes, but I don't feel as though my voice is being heard (or at least changes have not been made). I feel I struggle the most with dealing with colleagues and having the language to help them recognize their own biases. I attended a wonderful training a few weeks ago as part of the ASPP conference that has helped me in some ways; however, I definitely have room to grow.

Participant 6 shared insights relevant to individual vs. system advocacy and identifies years of experience as a potential factor to consider:
On the micro-level, advocacy is feasible as it pertains to individual students. For the most part in my career, if I have voiced concerns that a child's needs are not being met, those concerns are heard and nearly always adhered to specifically when an increase in services is sought. One of the good things about being a psychologist in my district is that people listen when I speak and act on my general recommendations (although smaller recommendations such as close proximity are often overlooked). There was a document that went out to special education staff that described psychologists as having a high level of integrity, and I think this speaks to the overall perception of psychologists in my district. However, advocacy on a larger scale, as in systems change, is nearly impossible. As a relative new-comer to the role and district (even with 10 years experience, which is less than most of my colleagues), I often feel uncomfortable advocating on a systems level, but I am grateful that more senior psychologists do so if even it seems to fall on deaf ears.

Sub-Question Two

The second sub-question asked participants, “How may advocating for marginalized students lead to a personal or professional marginalization of the school psychologist?”

Twenty four participants submitted a response to this question on the questionnaire. Based on 24 responses, 5 participants (20.83%) responded that they do not feel that advocating for students leads to personal or professional marginalization while 19 (79.16%) agreed that advocating for marginalized students leads to a personal and professional marginalization. The majority of respondents agree that school psychologists do experience marginalization as a result of advocating on behalf of students. The emerging theme involved feeling disrespected by administrators and the impact those feelings have on one’s ability to do their job effectively
including the personal impact these experiences have on self-confidence and self-worth due to being treated in such as dismissive manner. The responses capture both experiences and emotions relevant to feeling marginalized as a result of advocating on behalf of students.

Participant 21 shares insights into marginalization and the associated feelings with the experience.

Almost every day I feel it. We don't have a lot of support from administration and so teachers also see us as adversaries who are "keeping services away" from their students. This arises mostly because administration doesn't have the proper infrastructure to support pre-referral interventions. So, anything outside of the realm of average ends up as the psychologist or special education's problem to solve. They also don't realize the amount of work it takes every year to complete the increasing number of evaluations while still completing comprehensive and legally defensible reports. It's getting to the point where it seems unmanageable unless something changes.

Participant 10 shared their perspective based on experience in an urban school district.

I definitely have begun to feel jaded working in the field in an urban district for 10 years. But I have also resigned myself to this career choice, and I try to find joy in the everyday aspect of my work such as working with kids and supervising graduate students. Overall, I feel disillusioned with the state of school psychology in my district. I don't know if I'd feel the same in any district, but my district in particular presents with additional challenges and pressure to behave unethically.

The following participants shared their experiences and feelings of being disrespected and undervalued, and describe how these experiences of being marginalized impact self-confidence. Participant 9 shared, “Sometimes administrators just want me to fill out the
paperwork that will make whatever decision they want work which makes me feel disrespected for my expertise in the situation.”

Participant 12 stated, “It has made me feel like I am not valued and that my intelligence, critical thinking, and training are being dismissed.”

Participant 2 shared:

    It definitely has made me feel as though administration doesn't appreciate or recognize that I have knowledge or training that they do not. I often feel as though administrators think they know more than I do about school psychology, even though they are not trained as school psychologists. I share my thoughts, ideas, and expertise, but feel as though it is not listened to at times. I do not feel valued as a professional.

Participant E6 shared:

    It has made me dislike my job over time; however, the administrators do change and sometimes with change, things can get better and sometimes they have gotten worse. It has made me lose confidence in my ability to do my job.

In reviewing qualitative data in response to the fifth interview question which relates to marginalization, an emerging theme is the feeling of being viewed in a negative manner by colleagues, school community, and stakeholders (e.g. administration, parents). Words such as “angry”, “trouble”, and “bad reputation” were synonymous with the impressions that others may have about school psychologists according to the emerging theme. These derogatory views lead to a personal and professional marginalization that school psychologists experience as a result of advocating for marginalized students. Another identified theme was fear. This was fear related to repercussions from school personnel as well as families (e.g. losing their job, and credibility with staff and community).
Although the majority (9 out of 10) interview participants reported that marginalization occurs as a result of advocating for marginalized students, participant C4 views differed.

The ways I could imagine that happening is if the school psychologist was inappropriate in the way s/he advocated, pesterling, demanding, expecting unrealistic timelines, but refusing to do any of the actual legwork him/herself. Or if the psychologist only wanted to work with marginalized students, refusing to work with those who didn't have any issues with poverty, family, etc. even if they had difficulties at school. Or if the psych didn't fulfill other job duties because advocating was taking up all of his/her time.

Other views, represented by the majority of participants, reflected a connection between advocating for marginalized students and marginalization. Participant K2 shared an interesting perspective as it applies to the nature of the position:

   School psychologists are set up to be marginalized by the nature of their position. Typically, there is only one per building, which means you do not have peers in your personal work environment. You also do not have the "power" of administration. So essentially, you are advocating for a student who is already in the minority, while being in the minority of building staff. A school psychologist’s unique training allows them to view situations from a different lens, which is not the lens of the majority. You are then continually put in a position of defending your lens against the majority.

Participant 2 shared opinions involving systemic issues:

I feel as though we are at times viewed as "trouble". Rather than being experts, we are people who test kids, and that is it. Our thoughts and opinions about policy, procedure, and programming seem to go unheard and we are frowned upon when we disagree with
what is happened. In the past, I've had administrators that did support my opinion and asked for it all the time, but I do not currently feel that way.

Participant 6 shared insights involving fear and the motivation to advocate:

I do think that that is a concern that some school psychologists have in their district or in their building. Some school psychologists may withhold advocating for the marginalized students out of fear that they could just become, you know, that angry school psychologist or that school psychologist who is, has jumped on the bandwagon and they're on their soap box now. I think it's really important that if we, as school psychologists, are advocating for marginalized students, we keep it specific to like, why is it that we're advocating for them? We are a voice for a student or a group of students who may not have a voice. It's not about us, it's not about our need, it's about the students, and I think that the more we can keep people focused on that and make it less about us or less about our issues, our own baggage or our own damages or whatever it might be. I think the better off we will be and I think we're more likely to actually avoid a personal or professional marginalization.

Lastly, Participant 10 shared experiences related to reputation and marginalization:

Our district is way too large to keep up with who goes against the grain and who doesn't, so I don't believe that any attempts at marginalization are longstanding. However, one can develop the reputation of caving in to certain pressures, and therefore called upon to do cases in which there is a certain expectation that a child be found eligible for a disability regardless of the findings. This input coming from a very senior, now retired psychologist. It is well known amongst my colleagues that you do not want to be known for caving in to pressures lest you be called upon to continue to do so. In my opinion,
they expect newer psychologists to cave in and so we are often given the undesirable cases, and forced into questionable situations more often than the more senior psychologists.

**Research Question Three**

The third and final research question in this study was, “How have school psychologists who experienced ethically challenging pressure(s) attempted to address the issue?” This was followed by two sub-questions “What additional supports, training or professional development do school psychologists report are necessary to promote social justice within their educational settings? and “What are the biggest challenges in promoting social justice in schools and school communities?” Responses to the questions were gathered through quantitative and qualitative analysis.

In order to answer question three, “How have school psychologists who experienced ethically challenging pressure(s) attempted to address the issue?” responses were acquired through quantitative data analyses gathered from the SPOWS and are arranged according to frequency from highest to lowest (Table 4.3). The most frequently used strategy selected by 20 school psychologists (18.87%) was speaking with colleagues to obtain advice and emotional support, 18 participants (16.98%) selected trying to educate administrators about my ethical/legal responsibilities, 15 participants (14.15%) selected informing administrators about potential consequences of not behaving ethically/legally and were able to negotiate a compromise that was consistent with the ethical/legal responsibilities and also acceptable to the administrator. Only 1 participant (.85%) contacted NASP or another school psychology association to seek advice from their ethics committee while no participants contacted the state department of education. Participants were able to select all that applied to represent the various strategies that they
attempted to manage the pressure. Table 4.3 reflects the most selected to least selected strategy according to the 27 participants.

Table 4.3
*Questionnaire Items*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPOWS Items</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spoke with colleagues to obtain advice and emotional support</td>
<td>74.07</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tried to educate my administrator about my ethical/legal responsibilities</td>
<td>66.66</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negotiated a compromise that was consistent with my ethical/legal responsibilities and also acceptable to my administrator</td>
<td>55.55</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informed my administrator about the potential consequences of not behaving ethically/legally (e.g., parents file due process complaint)</td>
<td>55.55</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brought my concerns to another administrator in a higher position</td>
<td>40.74</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educated parents about their rights</td>
<td>29.62</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complied with administrative demands</td>
<td>25.59</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spoke to my union representative</td>
<td>18.51</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Directed parents to an advocacy organization</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable</td>
<td>11.11</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted NASP or other school psychology association for advice from their ethics committee</td>
<td>3.70</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted my state department of education</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* N=number of respondents that selected the strategy, % = percentage strategy was selected

In response to an open-ended item on the questionnaire prompting participants to identify additional strategies used to manage administrative pressure, responses included increased professional confidence as a result of learning from past experiences and alerting the director of special education when faced with this type of pressures.

**Sub-Question One**

The sixth interview question gathered qualitative responses to answer the following question: "What additional supports, training, or professional development do school psychologists report are necessary to promote social justice within their educational settings?"
Ten out of ten interview participants (100%) agreed that there is a need for additional training that should occur during graduate school, and that continued professional development should occur throughout one’s career. Three main components were identified. The first component involved recommendations relevant for training at the university level that include how to coordinate school-based teams to produce change within an organization that is socially justice-oriented, additional training on language to use when advocating, exploration of how personal bias impacts professional judgment, having social justice part of the university curricula within the school psychologist training program, training school psychology interns on how to manage unethical situations when they occur and how to address the problems. Additional recommendations for university coursework included having a field experience or placement every graduate semester to expose school psychology graduate students to some type of social justice intervention. One recommendation included improved training to help the graduate students learn classroom strategies that can be used for students who are experiencing academic difficulties but do not have a disability.

The second component involved recommendations for professional development. This theme focused on district-sponsored trainings that involved social justice specialists. Recommendations included being better prepared and knowledgeable on the language to use, studying trends on how to promote social justice within school settings, receiving formal training so school psychologists can then conduct trainings throughout the district with permission and support from school administrators. Establishing an entire week to focus on promoting social justice initiatives within schools was recommended. This would include training for team members who in turn can inspire and encourage a social justice movement amongst colleagues. The last suggestion for professional development involved district-wide bias training (implicit
and explicit) to increase employee awareness of their own biases, their responses, their reactions, and how to address bias in schools and communities.

