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FACULTY PROFILE

JEFFREY NICHOLAS

From where does our job satisfaction issue? Is it solely a matter of prime professional circumstance, or do other factors shape workplace well-being? These are some of the intriguing questions that Professor Jeffrey P. Nicholas has explored as a researcher in social and industrial psychology. Professor Nicholas's interest in psychology has developed since his undergraduate days at Salem State, where he received a B.S. in psychology, going on to complete his M.S. in Purdue University in Industrial/Organization Psychology ("I.O."), and his Ph.D. at Purdue University with a thesis on attitudes toward the workplace. Subsequently, Professor Nicholas continued to test the received wisdom that job satisfaction is a stable entity, entirely determined by workplace particulars such as salary, tasks performed, hours and office habitat.

Professor Nicholas supplied each of his subjects with a beeper set to go off randomly at different points in a work day, at which time subjects were to complete a brief set of questions designed to measure their mood. By this method

Professor Nicholas was able to determine that job satisfaction does a complex dance with a variety of extra-professional factors such as home situation, bodily biorhythms (e.g., the post-lunch slump), relationship issues (did the employee fight with his partner that morning? Does he live alone in a bleak room or a resplendent bachelor pad?), and of course the worker's own emotional landscape.

Professor Nicholas, who is interested in "I.O." as well as social psychology, presented these original findings at the American Psychological Association, and published them in the journal *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. On the heels of this accomplishment, he conceived of another equally significant project – to question how non-beneficiaries of affirmative action decisions react to those decisions. Consider a situation in which men and women are tested for professional capability, and a woman scores lower than a given male subject but receives the job nonetheless. If the job is one that relies on qualities generally perceived in our culture as "feminine," such as verbal prowess or skill with relationships, the male who had actually scored higher on the exam in the area of verbal proficiency was found to resent his competitor less. She was

seen as performing "woman's work," which does not pose a threat to his sense of masculine identity as the latter is defined by our culture. However, if the woman scores lower in a "masculine" subject area, such as spatial relations, and then receives the job which requires these "masculine," logical, reasoning sorts of talents, he feels great resentment. Now his sense of self has been threatened; he has been bested by a woman in a sacrosanct province of male competence. It would appear that even in millennial America, gender stereotypes that limit both women and men by pigeonholing each within circumscribed psycho-intellectual categories still obtain.

Professor Nicholas conducted these experiments at Muhlenberg College, where he was an assistant professor before coming to BSC. Here he has continued with related investigations, carving a space in his research for students to flex their own investigative muscles. His new project involves analyzing where and how sex bias appears in college readers of female-authored scholarship. Professor Nicholas and his student Brian Kronen set up a testing situation in which female college students were shown articles written by both men and women. What they found was that the students automatically gave more credence to male-authored scholarship if the field is considered "masculine" such as science or mathematics. An article attributed to a female author was discounted by female readers while the same article with a presumed male author was carefully read, remembered, and valued. Professor Nicholas's valuable research and teaching, in bringing these abiding biases to light, may help increase our cultural understandings of gender and work.