

Interview of a School Psychologist

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I. Background Information

The school psychologist I interviewed is named Hilary S. Harvey and she works within the Washington Township School District in New Jersey. The school she works at is elementary level, and she has been a school psychologist for 28 years. Schooling wise, Hilary went to Stony Brook University on Long Island for her Bachelor's of Arts in Psychology and minored in British Literature. Then, she continued her education at Long Island University at the Brooklyn campus for her graduate degree of a Masters of Education in School Psychology. For a brief period, Hilary attended Brooklyn College to become a bilingual school psychologist, but did not continue or earn a degree. Out of college, Hilary began working as a client coordinator, then a developmental specialist within an adult daycare. Next, Hilary worked as a social worker. Finally, she ended up as a school psychologist and has been working as one ever since.

II. Interview Write-Up

○ *What does a typical day look like?*

A typical day involves a lot of multitasking. One role I take on is being the Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying (HIB) Coordinator. As school psychologist, other duties include being a case manager, facilitating meetings, some behavioral intervention plans (BIP) (but nowadays the behavior specialist handles more of that), being a consultant to teachers, scheduling aides, working as a child study team leader, counseling (to an extent, again, the school counselor handles most of that), being a crisis team worker, implementing IQ tests, conducting observations, training people with the new individual education plan (IEP) computer program, conducting cognitive assessments, subbing for classes when need be, conducting standardized tests, recess duty, consultations for parents and therapists, administrative consultations, IEP writing, as well as working with other professionals within the school.

○ *Why do you think it is important for students to have access to a school psychologist?*

It's important for students to have access to a school psychologist because a safe place is necessary for kids. With a safe place, trust and rapport can be built. Also, with testing, childrens' abilities can be shown.

- *What is your favorite part of the job?*

My favorite part of the job is helping people who can't help themselves, being outgoing, talking with others, and using interpersonal skills. I also like testing kids, but NOT being a part of meetings. Also I enjoy being in the classroom.

- *What is the most rewarding part of the job?*

I like to supervise interns and watch them grow and develop on their journeys. Also hearing that I'm doing a good job from someone like the principal or administration. I don't need compliments, but it feels nice to be noticed in that way and know that I'm doing a good job.

- *What do you like the least?*

I do not like working with people who are controlling. I am someone who is more mellow and goes with the flow, and working with these kinds of people can be frustrating. It's more of a personality conflict kind of thing. Also, I really dislike all the paperwork that needs to be done.

- *What is the greatest challenge with your role as a school psych?*

Dealing with parents and people in general who are hard to handle. Also, new programs can be hard to learn and explain. Again, paperwork is a challenge.

- *Why did you become a school psychologist?*

I wanted to help people who couldn't help themselves. I started out my career wanting to be a clinical psychologist, but I didn't pass one of my exams and so I needed to choose something else. I decided to try to use a backdoor option through school psychology to end up as a clinical psychologist, but ended up loving school psychology more so I stayed there.

- *What is the most challenging situation you have been put in and how did you handle it?*

Early on in my career, I was an intern on Long Island, New York. I was working in an elementary school, and my supervisor told me to stay in the office because it wasn't safe to come out. An angry parent was trying to come into the school with a gun because they didn't agree with some decision they had made regarding their child. Another situation involved a parent where they were misinformed and I was blamed for something going wrong. My name was dragged through the mud and I was asked if I wanted to remain as the case manager for that student. I said no because I knew I wasn't wanted.

- *What systemic problems exist that you would like to see resolved?*

Mainly bureaucratic things, like when new people are in charge with their own ideas about things. They may have novel ideas and initiatives, but I'm more old school and would rather things be more like that. Also, I'm not very good at using technology so ideally there would be less of that as well.

- *What dream project would you like to implement?*

I would like to implement more severe language and learning disabilities (SLLD) classrooms throughout the district. More resources would be beneficial for the students so they can get the help they need.

- *How do you prevent burn out?*

Regular exercise like taking zumba classes, reminding myself what and who this is all about, and generally picking myself back up. There are hard days where I don't want to go back to work the next day, but I always go back without fail.

- *What is something you learned on the job that you wish you learned in graduate school?*

I wish there were more intense counseling classes taught in graduate school. They had the basic ones about administering tests, psychopathology, etc., but if they had more in depth counseling courses that would have been helpful.

- *How do you develop relationships with other professionals in the school?*

I have an open door policy for my office, where anyone and everyone is welcome to come in. I always treat people with respect. I noticed that people started coming to me for things besides work related situations and more personal things. It helps that I follow through with whatever task I am working on, which shows that I will get something done.

- *What are the most common interventions you recommend to teachers?*

Token economies, INRS committee redirection, training, answering various questions, and positive action plan curriculums.

- *How much time do you spend with people versus doing paperwork?*

I prefer to spend time with people much more than paperwork, so usually that's what I do.

- *What qualities/characteristics are important for a school psychologist to have?*

Compassion, sensitivity, politeness, a sense of humor, passion, enthusiasm, outgoingness, and confidence in themselves.

- *How would you categorize your theoretical orientation to the practice of school psychology?*

Definitely under the psychoanalytic perspective.

- *In your training as a school psychologist, what skills would you say were emphasized in the training program?*

Assessment, collaboration/consultation, therapy, family counseling, statistics, and cognitive personality assessments.

III. Reflection: What did you learn from your interview?

From the interview I conducted, I learned a lot about Hilary that I wasn't expecting. In college, the role of the school psychologist is discussed, where maybe the professional takes on three or four additional roles besides consultation and testing. Hilary on the other hand takes on ten to twenty different roles depending on the day. She isn't spread thin because she prioritizes, and some days one task might be more important than another, and that would get more attention. Hilary also had to face more hardships than I thought, from not passing one exam and changing directions in her career, to an

armed parent attempting to come into the school because they were unhappy with a decision the child study team made. Overall, Hilary is outgoing, level-headed, and down to earth. I think these are all wonderful qualities to have as a school psychologist. Since this job basically has “working with people” in its job description, remaining calm and having a steady head on your shoulders is crucial to get the job done and keep most parties involved happy. Besides her interpersonal skills with parents and administrators, Hilary has a wonderful relationship with other staff members in the school she works at. I love her “open door policy,” and think that it is a wise way to display that she is available at any time to help, and can create stronger bonds with staff before they even need consultation or advice. This way, when the time comes that an issue arises, Hilary will already have a good standing relationship with the school professional and make the whole consultation process more amicable. Overall, Hilary reminded me why I wanted to become a school psychologist- to help those who need it, and may not be able to help themselves.