Lastly, the third component involved new employee training. This would occur during orientation when starting in a new school district. It was recommended that school psychologists should be made aware of the population they are going to be working with including details of the demographics to best understand and meet their student’s needs. Training should include education about available resources in the district and in the community including which alternative placements are available, and what qualifies a student for those placements.

Sub-Question Two

The final sub-question was “What are the biggest challenges in promoting social justice in schools and school communities?” Responses were attained through qualitative data taken from the seventh interview question. Three main challenges were identified. They were the schools themselves, the community, and the socio-economic factors impacting minority communities. All ten interview participants acknowledged that promoting social justice causes is challenging. In looking at the schools, participants identified the need for schools to “buy-in” and support this issue as a priority free of repercussions and threats to job security for those that promote these efforts. Participant 9 identified their school’s problem as denial, “Being in denial and that if it is not a priority; this topic cannot compete with other priorities that rise to the top.”

With regard to community, the responses were quite diverse and shed valuable perspectives to consider. Participant 3 shared:

I think the lack of resources is the biggest problem. Students need intervention, but there is only so much money to pay for reading/math specialists to provide those interventions. Often, those specialists are called to sub for absent teachers and can't provide the
intervention anyway, and as hard as this is to admit, I think parents are also a challenge. These parents are also marginalized and have a lot on their plate to deal with and are sometimes unable to follow through on what their child needs. For instance, when we recommend a student for school-based counseling, we provide the parent with all the paperwork they need and highlight where they sign and the social worker brings it to their house, and still, sometimes the parent doesn't follow through. We may help the parent to set up an appointment with a community resource, but they don't show up. These challenges are so frustrating.

Participant 2 shared their opinion about the biggest challenge in promoting social justice in schools, “I think probably the fear of what repercussions my words and actions may have on my job. I'm not sure if it's just perceived or real, but I'm scared to chance it at times.”

Participant 5 shared challenges within the community: “I believe our biggest challenges are here within our community. We have community members who espouse blatant racist, sexist, gender/sexual identity ideas. Many of our students feel uncomfortable in their community and in school due to those remarks.”

Participant 10 also shared community-based concerns:

I think the school community at large, and in particular, those in decision-making capacities, have too poor an understanding of school psychologist work that they may not realize when they are asking something of questionable ethics. For instance, they often do not realize the potential for practice effects when requiring psychologists to test and retest. I found it most shocking when I first started out, how little administration understands psychologist work. Many of the situations psychologists are faced with could be avoided if more people truly understood our work. Thus, it is my opinion that graduate
education programs need to discuss special education in greater detail and discuss the role of the psychologist. I have tried to accomplish this on a smaller scale in my buildings with little reward. But it is really needed in the educators who advance to decision making roles.

Participant 7 also focused on community-based challenges:

I work in an urban and low socioeconomic-status school with mostly black and Hispanic students. The majority of the school cannot read and our community is plagued by poverty and trauma. At times, I feel I am just perpetuating a system of putting minorities in special education because no one else knows what to do. The assessments that we provide students are culturally and linguistically biased, even if think we think we are choosing an assessment that is not. I do not think I am promoting social justice by calling these children disabled; however, school personnel, families, community systems, and lawyers all seem to favor specialized services for each student as they do not see the system problem.

Participant 8 shared challenges related to multiple factors:

In my role as a Certified School Psychologist, I see the attitudes, personal biases and prejudices, and beliefs of school staff, administrators, parents, and community stakeholders as being the biggest challenges/barriers in promoting social justice causes in schools and school communities.

**Covid-19 and Administrative Pressure**

To determine how, if at all, Covid-19 has added to the pressures school psychologists experience, participants were encouraged to share their experiences and thoughts via the Qualtrics questionnaire. Two participants responded that it has not created any additional pressure, while 25
participants (92.59%) reported the opposite. The main themes were frustration and concern.

Responses included stress about timelines, pressure to immediately place kids in special education, increased requests for testing from school and parents, limited access to students, working longer hours, and not being able to stay within contractual hours due to a backlog of testing in the fall of 2020, feeling less connected to colleagues and students, questioning the validity of assessments and ethics for virtual testing, confusion around testing recommendations, lack of support from school administrators involving the well-being of school psychologists and the administrators' frustration when school psychologists express their opinions and concern.

Participant 21 shared: “It seems that the district has failed to even consider psychologists' roles and needs in planning during Covid-19.”

Participant C5 shared concerns related to the validity of test measures:

I have concerns about the validity and reliability of testing students at this time. We have not yet started, but soon will be starting testing with students and I'm struggling to see how these results will be valid. I'm going to start testing and see what information I get, but I'm concerned about what will happen if I ethically don't feel comfortable using that information to make a decision about eligibility.

Participant V3 expressed frustration with communication: “There is so much confusion and administration is not appropriately guiding us on procedures to take during this time.”

Participant 26 identified concerns related to missing instruction and how that needs to be considered when determining eligibility criteria.

Most administrators (and some teachers) do not understand the eligibility criteria for students when looking at specific learning disability (SLD). Trying to educate individuals
about why it is difficult to rule out adequate instruction as a factor has proved difficult.

Additionally, trying to get individuals to understand that students missed a quarter of their instruction last year so we need to reestablish core instruction and provide intervention has been hard to understand.

Feelings about the Profession

Participants completed a 6-point Likert scale focused on feelings about the profession and administrators. SPOWS items, the mean, and standard deviations are reported in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel satisfied with my current position</td>
<td>4.78</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel satisfied with my choice of profession.</td>
<td>5.04</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If I had the choice to do over again, I would still choose a career in school psychology.</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>1.45</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I think highly of the administrators I work with.</td>
<td>4.33</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The administrators I work with are cooperative.</td>
<td>4.52</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The administrators I work with are incompetent and/or inflexible</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I have a good relationship with the administrators I work with.</td>
<td>4.89</td>
<td>0.99</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The administrators I work with understand the ethical responsibilities of school psychologists.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.27</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The administrators I work with are knowledgeable about state and federal laws that pertain to special education.</td>
<td>4.00</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I feel burned out because of having to deal with pressure from administrators.</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel burned out because of having to work with uncooperative/inflexible administrators.</td>
<td>2.19</td>
<td>1.19</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I often feel caught between meeting students’ needs and complying with administrators’ demands.</td>
<td>2.67</td>
<td>1.41</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The actions of administrators make it hard to follow legal regulations (i.e., act in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations).</td>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>1.30</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. M= mean, SD=standard deviation, N = response
Table 4.5 shows the distribution of rankings and percentages based on responses.

**Table 4.5**  
*Likert ratings from SPOWS*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel satisfied with my current position</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>37.04%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I feel satisfied with my choice of profession.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td>40.74%</td>
<td>37.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. If I had the choice to do over again, I would still choose a career in school psychology.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
<td>29.63%</td>
<td>29.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I think highly of the administrators I work with.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
<td>37.04%</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The administrators I work with are cooperative.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td>48.15%</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The administrators I work with are incompetent and/or inflexible</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>18.52%</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I have a good relationship with the administrators I work with.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>40.74%</td>
<td>29.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. The administrators I work with understand the ethical responsibilities of school psychologists.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3.85%</td>
<td>3.85%</td>
<td>30.77%</td>
<td>26.92%</td>
<td>19.23%</td>
<td>15.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. The administrators I work with are knowledgeable about state and federal laws that pertain to special education.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
<td>25.93%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I feel burned out because of having to deal with pressure from administrators.</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.44%</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td>18.52%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel burned out because of having to work with uncooperative/inflexible administrators.</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>40.74%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Likert Ratings from SPOWS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Slightly Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. I often feel caught between meeting students’ needs and complying with administrators’ demands.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25.93%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>29.63%</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>3.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The actions of administrators make it hard to follow legal regulations (i.e., act in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations).</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>44.44%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>14.81%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
<td>7.41%</td>
<td>0.00%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** Top number is the number of responses, the percentage is listed below.

### Urban vs. Suburban Responses

Table 4.6 focuses on the differences and similarities identified between urban vs. suburban school psychologist responses. Percentages indicate that there is a similar positive response pattern as to whether the school psychologists from those two areas would choose a career in school psychology if they had a choice to do things over again. Equally, both urban and suburban school psychologists reported similar responses about burnout; however, more urban-based school psychologists rated their administrators as being incompetent or inflexible. Furthermore, a higher percentage of urban school psychologists reported feeling caught between meeting student’s needs and complying with administrators’ demands, and feeling that the actions of administrators make it hard to follow legal regulations (i.e., act in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations).
Table 4.6

Urban vs. Suburban Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Urban Agree</th>
<th>Urban Disagree</th>
<th>Suburban Agree</th>
<th>Suburban Disagree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. If I had the choice to do over again, I would still choose a career</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>in school psychology.</td>
<td>77.77%</td>
<td>22.22%</td>
<td>71.42%</td>
<td>28.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The administrators I work with are incompetent and/or inflexible</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>55.55%</td>
<td>44.44%</td>
<td>7.17%</td>
<td>92.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I feel burned out because of having to deal with pressure between</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meeting students’ needs and complying with administrators’ from</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>66.66%</td>
<td>21.43%</td>
<td>78.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>administrators.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I often feel caught between meeting student’s needs and complying</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with administrators demands.</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>66.66%</td>
<td>14.28%</td>
<td>85.71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The actions of administrators make it hard to follow legal regulations</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(i.e., act in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations).</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
<td>66.66%</td>
<td>7.14%</td>
<td>92.86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Top numbers reflect responses, bottom numbers reflect percentages of positive or negative responses from the Likert scale ratings.

Desire to Leave the Profession

On the SPOWS questionnaire, participants were asked to rate their desire to leave the profession within the next 5 years due to administrative pressure, and their desire to leave their current job within the next 5 years due to administrative pressure. The overall mean and standard deviation is listed in Table 4.7.

Response patterns between suburban vs. urban school psychologists are relatively similar and indicate that 75% (n=8) of urban school psychologists plan to leave the profession within the next 5 years because of administrative pressure, and 71.42% (n=7) of urban school psychologists
that completed the questionnaire plan to leave their current job within 5 years because of administrative pressure. In looking at suburban responses, the results are very similar. Eleven (72.72%) of the suburban school psychologists in the study plan to leave the profession within the next 5 years because of administrative pressure while 70% plan to leave their current job within 5 years because of administrative pressure.

Table 4.7

*Plans to Leave the Position*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SPOWS Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rate your desire to leave the profession altogether within the next 5 years because of administrative pressure.</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rate your desire to leave your current job within the next 5 years because of administrative pressure.</td>
<td>2.25</td>
<td>2.32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. M=Mean, SD=Standard Deviation*

**Inferential Statistics**

Table 4.8 and Table 4.9 indicate there were no statistically significant differences (p > .05) between the school psychologists who reported having less than 10 years of experience vs. those with over 10 years of experience or between urban and suburban school psychologists for the select SPOWS items identified in the designated tables. This information reflects consistency in response patterns between the two groups (i.e. variables).
Table 4.8

**Research Question 1 – Independent t Test Items 9, 10, 11, 12**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1-10 Yrs.</th>
<th>+10 Yrs.</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>9. Make decisions or take actions that I believed were unethical.</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10. Make decisions or take actions that I believed were unethical, with an implied threat to my job standing if I did not comply.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11. Make decisions or take actions that I believed were not in compliance with federal or state law.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12. Make decisions or take actions that I believed were not in compliance with federal or state law, with an implied threat to my job standing if I did not comply.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Make decisions or take actions that I believed were unethical.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Make decisions or take actions that I believed were unethical, with an implied threat to my job standing if I did not comply.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.7480</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Make decisions or take actions that I believed were not in compliance with federal or state law.</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.6313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Make decisions or take actions that I believed were not in compliance with federal or state law, with an implied threat to my job standing if I did not comply.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>0.7480</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* * indicates items that are statistically significant
Table 4.9 reflects the Independent t Test results for select items on the SPOWS to evaluate for statistical significance. No statistical significance was found between the two groups on any of the items.

