DOING THE RIGHT THING: CONCEPTUALIZING AND DEFINING PUBLIC RELATIONS ETHICS AND MORALITY VIA MORAL PSYCHOLOGY LITERATURE FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS MORAL COURAGE AND ADVOCACY

by

TAYLOR S. VOGES

(Under the Direction of Dr. Yan Jin)

ABSTRACT

The concepts ethics and morality date back millennia yet, despite their longstanding existence as both philosophical concepts, public relations scholars and practitioners do not consistently define the terms. At times, ethics, morality, and values are used interchangeably and without references to ethical approaches (e.g., virtues). Because of these tendencies, research is needed to understand how public relations practitioners define, describe, and apply both ethics and morality. Further, the contingency theory of strategic conflict management, a communications theory built to understand how practitioners make communication stance decisions, originally cited both ethics and morality as reasons practitioners should practice advocacy. Given the role of ethics and morality in the contingency theory, scholars need to understand how ethics and morality can provide continued explication of a practitioners' willingness to advocate. A review of moral psychology literature provided insights into morality in the workplace and how concepts like moral courage can help scholars understand workplace behaviors.

Following a review of public relations ethics, the contingency theory, and moral psychology literature, a mixed-methods, multi-phase, exploratory sequential approach was used to achieve deeper understandings of ethics, morality, and advocacy. The first phase included two methods: a qualitative analysis of public relations trade publication articles (from 2009-2021) and in-depth interviews with in-house public relations executives (more than 10+ years of experience). Insights from phase one informed phase two, which was a survey of United States practitioners (n=223). The analysis resulted in thematic and statistical insights into ethics, morality, and advocacy. Insights suggested that ethics and morality were interrelated topics that informed communication decision-making, like advocacy, moral courage, and a willingness to stand up against internal pressures.
INDEX WORDS: Public relations, Ethics, Morality, Contingency theory, Mixed methods

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Societies have dealt with issues of ethics and morality for thousands of years with Western ethics philosophies often traced back to Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle and Eastern ethics philosophies traced back to Confucius and Mencius (Hursthouse et al., 2018). As a result, many fields of study, like mass communication, have applied ethics and morality to theories and practices. In these applications, scholars borrow concepts and constructs from these centuries-old philosophies to help explain current communicative situations, such as if and how a public relations practitioner should act as an organization's ethical conscience (Bowen, 2008; Neill, 2016). However, these applications of ethics and morality are often shortsighted, as many scholars do not address the vastness that ethics and morality cover—meaning that scholars (1) rarely define either concept (ethics or morality), (2) often use the two concepts interchangeably, and (3) ignore the conceptual differences between ethics and morality.

Though many scholars have written about on ethics and morality, few communication scholars provide definitions for the concepts, which makes readers rely on their prior ethics and morality knowledge. This omission is an unfortunate oversight as it can lead to misunderstandings and miscommunication about the writing as a whole. Further, ethical and moral philosophies date back to the 5th century B. C. and both are vast fields. Many philosophers have developed varying perspectives on ethics and morality, such as Confucius (551 B.C.- 479 B.C.), Aristotle (384 B.C.-322 B.C.), Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), John Rawls (1921-2002), Sissela Bok (1934-), and more. Failing to provide a definition of either ethics or morality overlooks the need to relate modern scholarly work to the inspirational philosophical lineage.

Some public relations scholars have provided definitions related to ethics and morality. Some scholars use one of the two concepts (ethics or morality) to explain the other (e.g., Grunig et al., 2002, p. 63). It is important to note that while ethics and morality are related, there are differences between the two philosophies (Appiah, 2008; Fawkes, 2010, 2012; Holtzhausen, 2015; Solomon, 2000; Terkel & Duval, 1999). Table 1 provides an organized outline at how communication scholars have defined ethics. Some definitions of ethics are used by multiple scholars (e.g., DeGeorge, 2009) while some scholars use multiple definitions of ethics (e.g., Bowen, 2004, 2007, 2016; Place 2007, 2015). Perceptions may evolve over time, but failing to provide a consistent definition of ethics or acknowledge the changes is another oversight this study seeks to address.

Some scholars referred to and accepted ethics as a system (e.g., Bowen, 2016; DeGeorge, 2009; Neill, 2017; Neill & Barnes, 2018; St. John III & Pearson, 2016) while others defined ethics as the study of morals (e.g., Englehard & Evans, 1994; Grunig et al., 2000; Holtzhausen, 2015; St. John III & Pearson, 2016). Some scholars, in definitions related to morality, have used ethics to explain the concept (*see* Table 2). Indeed, Place and colleagues (2021) defined moral philosophy as the "rigorous and formalized study of ethics" (p. 2). There are far fewer definitions of morality in public relations literature and, when scholars did define morality, they either used a variation or an application of the term, such as elemental morality, role morality, morality-related crisis, and moral climate.

The term value came up, though not as frequently, in the literature. Table 3 outlines the definitions given to this umbrella term. Similar to how some variation of morality was used to describe ethics and vice versa, descriptions of values included ethics and morality (e.g., Grunig et al., 2000). Further, scholars relate values more so to ethics than morality, as seen through the contextual handlings of the verbiage (e.g., Grunig et al., 2000 Tsetsura & Valentini, 2016).

