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Class of 2019

Criminal Justice – Investigative Services

Psychologists' Motivations to Pursue Their Career

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Past studies on individuals' motivations to pursue a career in psychology (Hill et al., 2013; Murphy & Halgin, 1995; DiCaccavo, 2002) have focused on dynamics of psychologists' families of origin (Racusin et al., 1981) or early childhood experiences (Fussell & Bonney, 1990; Nikcevic et al., 2007), and have not explored other potential motivating factors, including psychological subdivision. The purpose of this study was to examine individuals' motivations and the influence of past experiences on their choice of career, specifically their psychological subfield, and to determine if there are similarities in motivations or experiences of people within the same subdivision. American Psychological Association (APA) divisions were contacted and six divisions (Divisions: 10, 13, 17, 33, 41, and 44) agreed to participate in this study. A survey was adapted to assess motivations and experiences that influenced participants' choice of their psychological subfield (Murphy & Halgin, 1995). Surveys were administered through Qualtrics and data were analyzed through the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences V23.

Members of the Society for the Psychology of Aesthetics, Creativity, and the Arts (Division 10) were not influenced in their career choice by Professional Altruism, however all other divisions in the study were. Professional Altruism statements reflected participants' desire to help others on a personal or social level. One reason for the difference may be due to Division 10's stated commitment to interdisciplinary scholarship, which is unique compared to the aims of the other divisions.

Members specializing in Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities/Autism Spectrum Disorder (Division 33) noted that problems, painful events, or experiences during youth were not relevant motivators in their career choice, as opposed to members of the Society for the Psychology of Sexual Orientation and Gender Diversity (Division 44). It is possible that people belonging to Division 44 have both a personal and professional identity related to their subfield, which may not be the case for those in Division 33. There was a large standard deviation among Division 44 members and the impact of personal experiences on their career. Some members may have strongly agreed to past personal problems having an impact, whereas these factors may have not been influential in the choice of other's careers.

On average, members of Division 10 noted that positive relationships with people within or outside of their family, and previous experience as a therapy client were not influential in their career choice, which was different from members of the Society of Counseling Psychology (Division 17), who on average, did not agree nor disagree that Strong Interpersonal Alliances was a motivator. As supported by previous research, counseling psychology students reported high rates of parentification, and control from parents, along with less care from parents

(DiCaccavo, 2002), which could explain why Division 17 members were not influenced by strong, positive, familial, and other connections in their career choice.

Further analyses will be conducted on the qualitative data, with plans to publish in the next year and present at the APA Conference. Additionally based on a larger response rate from Division 41, American Psychology – Law Society, specific analyses on this division are planned in the future.

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