Table 4.9  *Research Question 2 – Independent t Test Items 2, 3, 4, 7*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1-10 Yrs.</th>
<th>+10 Yrs.</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience</td>
<td>2. Agree with a special education placement that was not the least restrictive appropriate environment for the student.</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Make a student eligible for special education who did not meet eligibility requirements.</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Avoid finding a student eligible for special education who did meet eligibility.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Remove a student from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavioral and/or safety concerns.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting</th>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Urban</th>
<th>Suburban</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Agree with a special education placement that was not the least restrictive appropriate environment for the student.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Make a student eligible for special education who did not meet eligibility requirements.</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Avoid finding a student eligible for special education who did meet eligibility.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7. Remove a student from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavioral and/or safety concerns.</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* * indicates items that are statistically significant.
Summary

Chapter 4 contains the results of the analysis gathered in this mixed-methods study and connects the data to answer key research questions. All 27 participants were practicing school psychologists in Pennsylvania who met the eligibility criteria. After completing the SPOWS questionnaire, 10 participants were selected to complete the second phase of the study, a semi-structured interview. Interview questions were designed to gather experiences and views relevant to marginalization and the Social Justice Theory as it applies to school psychology. The combined results of this methodology emphasize the importance of studying this topic and supports the premise that pressure to engage in unethical practices continues to be a significant problem in the field of school psychology and that it has detrimental effects on the professionals, the school system, and most importantly, the students we are expected to advocate on behalf of.

Chapter 5 will review the outcomes, the design of the study, the limitations, implications for future practice, how and if findings support prior research, make recommendations for future studies along with final conclusions, and additional information that was noteworthy.
Chapter 5: Discussion

In this study, I researched pressure to engage in unethical practices and outcomes associated with those pressures. Incorporated into this study is also a focus on advocacy for marginalized students. The Social Justice Theory guided my framework. Social Justice Theory is rooted in the ideology that individuals from marginalized groups and those that lack equal power and access should have fair and equitable distribution of resources, rights, and treatment (Linnemeyer et al., 2018). As a theoretical framework, social justice has recently emerged in the school psychology literature (Johnson et al., 2017). While there are multiple commentaries and articles about social justice and school psychology, including recommendations to improve advocacy skills, research is limited (Speight & Vera, 2009; Warren, 2014). The findings of this study will fill the gaps in the literature.

In selecting the explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, I collected data to answer key research questions and compared my findings with that of earlier studies. Chapter 5 includes data on how Covid-19 impacted the participants in relation to administrative pressure, recommendations for solutions to address the research problem, considerations for future research, limitations in my study, its generalizability concluding with a final summary.

Review of Findings

Ethically Challenging Pressures

Administrative pressure to ignore ethical guidelines is identified as one of the most frequently reported transgressions school psychologists' experiences (Boccio et al., 2016; Jacob-Timm, 1999; Pope & Vetter, 1992). Based on my findings, the top three ethically challenging pressures included (1) pressure to agree with a special education placement that was not the least restrictive appropriate environment for the student, (2) "make do" with inadequate assessment/or
intervention materials, and (3) make decisions or take actions believed to be unethical. This was followed by pressure to avoid recommending certain support services due to costs and to make a student eligible for special education who did not meet eligibility requirements. Pressure to perform job duties outside the scope of training and expertise, make decisions or take actions believed were not in compliance with federal or state law, and pressure to remove a student from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavioral or safety concerns followed. The two items ranked as having the least reported pressure were making decisions or taking actions believed to be unethical, with an implied threat to job standing (e.g., negative evaluation, move to less desirable assignment, loss of job) if not complied, and making decisions or taking actions that believed were not in compliance with federal or state law, with an implied threat to job standing (e.g., negative evaluation, move to less desirable assignment, loss of job) if not complied.

Participants also shared other types of administrative pressures they had encountered. They included (1) pressure to prioritize and fast track students with behavior issues over other students, (2) make a diagnosis that is medical in nature (i.e. ADHD, autism, anxiety, depression), (3) complete paperwork and make recommendations based on administrator's desired outcomes, (4) pressure to sign an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) when the school psychologist was not present nor invited to attend the IEP meeting, (5) pressure to qualify students to thwart legal action in fear of parents seeking legal counsel and educational advocates, (6) pressure to include additional disability classifications even when a child was already identified, (7) pressure to conduct widespread testing to minimize legal action, (8) pressure to find a way to make students eligible for gifted, and (9) pressure to find students identified as a problem being made eligible for special education and recommending an out of district placement.
My findings are very similar to the results in the Boccio et al. (2016) study. Both studies used the SPOWS instrument. The top five rated pressures, according to Boccio et al. (2016), were also the top-rated pressures identified in my results. Another similarity was that the three lowest ratings were consistent. The one difference was pressure to make decisions or take actions believed were unethical. Boccio et al. (2016) reported a percentage of 31.9%, whereby 57.69% of my respondents reported experience with this type of administrative pressure, making it tied for one of the most experienced administrative pressures according to my results.

Although the sample size was small in my study, an interesting finding occurred when running t-tests to see if there were any differences in response to administrative pressure to engage in unethical practices between urban vs. suburban school psychologists or differences in years experiences (under 10 years and over 10 years). T test results showed no significance indicating the pressures to engage in unethical practices are consistent despite years of experience or school setting. This supports the results of the Boccio et al. (2016) study which showed union membership, possession of tenure, length in the field, and case load had no relationship to the variables that were a focus of the 2016 study. Although my sample size was small, it has implications that this type of pressure is far-reaching and suggests that additional studies are needed to further explore this problem.

Research findings show that these experiences increased the desire to advocate for students, and prepared professionals for future incidents. However, having these experiences has also contributed to a more cautionary stance regarding advocacy due to concerns about repercussions. These repercussions included conflicts and adverse treatment from colleagues, families, and administrators. A sub-theme implied that these experiences had a personal impact on school psychologists (i.e., self-confidence, feeling disrespected, frustrations, and dismissal in
area of expertise). Participant K2's response summarizes how administrative pressure impacts motivation, increases concern for repercussions, and captures the frustration when advocating for students.

A student I was working with for a reevaluation, who was placed out of district for aggressive behavior, told me that he was told he was not allowed to attend school-related community events (i.e. football games, multi-cultural conference, use school outdoor basketball courts, etc.). I immediately called my administrator who did in fact reiterate this "rule" despite that it was unethical and illegal. While I continued to advocate for the student and his rights, I did not get very far as I learned that the superintendent was the one who implemented it. Going forward, it made me think about how to balance keeping a job while also advocating for students.

Fear of retribution is a reality and can indeed impact a school psychologist's decisions. In 2016, Boccio et al. reported that 8.9% of school psychologists previously left their job because of administrative intimidation, and 10% had requested reassignment. School psychologists are overwhelmed by the complexity of advocacy work and may lack the skills needed to address these issues in their schools (Bernak & Chung, 2008). These experiences and the challenges in navigating such problems add additional pressure to school psychologists.

I expected that most participants would report that they have been intimidated or have witnessed colleagues being pressured to change their recommendations, and they would voice concern about these decisions knowing the significant impact these decisions have on students, especially from marginalized populations. According to my results, 57.69% of respondents reported they experienced pressure to agree with special education placements that were not the least restrictive appropriate environments, and 53.85% experienced pressure to make a student
eligible for special education who did not meet the eligibility requirements. Over 11% (11.54%) reported pressure to avoid finding a student eligible for special education who did meet the eligibility criteria. Participants reported pressure to qualify students to thwart legal action in fear of parents seeking legal counsel and educational advocates, the pressure to include additional disability classifications even when a child was already identified, the pressure to conduct widespread testing to minimize legal action, the pressure to find a way to make students eligible for gifted, and pressure to find students that have been identified as a problem being made eligible for special education and making an out of district placement recommendation.

Participant 3 verbalized concerns about pressures to qualify students, pointing out that the pressure was from multiple stakeholders.

Generally, there is pressure to qualify kids no matter what in an attempt to thwart legal action. That is, when children are found ineligible, parents seek attorneys so in order to avoid that, there is pressure to qualify any kids we test. There has also been pressure to add on disabilities even when the child is found eligible as if to say the more disabilities the better. That pressure comes from parent council as well as administration.

Administration pushes for widespread testing under the idea that this will minimize legal actions. That was actually said to me by an administrator.

Integration of research results demonstrated triangulation to support the overall findings for RQ2 using items #2, 3, 4, 7 of the SPOWS, responses from an open-ended question, and responses to the interview question (#3).

My findings align with previous research, but to fully grasp the significance and long-term consequences of this particular pressure and understand how Social Justice Theory is interwoven, we need to look at the literature. Not only does this type of pressure negatively
impact the school psychologist, but it also has significant ramifications for marginalized students.

According to Boccio et al. (2016), 13% of school psychologists adhered to administrative pressure. This decision was based on fear of repercussions (Jacob-Timm, 1999; Zirkel, 2008). While school psychologists may have to face repercussions, they must also consider the students and how this type of pressure impacts them. Research shows that students placed in special education are more likely to experience long-term negative outcomes associated with systemic racism and social injustice, leading to higher dropout rates (Donovan & Cross, 2002).

In order to fully comprehend the significance of this problem, we need to know essential facts about our marginalized populations. According to data published in 2018 by the United States Census Bureau, more than 39 million people were living below the federal poverty level in 2017, including 12.8 million of our students under age 18 (Fontenot et al., 2018). Further distribution of children and race show that 10.9% were Non-Hispanic/White, 12.2 were Asian/Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 31.1% were American Indian/Alaska Native, 28.7% of Black/African American, and 25% were of Hispanic/Latino (Children's Defense Fund, 2018). Hair et al. (2015) reported 1.3 million public school students were homeless and that, on average, 16% of these students miss more than three weeks of school per year, causing them to fall further behind academically (Bassuk et al., 2014).

