ETHICAL DECISION-MAKING
IN PROFESSIONAL CONSULTATIVE PRACTICE:
A SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGY PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT. The purpose of this study was to investigate the ethical understanding of school psychologists and, more particularly, their ability to identify ethical issues within their consultative practice. The researchers also sought to determine whether the differences between consultative orientations (e.g., psychometrician versus problem-solver) would influence the ability to identify ethical issues. The results of the study indicated that the ability to identify ethical issues varies between individuals and across situations and that the ethical dilemmas themselves appear to influence the identification of issues. Further, the researchers determined that there were no substantial differences between school psychologists' consultative orientations in their ability to identify ethical issues. Based upon the results of the study, the term "ethical" was categorized according to three ethical decision-making orientations: value-oriented, rule-oriented, and intuitive. Finally, the implications regarding the measurement of ethical understanding and the development of guidelines for school psychological consultation are discussed in the paper.

RÉSUMÉ. Cette étude visait à étudier la compréhension que les psychologues scolaires ont des questions d'éthique et, plus particulièrement, leur capacité à discerner les questions d'éthique qui surgissent dans leur pratique de consultation. Les chercheurs ont également tenté de déterminer si les différentes orientations des intervenants (p. ex., psychométrie par opposition à résolution de problèmes) ont un effet sur la capacité de discerner les questions d'éthique. Les résultats révèlent que la capacité à discerner les questions d'éthique varie selon les individus et les situations et que les delemmes éthiques eux-mêmes semblent affecter l'identification des questions. De plus, les chercheurs ont établi qu'il n'y a aucune différence importante entre les psychologues scolaires d'orientations diverses quant à leur capacité à identifier les questions d'éthique. En se fondant sur les résultats de l'étude, les auteurs ont catégorisé le terme "éthique" en fonction de trois orientations régissant la prise de décision en ce domaine: orientation axée sur les valeurs, orientation axée sur les règles et orientation intuitive. Enfin, les auteurs traitent des répercussions de la mesure de la compréhension des questions d'éthique et de la formulation de lignes directrices à l'intention des psychologues scolaires.

Professional psychologists often encounter ethical dilemmas in their practice of consultation. Consequently, adequacy of graduate training in ethics and consultation, competency of the consultant, determination of clientage, and rights of the client have been addressed in recent school, clinical, and counselling psychology literature. However, few research studies have investigated the perceptions of school psychologists themselves, particularly in relation to their identification and interpretation of ethical dilemmas within their professional roles.

The roles and responsibilities of school psychologists have evolved from primarily a direct service orientation to a more consultative orientation which incorporates both direct and indirect services. Direct service includes "both psychoeducational and curriculum-based assessment, counselling and group interventions, while indirect services consist of consultation, inservice training, and various prevention programs" (Scholten, Pettifor, Norrie, & Cole, 1993, p. 101). Although numerous models of consultation have been developed (e.g., behavioural, mental health), a consultant may use one or several models depending upon the nature of the situation (Babcock & Pryzwansky, 1983).

Scholten (1990) identified four consultative orientations underlying the role of the school psychologist: psychometrician, diagnostician, assessor, and problem-solver. In each of these orientations, the function of consultation is viewed somewhat differently. Within the psychometrician orientation, consultation is not an essential component; rather, it is employed only when testing is deemed inappropriate (e.g., working with English as a Second Language student). Within the diagnostician orientation, a school psychologist may consult with school personnel prior to formal assessment. Such consultations serve as screening devices to ensure that psychological assessments are not carried out unnecessarily. Within the role of the assessor, consultation may be incorporated during pre- and post-assessment phases in order to address teacher concerns and to disseminate information regarding assessment findings. The problem-solver, the fourth orientation, considers consultation to be an integral component of all aspects of practice in the schools because the facilitation of the problem-solving process is encouraged at all times (Scholten, 1990; Scholten et al., 1993).

Professional psychology associations (e.g., Canadian Psychology Association, American Psychological Association, provincial associations) are governed by codes of ethics. These codes are developed to assist the establishment of a professional group, to act as a guide and support for

professionals, to enable the group to meet responsibilities as a profession, and to assist the professional with the resolution of ethical dilemmas through the provision of a "statement of moral principle" (Sinclair, Poizner, Gilmour-Barrett, & Randall, 1987, p. 2). These codes, however, place little emphasis upon consultative matters and may, at times, be less than adequate in addressing the current needs of the psychologist within the school system (Crego, 1985; Eberlein, 1988; Gallessich, 1982; Robinson & Gross, 1985; Scholten et al., 1993). Several factors may influence the successful application of the principles underlying available codes of ethics within ethical dilemmas in the workplace: specific guidelines are not provided for consultants, real-life dilemmas may be ambiguous in nature, and novice practitioners may not have the necessary experience or knowledge base with which to resolve the dilemma (Smith, McGuire, Abbott, & Blau, 1991; Tennyson & Strom, 1986).