The percentage of minority students (black and brown) enrolled in public schools was 50.5% in 2014, and 4.6 million (9.4%) were English language learners (McFarland et al., 2017). These trends have implications applicable to this study as it applies to equity and social justice issues within our school buildings and communities.
When we reflect on the research question, "What are the problems and consequences as a result of administrative pressure on decision-making regarding eligibility determinations and placement of students?" it is essential to look at the big picture to understand why this type of pressure is a problem and how Social Justice Theory applies. We need to look at multiple factors impacting minority students both in and out of school, such as large disparities in funding. These disparities contribute to increased retention and dropout rates (Brayboy et al., 2007; Duran, 2008). An estimated 30% of all students identified as ELLs live in regions where English-only legislation mandates the type and amount of language support provided in schools. These restrictions lead to behavioral issues, low engagement, retention, dropout, disengagement, and referrals to special education (Plant et al., 2009; Suárez-Orozco et al., 2000). Limited availability of language supports in schools and a shortage of bilingual educators and specialists, including school psychologists, are significant (Plant et al., 2009). Another persistent problem impacting ELLs is underrepresentation in gifted education (King et al., 2009).

According to Wilkinson et al. (2006), schools failed to consider language and culture in their programming or evaluations. Teachers and school administrators lacked the training to work effectively with this population. While we often hear about students being over-identified, we also need to look at the other end of the spectrum. Data indicates that Latino elementary-aged students are under referred and over-diagnosed due to a lack of cultural understanding (Case & Taylor, 2005).

Data shows that black students are disproportionately placed in special education programs. Black/African American students account for only 14.8% of the general population of 6-to-21-year-old students; however, they make up 20% of the special education population (Losen & Orfield, 2002). Black/African American students are 2.41 times more likely than white
students to be identified as having intellectual impairments, 1.13 times more likely to be labeled learning disabled, and 1.68 times more likely to be classified as having an emotional or behavioral disorder (Klingner et al., 2005). They continue to face an increased risk for suspension for minor misbehaviors and increased risk of school suspension and expulsion for the same behavior as students from other racial/ethnic groups (Skiba et al., 2011). Limited access to general education classrooms and lack of access to typical peers leads to high dropout rates, low academic performance, and exposure to a weaker curriculum (Ferri & Connor, 2005). In learning more about the populations we serve, we can understand why school psychologists' ethical pressures have complicated and significant outcomes.

I anticipated those who volunteered for the interview would report that they were comfortable advocating within their school if they had a positive working relationship with their school team. I also expected that most would be uncomfortable advocating beyond their school building due to a lack of support, confidence, or training. I found that all ten interview participants reported they were comfortable advocating for social justice issues within their school setting; however, there were different levels of comfort reported and parameters to that comfort level. The themes that emerged were an overwhelmingly positive response for advocating for individual students, while two sub-themes related to challenges that impact comfort level became apparent. These included lack of preparation (e.g., skill set) and challenges in dealing with stakeholders (e.g., administrators, parents, and the school system). Participant 2 shared their opinion on comfort level and challenges when trying to advocate in isolation.

As a school psychologist, I feel very comfortable advocating for marginalized students and promoting social justice within school settings. Advocacy, however, does not come without its challenges. To start, you have to have an administration that is willing to
grow. If they are of a fixed mindset that what is happening is working, it will be hard to advocate for change. While I feel confident to explain my points and direct my thoughts to the appropriate people, I do not feel that a school psychologist alone can create the necessary change.

Participant 4 provided insight into the comfort level, colleague bias, skill set, and frustration when one's voice is not heard.

I feel most comfortable advocating for students at an individual level. I have tried to advocate for groups of students with administration for policy changes, but I don't feel my voice is being heard (or at least changes have not been made). I feel I struggle the most with dealing with colleagues and having the language to help them recognize their own biases. I attended a wonderful training a few weeks ago as part of the ASPP conference that has helped me in some ways; however, I definitely have room to grow.

Participant 6 shared insights relevant to individual vs. systems advocacy and identified years of experience as a potential factor in successful advocacy work.

On the micro-level, advocacy is feasible as it pertains to individual students. For the most part in my career, if I have voiced concerns that a child's needs are not being met, those concerns are heard and nearly always adhered to specifically when an increase in services is sought. One of the good things about being a psychologist in my district is that people listen when I speak and act on my general recommendations. There was a document that went out to special education staff that described psychologists as having a high level of integrity. I think this speaks to the overall perception of psychologists in my district. However, advocacy on a larger scale, as in systems change, is nearly impossible. As a relative new-comer to the role and district (even with ten years experience, which is less
than most of my colleagues), I often feel uncomfortable advocating on a systems level, but I am grateful that more senior psychologists do so if even it seems to fall on deaf ears. My findings support earlier research in that challenging institutional power is very difficult. Challenging institutional power was rated as the least realistic school psychologists' action (Shriberg et al., 2011). Participants felt their voice was not being heard yet they are expected to be the voice for the voiceless. They are expected to be school employees as well as student advocates. As a result of balancing the duality of their position, conflicts occur, such as ethical dilemmas between competing loyalties, which can lead to additional pressures (Boccio, 2017; Helton & Ray, 2005).

**Personal and Professional Marginalization Related to Advocacy Work**

Based on my data analyses, 20.83% of participants responded that they do not feel that advocating for students leads to personal or professional marginalization. In comparison, 79.16% reported that advocating for marginalized students does lead to personal and professional marginalization. The majority of respondents agree that school psychologists do experience marginalization as a result of advocating on behalf of students. The identified themes involved feeling disrespected by administrators and stakeholders, including colleagues. Sub-themes emerged and were related to the impact those feelings have on one's ability to do their job as effectively as possible, including a personal impact (i.e., self-confidence and self-worth due to being treated in such as dismissive manner). Another sub-theme involved being negatively viewed by colleagues and stakeholders (i.e., school community, parents, administration). Words such as "angry," "trouble," and "bad reputation" were synonymous with the impressions that others may have about school psychologists, according to the emerging theme. These derogatory views lead to a personal and professional marginalization that school psychologists experience
due to advocating for marginalized students. Another sub-theme was fear of repercussions from school personnel (including colleagues) and families (e.g., losing their job and credibility with staff and community). Participant 21 shared insights into their experiences of being marginalized, how often they felt this way, and the emotions associated with those experiences.

[I feel marginalized] almost every day. We don't have a lot of support from the administration, so teachers also see us as adversaries who are "keeping services away" from their students. This arises mostly because administration doesn't have the proper infrastructure to support pre-referral interventions. So, anything outside of the realm of average ends up as the psychologist or special education's problem to solve. They also don't realize the amount of work it takes every year to complete the increasing number of evaluations while still completing comprehensive and legally defensible reports. It's getting to the point where it seems unmanageable unless something changes.

The following participants shared their experiences and feelings of being disrespected and undervalued and describe how these experiences of being marginalized impact self-confidence. Participant 9 shared, “Sometimes administrators just want me to fill out the paperwork that will make whatever decision they want work which makes me feel disrespected for my expertise in the situation.”

Participant 2 shared:

It definitely has made me feel as though administration doesn't appreciate or recognize that I have knowledge or training that they do not. I often feel as though administrators think they know more than I do about school psychology, even though they are not trained as school psychologists. I share my thoughts, ideas, and expertise, but feel as though it is not listened to at times. I do not feel valued as a professional.
Participant K2 shared an interesting perspective as it applies to the nature of the position.

School psychologists are set up to be marginalized by the nature of their position. Typically, there is only one per building, which means you do not have peers in your personal work environment. You also do not have the "power" of administration. So essentially, you are advocating for a student who is already in the minority, while being in the minority of building staff. A school psychologist's unique training allows them to view situations from a different lens, which is not the lens of the majority. You are then continually put in a position of defending your lens against the majority.

Participant 2 shared their opinion involving systemic issues.

I feel as though we are at times viewed as "trouble". Rather than being experts, we are people who test kids, and that is it. Our thoughts and opinions about policy, procedure, and programming seem to go unheard and we are frowned upon when we disagree with what is happening. In the past, I've had administrators that did support my opinion and asked for it all the time, but I do not currently feel that way.

Lastly, Participant 10 shared experiences related to reputation and marginalization.

Our district is way too large to keep up with who goes against the grain and who doesn't, so I don't believe that any attempts at marginalization are longstanding. However, one can develop the reputation of caving into certain pressures, and therefore called upon to do cases in which there is a certain expectation that a child be found eligible for a disability regardless of the findings. This input coming from a very senior, now retired psychologist. It is well known amongst my colleagues that you do not want to be known for caving into pressures lest you be called upon to continue to do so. In my opinion, they
expect newer psychologists to cave in, and so we are often given undesirable cases and forced into questionable situations more often than the more senior psychologists.

My findings contribute to this area of research and support earlier research findings. Prior research shows that refusal to comply with administrative demands can result in threats to job security, unsatisfactory performance evaluations, involuntary reassignment, written reprimands, dismissal, and ostracism (Jacob-Timm, 1999; Zirkel, 2008). The pressure to engage in unethical practices has both short and long-term effects and can lead to school psychologists leaving the profession (Boccio et al., 2016). Research findings show that 8.9% of school psychologists had previously left a school psychology position due to administrative intimidation, and 10% had requested reassignment (Boccio et al., 2016). Trying to balance employee and student advocate's role further compounds the pressures school psychologists’ experience (Boccio, 2017; Helton & Ray, 2005). Negotiating this dual role can be demoralizing and unnerving (NASP, 2010)

**Strategies Used to Address Ethically Challenging Pressures**

Based on my results, the top five strategies used to address the problem were (1) Spoke with colleagues to obtain advice and emotional support, (2) Tried to educate my administrator about my ethical/legal responsibilities, (3) Negotiated a compromise that was consistent with my ethical/legal responsibilities and also acceptable to my administrator, (4) Informed my administrator about the potential consequences of not behaving ethically/legally (e.g., parents file due process complaint), and (5) Brought my concerns to another administrator in a higher position. The two strategies used the least or never were (1) Contacted NASP or other school psychology association for advice from their ethics committee, and (2) Contacted my state department of education.
My results support findings from a 2016 study conducted by Boccio et al. In that study, participants most frequently reported handling administrative pressure by soliciting advice and support from colleagues and sharing information about ethical and legal mandates with their building administrators. Providing administrators with information about ethical guidelines and special education legislation was also a common practice.

Although I did not study or focus on burnout, Shilling et al. (2018) reported how school psychologists deal with the pressures that lead to burnout. In their study, 73.7% said that they talked to coworkers, 53.7% tried to change the situation that was causing the burnout, and 53.7% did something to distract themselves. Talking with family was an option that 53.7% of participants pursued, while 43.2% spoke with friends, and 34.7% used yoga, meditation, medication, and physical activity to help manage the pressure.

Need for Supports, Training, and Professional Development

I expected there would be recommendations for continual professional development for entire school teams and school communities. The quantity and quality of responses I collected were very comprehensive and could be used for future action research or considerations for schools and training programs. My participants identified three main components to enhance support to manage this type of pressure. They identified a need for additional training in graduate training programs, professional development throughout one's career, and training as part of orientation when working in a new school or district.

The first component involved recommendations for graduate training programs. Suggestions included (1) Training that includes how to coordinate school-based teams to produce change within a socially justice-oriented organization. (2) Having a field experience or placement every graduate semester to expose school psychology graduate students to some type
of social justice intervention. (3) Improved training to help the graduate students learn classroom strategies that can be used for students who are experiencing academic difficulties but do not have a disability. (4) Training school psychology interns on managing unethical situations when they occur and how to address the problems. (5) Having social justice part of the university curricula within the school psychologist training program. (6) Additional training on language to use when advocating.

The second component focused on professional development within school systems. Recommendations included a variety of ideas. (1) District-sponsored training involving social justice specialists. (2) Being better prepared and knowledgeable on the language to use. (3) Studying trends on promoting social justice within school settings (4) Receiving formal training so school psychologists can then conduct training throughout the district with permission and support from school administrators. (5) Establishing an entire week to focus on promoting social justice initiatives within schools. (6) Training for team members who, in turn, can inspire and encourage a social justice movement amongst colleagues. (7) District-wide bias training (implicit and explicit) increases employee awareness of their own biases, responses, reactions, and how to address bias in schools and communities.

The third component identified suggestions for orientation. They were (1) School psychologists should be made aware of the population they will be working with, including details of the demographics to understand and meet their student's needs. (2) Training should include education about available resources within the community. (3) Training should include education about available resources in the district including which alternative placements are available and what qualifies students for those placements.
While some of the recommendations supported findings from prior research, the literature review correlated with my findings in identifying the need for additional supports and training. Accessing supports through NASP is encouraged and based on findings is an option that may be underutilized despite the fact that NASP sponsors social justice interest groups, publishes social justice articles, and promotes social justice research to assist school psychologists in their endeavors (Briggs et al., 2008).

Atiles et al. (2010) identified the need for teacher preparation programs to improve their diversity training. Lack of training involving a school population's needs may lead to inappropriate recommendations. Providing professional development will provide much-needed support for staff and benefit the students.

Although this particular information did not surface during my study, Walcott et al. (2018) reported school psychologists have less than four days of annual release time to attend conventions, conferences, or professional development activities outside of their district. Almost a fifth (17.8%) reported not having any days available at all. Over 74% of respondents to the NASP study did not receive reimbursement to cover the cost of their participation in these events, and that more than 80% of indicated that the lack of reimbursement affected their decision to attend a conference or professional development training (NASP, 2015).

**Challenges in Promoting Social Justice**

Based on my qualitative data, three main challenges were identified. They were the schools themselves, the community, and the socio-economic factors impacting minority communities. All ten interview participants acknowledged that promoting social justice is challenging. In looking at the schools, participants identified the need for schools to "buy in" and
treat these efforts as a priority free of repercussions and threats to job security for those that
promote equity and social justice.

With regard to community challenges, the responses were quite diverse and shared
valuable perspectives to consider. Participant 3 shared:

I think the lack of resources is the biggest problem. Students need intervention, but there
is only so much money to pay for reading/math specialists to provide those interventions.
Often, those specialists are called to sub for absent teachers and can't provide the
intervention anyway, and as hard as this is to admit, I think parents are also a challenge.
These parents are also marginalized and have a lot on their plate to deal with. Sometimes
they are unable to follow through on their child's needs. For instance, when we
recommend a student for school-based counseling, we provide the parent with all the
paperwork they need and highlight where they sign, and the social worker brings it to
their house, and still, sometimes the parent doesn't follow through. We may help the
parent set up an appointment with a community resource, but they don't show up. These
challenges are so frustrating.

Participant 5 shared challenges occurring within the community. "I believe our biggest
challenges are here within our community. We have community members who espouse blatant
racist, sexist, gender/sexual identity ideas. Many of our students feel uncomfortable in their
community and school due to those remarks."

Participant 10 also shared community-based concerns.

I think the school community at large, and in particular, those in decision-making
capacities, have too poor an understanding of school psychologist work that they may not
realize when they are asking something of questionable ethics. For instance, they often do
not realize the potential for practice effects when requiring psychologists to test and retest. I found it most shocking when I first started how little administration understands psychologists’ work. Many of the situations psychologists are faced with could be avoided if more people truly understood our work. Thus, it is my opinion that graduate education programs need to discuss special education in greater detail and discuss the role of the psychologist. I have tried to accomplish this on a smaller scale in my buildings with little reward.

Participant 7 also focused on community-based challenges.

I work in an urban and low socioeconomic-status school with mostly black and Hispanic students. The majority of the school cannot read, and our community is plagued by poverty and trauma. At times, I feel I am just perpetuating a system of putting minorities in special education because no one else knows what to do. The assessments that we provide students are culturally and linguistically biased, even if we think we are choosing an assessment that is not. I do not think I am promoting social justice by calling these children disabled; however, school personnel, families, community systems, and lawyers all seem to favor specialized services for each student as they do not see the systemic problem.

Participant 8 shared challenges related to multiple factors:

In my role as a Certified School Psychologist, I see the attitudes, personal biases, and prejudices, and beliefs of school staff, administrators, parents, and community stakeholders as being the biggest challenges/barriers in promoting social justice causes in schools and school communities.
Participant 2 shared their opinion about the biggest challenge in promoting social justice in schools pertaining to fear and repercussions. "I think probably the fear of what repercussions my words and actions may have on my job. I'm not sure if it's just perceived or real, but I'm scared to chance it at times."

Research data shows that school psychologists are encouraged to play an active role in promoting social justice by focusing on changes in systems rather than individuals (Vera & Speight, 2003). While this may be a motivator for some, it can be quite challenging. School psychologists may be uncomfortable with the political overtones and the call for social action and change (Speight & Vera, 2009). As advocates, school psychologists must be willing to challenge institutional barriers or policies (Field & Baker (2004); Trusty & Brown, (2005); NASP, 2020). As previously reported, challenging institutional power structures to promote institutional change was rated as the least realistic school psychologists' action (Shriberg et al., 2011). This is one reason why change is slow to occur, especially if the institution is part of the problem.

**Covid-19 and Pressure**

Because this dissertation study occurred during a worldwide pandemic and significantly impacted people's lives and our educational system, amongst many other things, a question related to Covid-19 was included. Data shows that Covid-19 has added to the pressure school psychologist experience. The main themes surround frustration and concern with school psychologists feeling less connected to colleagues and students, experiencing an increase in requests for testing from schools and parents, pressure to place students immediately in special education, stress over timelines, questioning the validity of assessments and ethics for virtual testing, confusion around testing recommendations, lack of support from school administrators
involving the well-being of school psychologists, trying to get others to understand the implications of missing instruction and the impact that has on eligibility criteria, dealing with administrators frustration when school psychologists express their opinions and concern, and working long hours and not being able to stay within contractual hours do to a backlog of testing in the fall of 2020. Participant C5 expressed concern related to the validity of test measures.

I have concerns about the validity and reliability of testing students at this time. We have not yet started, but soon we will be starting testing with students, and I'm struggling to see how these results will be valid. I'm going to start testing and see what information I get, but I'm concerned about what will happen if I ethically don't feel comfortable using that information to make a decision about eligibility.

Participant 26 identified concerns related to missing instruction and how that needs to be considered when determining eligibility criteria.

Most administrators (and some teachers) do not understand the eligibility criteria for students when looking at specific learning disabilities (SLD). Trying to educate individuals about why it is difficult to rule out adequate instruction as a factor has proved difficult. Additionally, trying to get individuals to understand that students missed a quarter of their instruction last year so we need to reestablish core instruction and provide intervention, has been hard to understand.

The data collected and shared highlights personal, professional, and ethical concerns. To integrate the Social Justice component, it is imperative to recognize that the pandemic has created significant mental health challenges for students. Educators need to look at mental health as a social justice issue as school closures cut children off from their friends, teachers, and mental health supports (Masonbrink & Hurley, 2020). Data shows that the pandemic affected
minorities and marginalized youth at higher rates and that Covid-19 widened the gap in access to
health and learning resources (Masonbrink & Hurley, 2020). Advocates for social justice believe
that these gaps result from systemic racism and have only worsened with the pandemic. This
reality has made the role of school-based advocates that much more necessary and that much
more challenging.

Suburban vs. Urban School Psychologists Responses

Although I did not initially set out to review correlations between these two groups of
participants, the quantitative data analyses supported the need to review their responses as some
interesting similarities and differences emerged. Out of 27 participants, nine worked in urban
school settings, and 14 worked in suburban school settings. Six (75%) of the urban school
psychologists indicated they experienced pressure to avoid recommending certain support
services due to costs to the district. When asked about experiencing pressure to remove a student
from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to
behavioral or safety concerns, none of the urban school psychologists responded "yes" to this
question. However, six of the 14 (42.85%) suburban school psychologists reported they had
experienced this type of pressure. In looking at urban vs. suburban responses, none of the urban
school psychologists reported experiencing pressure to avoid finding a student eligible for
special education who did meet eligibility requirements; however, three of the 14 (21.42%) suburban school psychologists reported experiencing this type of pressure. In comparing
responses between suburban and urban school psychologists, none of the urban school
psychologists responded "yes" to this question about the pressure to remove a student from
school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavior or
safety. However, six of the 14 suburban school psychologists (42.85%) reported the opposite
indicating that they had experienced pressure to remove a student from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavioral or safety concerns.

Percentages indicate a similar favorable response pattern as to whether the school psychologists from those two areas would choose a career in school psychology if they had a choice to do things over again. Equally, both urban and suburban school psychologists reported similar burnout responses; however, more urban-based school psychologists rated their administrators as incompetent or inflexible. Furthermore, a higher percentage of urban school psychologists reported feeling caught between meeting student's needs and complying with administrators' demands, feeling that the actions of administrators make it hard to follow legal regulations (i.e., act in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations).

In regard to leaving the profession, response patterns between suburban vs. urban school psychologists are relatively similar. Data indicates that 75% (n=8) of urban school psychologists plan to leave the profession within the next five years because of administrative pressure, and 71.42% (n=7) of urban school psychologists that completed the questionnaire plan to leave their current job within five years because of administrative pressure. In looking at suburban responses, the results are very similar. Eleven (72.72%) of the suburban school psychologists plan to leave the profession within the next five years because of administrative pressure, while 70% plan to leave their current job within five years because of administrative pressure.

**Future Studies**

**Administrative Training Programs**

One important study for the future is researching administrative training programs. We need to gather more information to answer key research questions and better understand why the problem of administrative pressure exists. We need to learn more about administrators, their
training specifically in special education, and advocacy for marginalized populations. School psychologists and school administration work closely within a school system. Having a positive, professional relationship can promote a healthy working environment. In my opinion, a healthy working environment will encourage school psychologists to stay in the field which may have a positive impact on the shortage of school psychologists. Successful principals understand that creating a positive school climate is an essential attribute in creating a successful school (MacNeil et al., 2009), but there needs to be more than a positive culture. By looking more closely into principal training programs, collecting research data may shed more light on administrative pressure to engage in unethical practices and provide recommendations for future practices to rectify the problem.

This recommendation supports the findings from the Roberts and Guerra (2017) study that identified the lowest area of knowledge according to input from principals was special education regulations, with 41% supporting a need for more training in special education laws. Interestingly, 10% of principals surveyed suggested that principal practicum students should be mentored by a special education supervisor or diagnostician to acquire knowledge about special education procedures. Levine (2005) reported that principal training programs lack conformity and are outdated. Based on the literature review, there is a gap in this area, and further research is recommended.