The identification and interpretation of ethical dilemmas within psychologists' practices may also be influenced by their personally developed ethical codes of conduct, philosophical views on morality and moral behavior as well as their level of moral development (Kitchener, 1986; Kohlberg, 1984; Rest, 1983; Tennyson & Strom, 1986). Researchers within the counselling and clinical psychology arenas have examined psychologists' moral understanding and decision-making using J.R. Rest's theory of moral decision-making.

Rest (1983) views the production of moral behavior as an interaction of psychological processes involving cognitive and affective elements. Rest has identified four components of moral behavior: moral sensitivity, moral reasoning, moral motivation, and moral action. Moral sensitivity refers to the identification and interpretation of a situation as a moral one (Rest, 1984, 1986). For psychologists, "moral sensitivity means the ability to recognize the ethical [moral] dimensions of a situation along with its clinical, scholarly, or pragmatic aspects" (Welfel & Kitchener, 1992, p. 179). Moral reasoning, the second component, involves the determination of an appropriate (i.e., right, just, or fair) course of action. Psychologists must have the capability to differentiate moral choices from nonmoral ones. Their capabilities to do so are influenced by their current conception of fairness or by their level of moral development, knowledge and understanding of professional codes of ethics, and education and training (Rest, 1984; Welfel & Kitchener, 1992). Moral motivation, the third component, involves the selection of a course of action based upon competing values. For the psychologist, this involves making a morally defensible choice despite the potential

costs associated with this decision (Welfel & Kitchener, 1992). Finally, moral action, the fourth component, refers to the implementation of an action plan. The psychologist's ability to execute a morally defensible action plan despite external pressure to behave differently may be considered a function of moral action (Welfel & Kitchener, 1992).

Several research studies have focussed on counselling and clinical psychologists and the ethical dilemmas or problems within their practice (Haas, Malouf, & Mayerson, 1986; 1988). These studies used questionnaires in which vignettes were presented depicting ethical problems. Respondents were requested to select, from a set of predetermined resolutions, their preferred resolution to the ethical dilemma presented in each vignette. Results indicated that characteristics such as gender, theoretical orientation, work setting, and ethics training did not appear to influence the respondents' choice of action. However, there was variability among the respondents regarding their preferred resolution to the ethical dilemmas. Although these studies did not address consultation issues *per se* nor did they survey practitioners in school psychology, the current study used a research methodology similar to their design.

The purpose of this study was to investigate school psychologists' understanding of ethical dilemmas within their consultative practices. More specifically, we sought to determine whether school psychologists could identify ethical issues within written vignettes depicting dilemmas representative of "real-life" situations. In addition, school psychologists were asked to outline how they practice consultation and explain their understanding of the term "ethical". It was hypothesized that differences would exist between consultative orientations and ethical understanding given the different situations which might arise as a function of the kind of consultative orientations school psychologists might have.

METHOD

Sample and sampling procedures

The participants for the study were drawn from Saskatchewan school psychologists identified as educational psychologists by their respective regional co-ordinators of special education. As Saskatchewan Education required that only one educational psychologist be named per school division, the names of the educational psychologists identified were cross-referenced with the 1992 and 1993 Saskatchewan Educa-

tional Psychology Association (SEPA) membership directories. SEPA members who were not named by the regional co-ordinators but who were employed by the school system (e.g., employees of school boards or Shared Services) were included in the sample. As two sources were utilized in the identification of Saskatchewan school psychologists, it is reasonable to assume that the group included in this study was in fact the population of Saskatchewan school psychologists employed within the school system.

A total of 53 school psychologists were identified for participation in the research project. A stratified random sample of school psychologists (n=15) was selected for participation in a semi-structured interview; the remaining 38 members of the population received mail questionnaires. Fourteen interviews were completed and 30 questionnaires were returned. In total, 44 members (83%) of the population of school psychologists participated in the research project. There were 22 males and 21 females; one respondent on the questionnaire did not indicate gender. Forty-one of the participants had completed graduate training and had received either a master's degree or a post-graduate diploma. Three respondents held an undergraduate degree. Years of experience as a school psychologist ranged from 1.5 years to 30 years; the mean number of years of experience was 7.8 years for the questionnaire respondents and 12 years for the interview participants.