Changing Roles of School Administrators

Studying the changing roles of administrators (i.e. principals) is an important topic that needs to be researched as the changes in their role may impact the pressure placed on school psychologists. School administrators have multiple obligations and manage demands from various stakeholders. They are expected to maintain a well-functioning school, manage
personnel, and create a safe learning environment while working with budget constraints and the public (Baker et al., 2016; Muse, 2009). Managing a school building is not an easy task, and principal responsibilities have expanded. One responsibility involves implementing policies connected to the Individuals Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (DiPaola & Walther-Thomas, 2003). For districts that do not have a special education director, principals oversee special education (Hoppey & McLeskey, 2013). There is a potential problem in that shift. Lynch (2012) claims that principals are not prepared to supervise special education programs because they have limited knowledge of special education policy and limited understanding of disabilities. DiPaola et al. (2004) identify a lack of adequate instruction and field-based experience in principal training programs. If a principal lacks training and is unprepared to lead inclusive schools, students with disabilities are at a higher risk of having their legal rights violated. Lack of training can lead to significant complications involving educational rights and increases the chance of lawsuits (Ball & Green, 2014). Understanding the pressures principals face from their district-level administrators (e.g., superintendents) may contribute to improved communication and change that could benefit school psychologists (Boccio, 2017).

**Need for Equity Training**

Another area involving administration training involves social justice and equity. There is a growing demand for school districts to review equity and equality policies, leading to new leadership styles. Skrla et al. (2011) refer to these leaders as equity-oriented change agents. These leaders are expected to demonstrate equity-oriented leadership, participate in difficult conversations, remove inequities, and recognize cultural differences within their schools (Skrla et al., 2011). Theoharis (2009) identified that these kinds of school leaders can transform schools into equitable communities. Training educators in decision-making and engaging in self-
reflection may improve social justice initiatives within a school. Boccio et al. (2016) supports improvements in administrators' training implying that differences in training contributes to the difficulties school psychologists experience. The lack of formal training may result in directives that are out of compliance with ethical codes or state/federal guidelines. This information is consistent with earlier findings whereby principals make decisions in the best interest of students in general, rather than what is legally mandated (Frick & Faircloth, 2007). Based on my findings, participants identified school systems and communities as part of the problem regarding advocacy work; thus, multi-level training and education in and out of the school buildings is necessary.

**Improvements in School Psychology Training Programs**

In addition to recommending future research on administrative training, my findings support the need to research school psychology training programs. The goal would be to ensure training is appropriate to meet the demands of the job, learn how to advocate for marginalized populations, and manage potential repercussions. The participants in my study provided numerous suggestions showing a need in this area which is similar to those in the 2007 Dailor study, where less than 40% of school psychologists reported feeling prepared to address unethical conduct.

Another essential factor to consider when trying understanding why the pressure is occurring and what can be done to rectify the problem, is to look at the professional training that all educators receive in ethics and ethical decision making. School psychology programs include training to make informed decisions when challenging, ethical situations arise (Flanagan et al., 2005). Ethics training occurs in school psychology programs (Domenech Rodriguez et al., 2014); however, ethics training is limited in administrative and teacher training programs. Additional
research is warranted to study teacher and educational training programs in more detail (Levine, 2005).

Participants in the Schilling et al. (2018) study identified school psychology training programs as being out of touch with actual work experience. Training programs focused on best practices rather than what happens in schools. Participants in the study emphasized the need to make training programs more realistic to the role of the school psychologists. Moreover, coursework and class activities should include discussions and role-plays to address strategies to negotiate conflicts with superiors and manage ethical pressures. Boccio (2015) identified the need for role-playing exercises as well along with coursework on professional ethics and internships.

**Recommendations to Support School Psychologists**

Past NASP membership surveys suggest that supervision and mentoring for school psychologists is usually delivered by supervisors who are not school psychologists (Curtis et al., 2012). Having experienced school psychologists mentor new school psychologists may be a practical recommendation to consider. Another area worthy of research that connects the results from my study with prior studies is how school psychologists manage administrative pressure. Pope et al. (1987) identified that while school psychologists know they should report unethical practices, they are hesitant to do so. This still seems to be an issue and is worthy of a more focused study. It would be interesting to find out why school psychologists are not discussing these problems with their union representatives and why school psychologists are not consulting with organizations such as ASPP or NASP. To take it one step further, exploring the union representatives' understanding of ethical pressures school psychologists experience is also worthy of research.
Consulting with Unions and Organizations

Although school psychologists are expected to share concerns and be a voice for the voiceless, they are discouraged from engaging in insubordinate (NASP, 2020). According to NASP, if a school psychologist suspects that another school psychologist or another professional has engaged in unethical practices, they are recommended to address the problem amongst themselves. If this is not possible, school psychologists are then advised to take further action, including discussing concerns with a supervisor, consulting with state association ethics committees, or filing a formal ethical violation complaint with state or national organizations. Although reporting a concern to an agency is an option to consider, data in my study and prior studies show that school psychologists are hesitant to do this (Pope et al., 1987; Dailor, 2007). This is a very sensitive matter, but it needs to be researched to understand why it is underutilized.

Applying inferential statistics to a larger sample may help to clarify differences in the types of unethical pressures school psychologists from different settings and with different levels of experience face. Additional research could explore potential differences in response to administrative pressure based on occupational variables such as employment in low-income communities, districts with high turnover rates, or districts that experience higher requests for mediation or due process hearings. Future studies could include surveying school psychologists who have left the field, although accessing those individuals may be challenging. Pursuing larger samplings in urban, rural, and suburban school settings is recommended, and looking at additional demographic variables to evaluate correlation rates as well as inferential statistics with larger sample sizes to determine potential discrepancy patterns is suggested.
**Scheduling Effects**

I was aware of the unique pressures placed on school psychologists during the 2020-2021 school year due to Covid-19 and the impact that the virus had on education and school psychologists in particular. Since in-person interviews were prohibited and it was essential to respect the increased work demands, potential health issues, and subsequent stress, participants could choose from three interview methods to best suit their needs. Offering participants the three options was an appropriate step to take due to the pandemic.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations to this study. These include small sample size, lack of national perspective, potential issues with rater reliability in how they interpret an experience, potential for errors in their recall of ethical pressures that occurred in retrospect. The type and submit response option was offered to participants due to the increased demands placed upon school psychologists at the time of this study and in an effort to encourage participation. While this allowed participants to provide a detailed response at a time that suited their schedule, this method prohibited the ability to make observations of personal reactions, monitor the participant’s tone of voice and intonations, and prompt or encourage expanded responses. Social desirability may have been a factor whereby respondents reported steps they took to address the problem or their responses to questionnaire items or the interview questions. When the questionnaires were being completed, several significant social and political crises were occurring in the United States and may have had an impact on responses. These included but were not limited to a contentious presidential election, refugee crisis (i.e. South American and Mexican individuals crossing the border), worldwide pandemic (Covid-19), racial and law enforcement crisis and civil unrest (civil unrest sparked by the killing of unarmed black
men/women). Lastly, the pre-determined time frame established by the university created limitations.

**Future Plan for Action Research**

The topic and subsequent recommendations found in this mixed-methods study align with the ideology of action research and tie in with the expectations that school psychologists are responsible for encouraging systemic change (Vera & Speight, 2003). The methodology selected in this study provides insights, understanding of a research problem, enhances culturally sensitive measures, encourages sharing of personal experiences, and can improve procedures (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007). Sweetman et al. (2010) support using a mixed-methods design and the need for qualitative data for advocacy research. The findings in this study can be put into action and promote systemic change.

Two plans for action research were identified in the literature review. Ho (2002) identified participatory action research whereby researchers work collaboratively with colleagues to create interventions. This approach would allow school psychologists an opportunity to demonstrate leadership skills and create research-based interventions (Ho, 2002). Another component that can assist in promoting change is the focus on problem-solving. Stringer et al. (1999) promoted a 4-step process including (1) analyzing a problem, (2) researching, (3) creating additional data, and (4) implementing the results to solve and improve a problem.

Another option to consider relevant to action research was from Nastasi et al. (2000). The researchers supported the idea that school psychologists should collaborate with school personnel to develop systemic interventions. Nastasi et al. (2000) created a six-phase process to which included: Phase 1: Forming Collaborations with Stakeholders, Phase 2: Identifying Problems, Phase 3: Data Collection, Phase 4: Data Analysis and Recommendations, Phase 5:
Designing Interventions, and Phase 6: Evaluating the effectiveness of the interventions. Nastasi et al. (2003) believed that participatory action research methodology could create culturally sensitive interventions that promote the empowerment of minorities. These types of interventions can lead to systemic change that ultimately benefits multiple and varied stakeholders.

**Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer Students (LGBTQ)**

This group of marginalized students also needs our support. Although the questionnaire did not ask specific questions related to LGBTQ students, one individual did provide a unique insight worthy of consideration and future study. Since the individual resides in a state outside the mid-Atlantic region, their data was not included in the analyses and report findings; however, their insight was very important to share. When asked to expand on comfort level as it pertains to advocating for marginalized students, this particular school psychologist shared valuable, personal insights to the various marginalized groups addressed in this study.

We are encouraged to advocate for and be knowledgeable of serving marginalized groups. So I'd say I'm lucky in that regard, but there's still some risk associated with that. If we have a racist practice, we want to call it out and do something about it. I would also say there is risk associated with some of the parents that we work with. Parents in our district have massive influence, so we have lots of families in the district who do not really support our racial equity work or inclusion work. They feel that if you are giving resources to black and brown students, then that means you're taking resources away from white students. For instance, I'm a queer person myself, and advocating for queer students still carries a lot of risks from those who are intolerant of people like that. There is probably a white male privilege sort of thing where I am not afraid to identify myself as such to my colleagues or administrators and to use that as a position to boost up my
students, but I know other people in my district or in my building who have been less comfortable, less inclined to help themselves at work because they're worried about how that might cause them to be perceived.

School psychologists are expected to understand these students' lives, which include the bias and discrimination they encounter (McCabe, 2014). In 2000, GLSEN started to conduct school climate surveys every two years. Data shows increasing physical assaults and verbal harassment, making school an unsafe place for these students (McCabe, 2014). LGBTQ students are 140% more likely to miss school due to safety concerns (Human Rights Campaign Foundation, 2010). Although educators report hearing derogatory homophobic language and seeing harassment in schools, including homophobic remarks from colleagues, they are unsure how to address the situation (Dragowski et al., 2014). This adds a further layer of complication and concerns for this marginalized group and why it is so important for school psychologists to advocate on their behalf despite the potential for the adversity they may face. It's important to reiterate the data related to this marginalized group to emphasize the importance of advocacy work.

According to the 2017 Human Rights Campaign (HRC), LGBTQ students are more than twice as likely to feel suicidal and four times more likely to attempt suicide than their heterosexual counterparts (Kann, 2016; Marshal, 2011). Mental health and substance abuse issues are also prevalent within this marginalized group. To support these students, school psychologists need increased training and self-awareness. A survey completed by school psychology graduate students indicated a lack of awareness that LGBTQ individuals are part of an oppressed group. Over 80% of the graduate students admitted they would not intervene for LGBTQ bias or harassment out of concern of not having administrative support (McCabe &
Rubinson, 2008). This data supports the need for future research in order to fully understand these students’ needs and how best we can support them.

**Summary**

School psychologists play a vital role within a school system. Their duties are complex and not without challenges. Research findings show that pressure to engage in unethical practice continues to be a problem just as it was forty years ago when the topic first appeared in research journals. My research findings show that school psychologists face negative repercussions as a result of advocating for marginalized students and for systemic change.

The recommendations identified in this dissertation can be applied to graduate training programs and school districts. Findings also lend a degree of support and comfort for school psychologists who are experiencing ethical pressures and feeling marginalized as a result. The participants' insights reflect a sincere interest and commitment to advocating for marginalized students, which is commendable. I hope readers find guidance and support from what has been shared in this dissertation and that future research recommendations are considered and that my findings help to fill the gaps in the literature.
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Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

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Chester, PA 19383 | 610-436-3557 | www.wcupa.edu
West Chester University is a member of the State System of Higher Education

Protocol ID# 20200828B
This Protocol ID number must be used in all communications about this project with the IRB

TO: Janice Pietrowicz, Brittany Severino, Mimi Staulters
FROM: Nicole M. Cattano, Ph.D.
Co-Chair, WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)
DATE: 8/26/2020

Project Title: An exploration of ethically challenging situations experienced by school psychologists and related outcomes associated with those experiences-A mixed methods study

Date of Approval: 8/26/2020

Expedited Approval PENDING Site Approvals

This protocol has been approved under the new updated 45 CFR 46 common rule that went in to effect January 21, 2019. As a result, this project will not require continuing review. Any revisions to this protocol that are needed will require approval by the WCU IRB. Upon completion of the project, you are expected to submit appropriate closure documentation. Please see www.wcupa.edu/research/irb.aspx for more information.

Any adverse reaction by a research subject is to be reported immediately through the Office of Research and Sponsored Programs via email at irb@wcupa.edu.

Signature:

Co-Chair of WCU IRB
WCU Institutional Review Board (IRB)
IORG#: IORG0004242
IRB#: IRB00005030
FWA#: FWA000141
Appendix B: Questionnaire

School Psychology Occupational Well-Being Survey

Section 1

Directions: Items 1–12 represent specific experiences that may be encountered by school psychologists during the performance of their professional duties. These incidents involve experiencing pressure from administrators (e.g., principals, assistant principals, directors of pupil personnel services) to perform certain behaviors or make certain decisions. Please indicate whether or not you have personally encountered any of these scenarios during the entirety of your career in the field of school psychology.

I have experienced pressure from administrators to...

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>avoid recommending certain support services due to costs to the district.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>agree with a special education placement that was not the least restrictive appropriate environment for the student.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>make a student eligible for special education who did not meet eligibility requirements.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>avoid finding a student eligible for special education who did meet eligibility requirements.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>“make do” with inadequate assessment and/or intervention materials.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>perform job duties that are outside the scope of my training and expertise.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>remove a student from school or encourage parents to keep the student home without due process due to behavioral and/or safety concerns.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>disclose information about a client that I considered confidential.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>make decisions or take actions that I believed were unethical.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>make decisions or take actions that I believed were unethical, with an implied threat to my job standing (e.g., negative evaluation, move to less desirable assignment, loss of job) if I did not comply.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>make decisions or take actions that I believed were not in compliance with federal or state law.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>make decisions or take actions that I believed were not in compliance with federal or state law, with an implied threat to my job standing (e.g., negative evaluation, move to less desirable assignment, loss of job) if I did not comply.</td>
<td>Yes  No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
If you have experienced any other types of administrative pressure to behave or act in ways that made you uncomfortable, please explain below: __________________________

Section 2:

Directions: The items in this section assess your feelings about your job and your choice of profession. Using the scale below, please circle the option that best reflects your agreement with the following statements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Disagree 1</th>
<th>Disagree 2</th>
<th>Slightly Disagree 3</th>
<th>Slightly Agree 4</th>
<th>Agree 5</th>
<th>Strongly Agree 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>How Much Do You Agree? (1-6)</strong></td>
<td>Statements:</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. I feel satisfied with my current position.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I feel satisfied with my choice of profession.</td>
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<td>3. If I had the choice to do over again, I would still choose a career in school psychology.</td>
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<td>4. I think highly of the administrators I work with.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. The administrators I work with are cooperative.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. The administrators I work with are incompetent and/or inflexible.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. I have a good relationship with the administrators I work with.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. The administrators I work with understand the ethical responsibilities of school psychologists.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. The administrators I work with are knowledgeable about state and federal laws that pertain to special education.</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. I feel burned out because of having to deal with pressure from administrators to behave in ways that I feel are unethical.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I feel burned out because of having to work with uncooperative/inflexible administrators.</td>
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<tr>
<td>12. I often feel caught between meeting students’ needs and complying with administrators’ demands.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. The actions of administrators make it hard to follow legal regulations (i.e., act in compliance with federal, state, and local regulations).</td>
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<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
14. Have you previously left a school psychology job because of pressure from administrators to behave unethically and/or illegally?
   - Yes
   - No

15. Have you previously asked for a transfer to another position because of pressure from administrators to behave unethically and/or illegally?
   - Yes
   - No

16. If you have experienced administrative pressure to behave unethically and/or illegally, was there any action you took to manage or cope with the situation? (Check all that apply. Check N/A if you haven’t experienced administrative pressure).
   - Tried to educate my administrator about my ethical/legal responsibilities
   - Informed my administrator about the potential consequences of not behaving ethically/legally (e.g., parents file due process complaint)
   - Brought my concerns to another administrator in a higher position
   - Spoke with colleagues to obtain advice and emotional support
   - Contacted NASP or other school psychology association for advice from their ethics committee
   - Educated parents about their rights
   - Directed parents to an advocacy organization
   - Contacted my state department of education
   - Spoke to my union representative
   - Complied with administrative demands
   - Negotiated a compromise that was consistent with my ethical/legal responsibilities and also acceptable to my administrator
   - Not Applicable (N/A)
   - Other: ________________________________________________________________

17. Have you found any particular action(s) helpful in dealing with pressure from administrators?

18. Please rate your desire to leave your current job within the next 5 years because of administrative pressure.

19. Please rate your desire to leave the profession altogether within the next 5 years because of administrative pressure.

*This question was added to the Qualtrics link, it is not part of the SPOWS
*How, if at all, has COVID-19 added to the pressure you experience as a school psychologist?
Appendix C: Informed Consent Form for Questionnaire

Informed Consent

Project Title: An exploration of ethically challenging situations experienced by school psychologists and related outcomes associated with those experiences-A mixed methods study.

Investigator: Janice Pietrowicz, Doctoral student at West Chester University

Key Information: The purpose of this research is to explore ethically challenging situations experienced by school psychologists and related outcomes associated with those experiences.

Project Overview: Completion of a survey will take approximately 20-25 minutes followed by an optional interview that will take approximately 15-30 minutes. If selected to participate in the interview, participants can choose to be interviewed over Zoom, telephone or submit written responses to a Qualtrics link. The interview will be conducted at a convenient time and you will receive the interview questions in advance.

If you have any questions, consult Janice Pietrowicz. If you choose not to be a part of this study, it will not affect any services from West Chester University. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to withdraw, at any time.

1. What is the purpose of this study?
Explore ethically challenging situations experienced by school psychologists and outcomes associated with those experiences

2. If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:
Sign consent form, complete survey and consider completing the optional interview.

3. Are there any experimental medical treatments?
No

4. Is there any risk to me?
There is a minimal risk. Possible risks include discomfort discussing administrative pressures experiences, and loss of free time. If you become upset, you can speak with Janice Pietrowicz or Dr. Staulters from West Chester University. You can withdraw from the study, at any time, or ask that the interview be conducted over more than one session.

5. Is there any benefit to me?
There may be no benefit to the participants; however, participants may experience relief when they share information related to the pressure they experienced. The anticipated benefits to the professional field include expanding research on this topic and possible support to others who have experienced pressure, and promote change in policies/procedures.
6. How will you protect my privacy?
All hard copies of the research related documents (i.e. interview notes) and related data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Ms. Pietrowicz’s home office. Only Ms. Pietrowicz, Ms. Brittany Severino (doctoral candidate who will see 15% of the de-identified data), and academic advisor, Dr. Staulters, will have access to this data. The data will be de-identified by assigning each participant a pseudonym that will be used instead of their name. A list of participant names and numbers will be created. This list and all consent forms will be locked in the file cabinet in Ms. Pietrowicz’s home office. All questionnaires will be anonymous as IP addresses will not be collected. Taped interviews will be securely saved on OneDrive. Any data that is saved on the designated laptop will be password protected and encrypted thumb drives will further secure the information. The laptop will also be locked in a secured cabinet when not in use. All data and related materials will be destroyed three years from the completion of the study. Information obtained through the Qualtrics platform will be protected by high-end firewall systems and remain confidential.

7. Do I get paid to take part in this study?
No, but volunteers who complete the survey and the interview will choose a $10 electronic gift card from Target, Amazon or Walmart.

8. Who do I contact in case of research related injury?
Primary Investigator: Janice Pietrowicz at 215-718-7620 or JP051647@wcupa.edu
Faculty Sponsor: Merry Staulters at 610-436-2398 or mstaulters@wcupa.edu

9. What will you do with my Identifiable Information?
No identifying information will be used in any report produced from this research. The research will be used to complete the dissertation requirement for the WCU Doctoral Program in Education Policy, Planning and Administration. Dissertations will be shared through Digital Commons, an open access journal owned by RELX Group, and may be shared in other publications, scholarly journals, and conference presentations.

For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557.

I, _________________________________ (your name), have read this consent form and understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, but I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.

I can be reached at the following email: _________________________________ (personal email address)

I understand this information will remain confidential and not be shared.

_________________________________ Date: ________________
Subject/Participant Signature

_________________________________ Date: ________________
Witness Signature
Appendix D: Informed Consent for Interview

Project Title: An exploration of ethically challenging situations experienced by school psychologists and related outcomes associated with those experiences - A mixed methods study.

Investigator: Janice Pietrowicz

Key Information: The purpose of this research is to explore ethically challenging situations experienced by school psychologists and related outcomes associated with those experiences.

Project Overview: The interview will be conducted by Janice Pietrowicz as part of her Doctoral Dissertation Research at West Chester University. If selected to participate in the 1:1 interview, participants can choose to be interviewed over Zoom, telephone or submit written responses to the Qualtrics link provided after consent is submitted. Interviews will be arranged via email at a time that is convenient to the participant. Participants who opt to submit written responses will have 2 weeks to respond at which time a reminder email will be sent. All interviewees will have access to the questions 24 hours in advance of the interview. If a participant is not comfortable answering a question or chooses to not participate in the interview, they are permitted to omit a response or withdraw from the study, at any time. The Zoom and telephone interview will be audio taped, transcribed and provided to the participant for final review. All materials will be kept in a secured location.