Research design

The study incorporated two research instruments devised by the researchers: a mail questionnaire and a semi-structured interview. In order to ensure that the measurement instruments adequately reflected the intent of the research study, both the questionnaire and the semi-structured interview were subjected to content validation and a pilot study. The content validity of the vignettes and accompanying response statements in both the questionnaire and interview was assessed by three Saskatchewan professional psychologists who had expertise in the area of professional ethics. Each of the three psychologists were requested to evaluate, using specific criteria, thirteen sets of vignettes.

The thirteen vignettes depicted situations which typified school psychologists' consultative practice. Of the original thirteen vignettes, seven were selected for inclusion in the questionnaire. Five vignettes depicted ethical dilemmas and two represented dilemmas which were pragmatic in nature. Vignettes deemed to be pragmatic were included in the questionnaire in order to ensure that the respondents were not

inadvertently cued to look for ethical issues in all vignettes. According to Welfel (1992), "to assess ethical sensitivity one must not cue the respondent to the presence of an ethical problem" (p. 184). Four of the seven vignettes (three with ethical dilemmas; one with a pragmatic issue) included in the mail questionnaire were also used for the interview. The vignettes are summarized in Table 1. A pilot study of the mail questionnaire was conducted on a sample of Manitoba school psychologists in order to provide the researcher with information regarding any necessary revisions of the content (e.g., clarity of questions). Given the limited number of subjects, no Saskatchewan school psychologists were asked to participate in the pilot study.

Mail questionnaire

The questionnaire consisted of three sections. In the first section, respondents were asked to document the professional development opportunities and university courses they had completed. They were also asked to describe their consultative practice and indicate what percentage of time was spent in activities ranging from direct service to administrative duties. The second section of the questionnaire was comprised of the seven written vignettes and the accompanying response statements. Each of the vignettes required the respondents to rate the response statements on a five-point scale ranging from "definitely not a problem" (1) to "definitely a problem" (5). Following the vignettes and response statements, questions were posed regarding the frequency of ethical dilemmas encountered in the workplace, resources utilized in identifying ethical dilemmas, and the meaning of the term ethical. The last section of the questionnaire contained personal and contextual demographic questions; these questions were included to provide the researchers with a better understanding of the characteristics of the population under investigation.

Semi-structured interview

The semi-structured interview was comprised of a five-step procedure. First, participants were informed of the purpose of the interview. Second, interviewees were requested to cite an example of a problematic work situation in order to orient them to the purpose of the interview. They were then requested to read four vignettes drawn from the mail questionnaire. After they had completed each vignette, they were required to identify the underlying issues. Once they had indicated the issues, they were then asked to complete the vignette response state-

TABLE 1. **Summaries of ethical vignettes**

Vignette title	Vignette summaries of questionnaire & interview	Themes identified by interviewees on vignettes used for interview
Parental request for assessment	School psychologist is requested by a parent to complete an assessment on a student without prior assessment information; the parent requests that the psychologist report to him first rather than to the school administration.	
Northern community recommendation	The school psychologist in a remote northern community makes a recommendation which is not financially feasible for the parents of the child and does not investigate sources of financial assistance.	Investigation of funding Feasibility of recommendation Consultation/ collaboration Role of psychologist
Private facility recommendation	The school psychologist assesses a child and makes a recommendation to the parent to send the child to a private facility rather than the local school. The psychologist discusses the recommendation with the parent prior to discussion with the school board.	Role of psychologist Consultation/ collaboration Best interest of student vs school Informing parents of options
· Non-custodial parental consent	The school psychologist recommends counselling for the child of a single parent; the psychologist agrees to counsel the child despite the objections of the non-custodial parent	
Principal request for information	The school psychologist is requested to relay information to the school principal regarding the behavioural management capabilities of a classroom teacher in whose classroom the psychologist has observed.	Clientage Confidentiality of information Role of psychologist

TABLE 2. **Frequency percentage, and mean ratings of response statements by vignette**

Vignette and accompanying response statement	Percent (%) of ratings:				
	1	2	3	4	5
Parental request for assessment N=30					
A	6.7	16.7	36.7	20.0	20.0
B	6.7	13.3	6.7	16.7	56.7
C	26.7	6.7	23.3	10	33.3
Northern community recommendation N=44					
A	18.2	18.2	18.2	22.7	22.7
B	9.1	9.1	18.2	25.0	38.6
C	11.4	18.2	25.0	15.9	29.5
Private facility recommendation N=44					
B	9.1	13.6	11.4	27.3	38.6
C	9.1	22.7	2.3	22.7	43.2
D	9.1	11.4	9.1	25.0	45.5
Non-custodial parent N=30					
B	13.3	33.3	16.7	20.0	16.7
C	23.3	23.3	16.7	6.7	30.0
Principal request for information N=43					
B	39.5	18.6	20.9	18.6	2.3
C	32.6	9.3	23.3	25.6	9.3
D	11.6	–	7.0	20.9	60.5

TABLE 3. **Frequency and percentage of questionnaire respondents' mean ratings across vignettes**

Rating scale values (1 – 5)	Frequency and percentage of respondents N=30	
≥ 1 < 2	2	(6.7%)
≥ 2 < 3	8	(26.7%)
≥ 3 < 4	20	(66.7%)
≥ 4 ≤ 5	0	

TABLE 4. **Frequency and percentage of consultation categories on questionnaire (N=30) and interview (N=14)**

Consultative role	Mean rater frequency questionnaire	Mean rater frequency interview	Percentage questionnaire & interview
Psychometrician	3	1	9
Diagnostician	6	5	25
Assessor	12.5	9	49
Problem-Solver	5.5	0	13
Missing	3		7

ments derived from the questionnaire. Third, participants were requested to define the term "ethical" and identify which of the preceding vignettes were representative of ethical dilemmas. Fourth, demographic information was requested after the completion of the discussion regarding the vignettes. Finally, interviewees were debriefed concerning the purpose of the interview.

ANALYSIS

Data analysis used both quantitative and qualitative approaches to data analysis. As the entire population of Saskatchewan school psychologists was surveyed, inferential statistical procedures were not performed. Open-ended questions on both the questionnaire and semi-structured interview were subjected to a content analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). One of the researchers and another rater analyzed responses independently to develop categories. Common categorization systems were then derived and responses were assigned to the new categories. Content analysis was conducted on those open-ended questions pertaining to definitions of ethical and consultative practice, and the identification of ethical issues within written vignettes. The closed-ended questions on the mail questionnaire were analyzed using descriptive statistics.

RESULTS

In order to assess whether or not school psychologists were able to identify ethical dilemmas on the basis of written vignettes, both content analysis of the responses to the open-ended questions and quantitative analysis of the responses on the rating scale were conducted.

Interviewees identified numerous themes. Table 1 provides a summary of the vignettes and themes arising from the content analysis of the interview data.

During the development of the rating scale, the researchers determined that a rating of (1) or "definitely not a problem" on those vignette response statements which were reflective of ethical issues would indicate the respondents' inability to identify the ethical dilemmas. Ratings of (2) or "slightly a problem" to (5) or "definitely a problem" would be indicative of the respondents' ability to identify ethical dilemmas. On each of the response statements, some participants gave a (1) or "definitely not a problem rating." The percentage of (1) ratings ranged from 6.7% to 39.5% (see Table 2).

Of the seven vignettes included in the questionnaire, four were also administered to the interview participants. It was noted during the interviews that several of the interviewees stated that a particular vignette response statement was "not a problem", but would then vacillate between the (1) and (2) ratings on the scale. When asked about their indecisiveness, they made statements such as "this might be a problem." Given the tendency for these interviewees to record either a (1) or (2) response, the researchers determined that a dichotomization of the rating scale, e.g., (1) versus (2) to (5), might better be conceptualized as a distinction between a low rating, e.g., (1) and (2), and a high rating, e.g., (3) to (5). Mean ratings were calculated to determine whether or not the respondents — as a group — viewed particular vignette statements as more problematic than others. It was noted that mean ratings ranged from 2.26 (SD 1.22) to 4.19 (SD 1.30). Those vignettes which received higher mean ratings were regarded as more problematic by the group as a whole.

The variability between individuals surveyed via the questionnaire was also addressed through the computation of individual mean ratings (n=30) across all vignettes. These mean ratings ranged from 1.35 to 3.82. As indicated in Table 3, two of the respondents had mean ratings between (1) and (2) whereas 20 of the respondents had mean ratings between (3) and (4). None had mean ratings greater than or equal to (4).

Definitions of consultation were categorized according to the four consultative role orientations defined by Scholten (1990): psychometrician, diagnostician, assessor, and problem-solver. A summary of the orientations and percentage of responses in each category is included in Table 4.