If you have any questions about the study prior to or during your participation, you may consult with Janice Pietrowicz. If you choose not to be a part of this study, it will not affect any services from West Chester University. If you choose to be a part of this study, you have the right to change your mind, withdraw, and stop your involvement at any time.

1. What is the purpose of this study?
Explore ethically challenging situations experienced by school psychologists and outcomes associated with those experiences.

2. If you decide to be a part of this study, you will be asked to do the following:
Sign consent form and complete interview that takes approximately 15-30 minutes.

3. Are there any experimental medical treatments?
No

4. Is there any risk to me?
There is a minimal risk. Possible risks include discomfort discussing administrative pressures experiences, and loss of free time. If you become upset, you can speak with Janice Pietrowicz or Dr. Staulters from West Chester University. You can withdraw from the study, at any time, or ask that the interview be conducted over more than one session.

5. Is there any benefit to me?
There may be no benefit to the participants; however, participants may experience relief when they share information related to the pressure they experienced. The anticipated benefits to the
professional field include expanding research on this topic and possible support to others who have experienced pressure, and promote change in policies/procedures.

6. How will you protect my privacy?
All hard copies of the research related documents (i.e. interview notes) and related data will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in Ms. Pietrowicz’s home office. Only Ms. Pietrowicz, Ms. Brittany Severino (doctoral candidate who will see 15% of the de-identified data), and academic advisor, Dr. Staulters, will have access to this data. The data will be de-identified by assigning each participant a pseudonym that will be used instead of their name. A list of participant names and numbers will be created. This list and all consent forms will be locked in the file cabinet in Ms. Pietrowicz’s home office. All questionnaires will be anonymous as IP addresses will not be collected. Taped interviews will be securely saved on OneDrive. Any data that is saved on the designated laptop will be password protected and encrypted thumb drives will further secure the information. The laptop will also be locked in a secured cabinet when not in use. All data and related materials will be destroyed three years from the completion of the study. Information obtained through the Qualtrics platform will be protected by high-end firewall systems and remain confidential.

7. Do I get paid to take part in this study?
No, but volunteers who complete the survey and the interview will choose a $10 electronic gift card from Target, Amazon or Walmart.

8. Who do I contact in case of research related injury?
Primary Investigator: Janice Pietrowicz at 215-718-7620 or JP051647@wcupa.edu
Faculty Sponsor: Merry Staulters at 610-436-2398 or mstaulters@wcupa.edu

9. What will you do with my Identifiable Information?
No identifying information will be used in any report produced from this research. The research will be used to complete the dissertation requirement for the WCU Doctoral Program in Education Policy, Planning and Administration. Dissertations will be shared through Digital Commons, an open access journal owned by RELX Group, and may be shared through other publications in scholarly journals, and in conference presentations. For any questions about your rights in this research study, contact the ORSP at 610-436-3557. I, ___________________________ (your name), have read this form and I understand the statements in this form. I know that if I am uncomfortable with this study, I can stop at any time. I know that it is not possible to know all possible risks in a study, and I think that reasonable safety measures have been taken to decrease any risk.
I can be reached at the following number: ___________________________.
I can be reached at the following email: ___________________________ in order to set up the interview or to have the Qualtrics interview link emailed to me.
I understand that this information will remain confidential and not be shared.

__________________________________________ Date: ________________
Subject/Participant Signature

__________________________________________ Date: ________________
Witness Signature
Appendix E: Recruitment Materials

Dear School Psychologist,

Hello, my name is Janice Pietrowicz. I am a school psychologist, and doctoral student at West Chester University. My advisor is Dr. Staulters. She can be reached at 610-436-2398 or mstaulters@wcupa.edu. I am contacting you to invite you to participate in my research about school psychologists. The title of my study is: An exploration of ethically challenging situations experienced by school psychologists and related outcomes associated with those experiences-A mixed methods study. The inclusion/exclusion criteria are listed below.

Inclusion criteria:
- Participants will be certified school psychologists in the United States.
- Participants employed full-time as a school psychologist in a public, private, or other school setting/agency.
- Participants will have a minimum of one-year experience in a public, private, or other school setting/agency.
- Participants may be part of the study if they are currently taking a temporary leave from work due to the following reasons: maternity/paternity leave, Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Military Leave, Bereavement, and/or American with Disabilities Act (ADA).

Exclusion criteria:
- Participant who has not served one year as a full-time school psychologist post training/internship experience
- Retired or unemployed school psychologists

The questionnaire will take 20-25 minutes to complete followed by an optional interview. The optional interview consists of 7 questions and will take approximately 15-30 minutes. You will receive the interview questions 24 hours in advance of the interview. Interviews will take place over the phone, ZOOM, or by submitting typed responses to a Qualtrics link, and can be completed at a time most convenient for you. Face to face interviews are prohibited due to COVID-19 restrictions. Participants who complete the survey and interview will receive an electronic $10 gift card to Target, Walmart or Amazon. All information is kept confidential. There are minimal to no risks involved with the study, and you can withdraw at any time. Possible benefits include contributing to the limited research in the field, promoting change in policy and practices, and providing encouragement/support to others who have had similar experiences. If you are interested in participating in this study, click on the link below.

Please forward this email to other school psychologists that may be interested in participating.

https://qfreeaccounts.sjc1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_a97Kt2dcJ3NJ5ul

Thank you for your time and support!
Janice Pietrowicz
JP051647@wcupa.edu
IRB Protocol Approval # 20200828B
Appendix F: Permission to use SPOWS

Note: Dr. Boccio used the Maslach Burnout Inventory in her study, but the Maslach Burnout Inventory will not be used in this research study.

From: Dana Boccio <dboccio@adelphi.edu>
Sent: Saturday, April 18, 2020 8:51 PM
To: Janice Pietrowicz <Janice_Pietrowicz@msn.com>
Subject: Re: Ethics and School Psychology

Hi Janice,
I am glad to hear you are interested in exploring the topic of ethics in school psychology and I am more than happy to share the SPOWS with you. I have attached it to this email. The first 22 items are from the Maslach Burnout Inventory - since it's a proprietary measure, you may need to get permission to use it or purchase it. But the rest of the instrument does not require any special permission. I'm happy to answer any questions you may have.
All the Best,
Dana
Appendix G: Interview Script
Participant Assigned Code ________

Hello (first name),

My name is Janice Pietrowicz. I am a school psychologist, and I am working towards my doctoral degree at West Chester University. Thank you for completing the survey and agreeing to participate in the interview. I have received your signed consent form. The data you provide will enhance the research in the field of school psychology. It will be used in my dissertation and possible future publications for professional development purposes. I know you have already provided written consent to participate in this interview, so I will review a few items before we get started. Is that okay?

I want to let you know that this interview is taking place in my home office with the door closed to minimize distractions and keep this conversation confidential. This interview will last approximately 15-30 minutes, depending on the length of your responses. I will use my cell phone to tape this interview. You have the right to refrain from answering a question(s) that make you feel uncomfortable or that does not apply to you. You can request the interview to occur in more than one session. You have the right to withdraw from this interview at any time. To protect your privacy, I will not be using your name when analyzing or sharing the data. The information will be stored securely on my laptop and destroyed in three years. I ask that you refrain from using the names of colleagues, students, or schools, but if you do share that information, it will not appear in the transcripts or dissertation. After the interview takes place, I will transcribe the interview and email you a copy for your final review within 7-10 days. Do you have any immediate questions?

I will start taping this interview and begin with a few basic questions:
1. I have your signed consent form. Do I have your consent to proceed with the interview?
2. Did you receive a copy of the interview questions in advance?
3. Do you give your consent to have this interview audio recorded?
4. Do you understand your rights, as explained?
5. Do you have any questions/concerns?
6. To show my appreciation, what type of gift card shall I email you: Amazon, Walmart, or Target?

Today, I will ask you seven questions relevant to my research topic: An exploration of ethically challenging situations experienced by school psychologists and related outcomes associated with those experiences. After the interview takes place, I will transcribe the interview and email you a copy for your final review within 7-10 days.

Interview Questions:
1) According to the National Association School Psychologist (NASP) 2019 Policy Playbook, 2020 Code of Ethics, and the NASP Practice Model, school psychologists are expected to advocate for marginalized students and promote social justice within school settings. Please share with me, your comfort level, as it pertains to this role, including your ability to embrace the challenges to make the necessary changes within your current school setting.
2) Please describe 2-3 experiences related to pressure to act unethically that you personally encountered including how those experiences impacted your motivation to advocate for students?

3) How do you believe administrative pressure could impact a school psychologist’s recommendations related to eligibility determinations and placement decisions and what are the potential problems or consequences associated with those two types of pressures?

4) In your efforts to advocate on behalf of students, what type of repercussions (i.e. ostracized, reprimanded, intimidation, reassignment) have you experienced, if any, and how did you manage these repercussions?

5) Given that school psychologists are expected to advocate for marginalized students, how could advocating for marginalized students lead to the personal or professional marginalization of school psychologists?

6) What additional supports or training do you believe are needed to better prepare school psychologists to promote social justice within their school settings?

7) In your role of school psychologist, what do you see as the biggest challenges in promoting social justice causes in schools and school communities?
Appendix H: Support for Recruitment (ASPP)

From: Timothy Runge <trunge@iup.edu>
Sent: Friday, September 4, 2020 9:42 AM
To: Janice Pietrowicz <janice_pietrowicz@msn.com>
Subject: Results of ASPP Research Opportunity Review

Dear Ms. Pietrowicz,

Congratulations! Your study, “An exploration of ethically challenging situations experienced by school psychologists and related outcomes associated with those experiences – A mixed methods study,” has been approved by the Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania (ASPP). At this point, we will post your Project Description containing the hyperlink to your survey to our membership.

Please provide us with the hyperlink within the next 3 business days so we can post your recruitment message.

We will also send out a web-blast to association members indicating ASPP’s endorsement of your project and encouraging members to participate in the coming days.

We also encourage all researchers who access ASPP Members to submit a study brief for publication in our tri-annual newsletter, InSight. I am the co-editor and am always interested in receiving research summaries to publish to our members, especially those studies in which our members participated. Call it a way to positively reinforce members for participating in your research.

Best,
Tjr

Timothy J. Runge, PhD, NCSP, BCBA
Professor
Department of Educational and School Psychology
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
246C Stouffer Hall
1175 Maple Street
Indiana, PA 15705-1087
Phone: (724) 357-3788
Association of School Psychologists of Pennsylvania, Communications Chair
Appendix I: Approval to Use NASP Figure

Chris Goode <cgoode@naspweb.org>
Wed 11/4/2020 4:18 PM
Hello Janice,

You may use this figure in your dissertation. Please use the following cite w/ "Use is by permission."

If you find you should require a formal permission letter, please get back to me via this e-mail.

Note. From The Professional Standards of the National Association of School Psychologists (p. 3), by the National Association of School Psychologists, 2020 (https://www.nasponline.org/x55315.xml). Copyright 2020 by the National Association of School Psychologists

Hope this helps.

Chris Goode
NASP Publications Department