Mean ratings and frequencies of responses were computed for each of the consultation orientations. All four consultation categories were represented in the (1) or "definitely not a problem" rating. In other words, none of the consultation groups were able to identify all of the ethical issues across vignettes. No substantial differences between the four consultation orientations were found. As well, differences between males' and females' mean ratings of the vignettes were also examined; no substantial differences were found.

In most cases, school psychologists' definitions of the term ethical were descriptions of their ethical decision-making processes. Three decision-making processes appeared to be evident: (1) rule-based (objective and subjective), (2) value-based (objective and subjective), and (3) intuitive. The first category was oriented towards a rule-based view of the term ethical and was characterized by responses which focussed upon behavior guided by generally accepted principles or standards (e.g., "acting in a manner that is based upon professional standards and values"). Responses based upon rules espoused by professional organizations and their accompanying codes and standards were categorized as objective, whereas responses reflective of personalized views of professional standards or practices were classified as subjective decision-making processes. The second broad decision-making category — value-based — also consisted of two subcategories and appeared to reflect the societal (objective) and personal (subjective) values of the respondents. Societal values included generally accepted tenets of right and wrong (e.g., "attempts to respect rights of individuals but not at the expense of the greater good for the larger community"). Personal value-based definitions, on the other hand, reflected actions and interpretations pertaining to, or concerning, a particular individual and were without specific reference to those values held by society as a whole (e.g., "operating within principles that govern . . . your personal beliefs"). Intuitive, the final category, appeared to reflect the affective response of the individual to a situation reflecting decision-making based on a "gut" feeling (e.g., "what feels right").

DISCUSSION

The primary purpose of this research study was to investigate school psychologists' understanding of ethical issues. The investigation culminated in two main findings: (1) the ability to identify ethical dilemmas varies within and between individuals as well as across situations within their consultative practices and (2) the ethical dilemmas themselves

may influence the ability to identify ethical issues; that is, more complex and ambiguous situations may be more difficult to identify than less complex dilemmas.

Identification of ethical issues

Ratings on the ethical vignette response statements indicated that a percentage of the population was not able to identify the ethical issues on all vignettes. The composition of the group who did not identify the ethical issues varied from one vignette response statement to another. The percentage of "definitely not a problem" ratings obtained was somewhat lower than those obtained in similar studies (e.g., Lindsey, cited in Welfel, 1992, and Podbelski & Weisberger, cited in Welfel, 1992). In each of those studies, the percentage of participants who did not perceive the ethical issues was nearly 50% and 44%, respectively. Notably, percentages for individual ethical issues were not discussed in those studies; rather, results across all ethical interviews were reported.

Further analysis of the current research data revealed that across all vignettes, all of the respondents were able to identify at least one ethical issue. None of the respondents rated all the vignette response statements as "definitely not a problem" either on the questionnaire or during the interview. Conversely, none of the respondents rated all of the vignettes as "definitely a problem". Thus, it would appear that the inability or ability to identify ethical dilemmas may not be generalizable across all situations; one might be able to identify ethical issues within one context but not another. These findings are similar to those of Volker (cited in Rest, 1986) who found "a fair degree of situational specificity in moral sensitivity" (p. 27).

Content analysis of the interviewees' responses to the open-ended questions indicated that the group as a whole was able to identify the ethical issues as delineated by the professional psychology experts. However, each of the interviewees did not identify all of the ethical issues. Again, these results are consistent with the findings on the questionnaire: Not all school psychologists could identify the ethical issues within each of the vignettes.

As discussed earlier, the observations made during the semi-structured interviews indicated that the ability to identify ethical dilemmas might better be conceptualized as a continuous variable. Therefore, based upon the low versus high rating, one might conclude that individuals may be "more" or "less" able to identify ethical dilemmas. Those individuals who gave the ethical response statements a low rating might be

less aware of the underlying ethical issues than those who rated them more highly. The identification of ethical dilemmas may vary across situations and between individuals (as indicated by individual mean ratings). This provides further support for Rest's (1984) supposition that individuals vary in their sensitivity to ethical dilemmas. According to Rest (1984), while some individuals seldom identify ethical issues, "other people are so supersensitive that every act, word, or grimace takes on momentous moral implications" (p. 21).

Ambiguity or complexity of ethical dilemmas

The ethical issues within those vignettes that had a low percentage rating of "definitely not a problem" could be construed as more readily identifiable by the group as a whole. For example, the ethical issue of the extended responsibilities of the psychologist which go beyond the stated roles of the psychologist (e.g., vignette "Northern Community Recommendation") received a mean rating of 4.03. Over half of the respondents regarded this issue as "definitely a problem." The interview participants also identified this as an ethical issue.

Vignette response statements which had a high percentage of "definitely not a problem" ratings were more difficult to identify. In the vignette, "Principal Request for Information", 39.5% of the respondents did not regard the issue of confidentiality of information as problematic when the teacher made inappropriate disclosures to the psychologist regarding personal feelings of ill will toward a student. However, within the same vignette, the psychologist was requested to disclose information to the principal regarding the teacher without having received the teacher's consent. In this instance, only 11.6% of the respondents gave a "definitely not a problem" rating. The issue of confidential information regarding a consultee's (e.g., teacher's) personal feelings and concerns was not identified as readily as the request made by the consultee (e.g., principal) for confidential information regarding another individual (e.g., client or consultee). School psychologists may perceive self-disclosures made by consultees or clients as an indication of their rapport with these individuals rather than an ethical concern. In fact, several of the interviewees stated that they did not perceive the self-disclosures on the part of the consultees to be problematic; rather, it appeared to indicate that the school psychologist was "trusted" by them. This finding may corroborate earlier research findings reported by Rest (1984) that ambiguity of cues in social situations may negatively affect the ability to identify the ethical issue within.

Consultative role orientations

Each of Scholten's (1990) consultative role orientations was represented in the population thus indicating that Saskatchewan school psychologists vary in the amount and kind of consultation in which they engage. The majority of the school psychologists functioned as assessors and diagnosticians; fewer psychologists functioned as either psychometricians or problem-solvers. As there were no important differences among their overall mean ratings of the vignette response statements, their ability to identify ethical issues does not appear to be related to their consultative orientation.

Definitions of ethical

The meanings ascribed to the term ethical by the population were indicative of their ethical decision-making processes. Rule-based, value-based, and intuitive orientations to decision-making were represented.

As indicated by Rest (1986), an individual's understanding or sensitivity to ethical dilemmas may range from an affective response (e.g., intuitive or "gut feeling") to a recognition that "one's actions might be violating some moral norm or principle" (Rest, 1986, p. 5). The cognizance of the violation of a moral norm could be construed as a value-based response. Rule-based responses would involve the recognition that a particular societal or professional standard or code had been violated.

According to Rest (1986), individuals who rely upon the "cognitive encoding" (p. 6) of the problem (or rule-based and value-based orientations to ethical decison-making) may be in a better position to accurately identify ethical dilemmas. Their responses may include the articulation of the problem rather than an affective or "gut feeling" reaction. Effective ethical decision-making may be a reflective process rather than a reactive one. Although analysis of possible relationships between each of the ethical orientations and the ability to identify ethical issues could not be conducted within the current study, future studies may examine whether such relationships exist.

DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research in this area should include a cross-Canada sample of school psychologists in order to determine the generalizability of the current research findings. This would also allow for a more in-depth

investigation of possible relationships between ethical orientations to decision-making processes and the ability to identify ethical issues.

In the current study, the "ability to identify ethical issues" was conceptualized as both a dichotomous variable (i.e., "not able to identify an ethical issue" versus "able to identify an ethical issue") and a continuous variable (i.e., "less able to identify an ethical issue" to "more able to identify an ethical issue"). Future research studies should focus upon determining the most appropriate way to conceptualize and measure the ability to identify ethical issues.

In the present study, researchers used both a questionnaire and semistructured interview. Researchers have incorporated various methodologies (e.g., tape-recorded dramatizations of ethical dilemmas; paper and pencil tasks) in the attempt to measure ethical decision-making most efficaciously (Rest, 1986; Welfel, 1992). Future studies should use a variety of methodologies to determine if the ability to identify ethical issues is influenced by the kind of methodology employed.

The current investigation of school psychologists' ethical understanding within the venue of consultation provided information regarding practitioners' abilities to identify ethical issues within potentially ambiguous situations. As there are no distinct guidelines or ethical principles specific to school consultation, school psychologists must rely upon their own perceptions of ethical practice and their awareness of existing codes of ethics (e.g., *Canadian Code of Ethics for Psychologists*) to identify ethical issues within their consultative practices. Given the variability among school psychologists in their ability to identify ethical issues, "professional associations might study the current codes of ethics to determine if modifications are required in order to address consultation services" (Scholten et al., 1993, p. 108).

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