This definitional review, which consisted of more than two hundred scholarly articles, demonstrates an important and very pressing gap. Some public relations articles defined either ethics or morality, but even fewer noted the differences between ethics and morality. Terkel and Duval (1999) edited *Encyclopedia of Ethics* and defined ethics as "the study of problems of right conduct in light of moral principles, such as compassion, freedom, good, justice, rationality, responsibility, and virtue" (p. 80). The root of ethics—*ethos*— is derived from character while more, the root of morality, is derived from customs (Terkel & Duval, 1999). Alongside their ethics definition, the authors proposed the following:

> Philosophers sometimes make a distinction between ethics and morality, holding ethics to refer to the cultivation of character and practical decision making while morality refers more generally to the set of practices a society holds to be right or just. (p. 80)

The commentary on the ethics definition entry demonstrates the intertwined nature of ethics and morality, but concedes to the differences between the two concepts. Morality was defined as "beliefs (*see* faith) and practices (*see* practice) related to the notion of right conduct or good character" (Terkel & Duval, 1999, p. 187). Similar commentary is provided about the relationship between ethics and morality,

> One popular distinction defines *morality* as a set of principles (*see* principle) of right conduct, while *ethics* is defined as the study of moral judgments (*see* judgment). On this conception, a person may have a morality but no interest in ethics. For example, one's morality would be a more-or-less coherent set of codes, such as "Do not lie" or "Help others whenever possible." Ethics, on the other hand, would be inquiry into why those moral principles are valid and whether or not they are binding to everyone. (Terkel & Duval, 1999, p. 187)

These two definitions, and commentaries, have slight variations within them as well, though the authors acknowledge that there are variations of how philosophers perceive the difference between ethics (*ethos*, character) and morality (*mores*, custom). Lastly, given the importance of principle in both of the definitions, the authors definition of principle is provided, "a fundamental rule, law, or doctrine, from which other rules or judgments (*see* judgment) are derived...principles are basic moral beliefs on which judgments about actions (*see* act) or the character of persons are founded" (Terkel & Duval, 1999, p. 218). The commentary on principle seems to imply a sort of order for morality and ethics: moral beliefs exist and it is on those moral beliefs that acts and characters rely.

Public relations scholars have dealt with this distinction between ethics and morality. Solomon (2000) considered morality as (1) intrinsic and (2) rules and codes and ethics as (1) reflective, (2) open to constant scrutiny, and (3) used when conflict arises. This perception similarly assumes an ordering between morality and ethics. A variant perspective comes from Appiah's (2008) discussion on Aristotelian perceptions of ethics and morality: “what it means to live well, as the basis for ethics, reserving the term morality for normative ideas about ‘how we should and should not treat other people’” (p. 37). Ethics was also considered as either a cultural variable (Fawkes, 2012) or as “a prescriptive language game based on other criteria such as membership of specific institutions or adherence to different moral frameworks and therefore hard to enforce” (Holtzhausen, 2015, p. 770). These conceptions of morality and ethics demonstrates Terkel and Duval’s (1999) comment on how there are varying perspectives on the distinction between these two concepts.

Based on the varying conceptions of ethics and morality in public relations literature, the current study seeks to close the gap and work to differentiate between them by applying principles found in moral psychology literature. As other scholars noted and demonstrated from the definition review, there are widely varying perceptions of both ethics and morality. This study proposes a mixed-methods approach to (1) analyze how public relations trade publication articles and highly experienced public relations practitioners describe and define ethics and morality and (2) apply those findings, via survey, to broader public relations practitioner experiences as related to the contingency theory of strategic conflict management.

Table 1
Definitions of Ethics for Public Relations and Communication

	Definition	Scholar(s)	Journal
Ethics	Ethics, after all, is the study of values and moral principles and how they relate to human behavior	Grunig, Toth, & Hon (2000, p. 63)	Journal of Public Relations Research
	the study of (conventional) morality or moral behavior….dealing with moral choices, actions, judgments, and their rational justification	Englehard & Evans (1994, p. 251)	Public Relations Review
	defined ethics as a science that teaches, not how we are to achieve happiness, but how we are to be worthy of happiness	Kant, 1973/1974, p. 45, as cited in Bowen, (2004, p. 68)	Journal of Public Relations Research
	a systematic attempt to make sense of our individual and social moral experience, to determine the rules that ought to govern human conduct, the values worth pursuing, and the character traits deserving development in life	(DeGeorge, 2009, p. 13) as cited in Neill (2017, p. 120) DeGeorge, 2009, p. 13) as cited in Bowen (2016, p. 564) DeGeorge, 2009, p. 13) as cited in Neill & Barnes (2018, p. 27)	Journal of Media Ethics Public Relations Review Journal of Media Ethics
	extent to which the individual supports the moral code through conduct	Holtzhausen (2015)	Public Relations Review
	inquiry concerned with the process of finding rational justifications for our actions when the values that we hold	(Plaisance, 2009, p. 3) as cited in Place	Journal of Media Ethics

	come into conflict	(2015, p. 253)	
	the application of knowledge, understanding, and reasoning to questions of right or wrong behavior in the professional practice of public relations	Parsons, 2008, p. 9, as cited in (Place, 2015, p. 253)	Journal of Media Ethics
	[the] systematic analysis, the distinguishing of right from wrong, and determining the nature of what should be valued	Bowen (2007) as cited in Place (2017, p. 1)	Journal of Mass Communication Educator
	Rules, principles, or ways of thinking that guide actions, or systematic study of reasoning about how we ought to act	(Singer, 1994, p. 4) as cited in Bowen (2016, p. 564)	Public Relations Review
	Inquiry concerned with the process of finding rational justifications for our actions when the values that we hold come into conflict	(Plaisance, 2009, p. 3) as cited in Place (2015, p. 253)	Journal of Media Ethics
	Systematic examination of moral agents and their actions	St. John III & Pearson (2016, p. 20)	Journal of Media Ethics
	Implied via an expectation of appropriate professional actions, practices, and standards	Formentin & Bortree (2018, p. 2)	Journal of Communication Management
Applied Ethics	Examines specific moral issues or cases through the lens of ethical theories	St. John III & Pearson (2016, p. 20)	Journal of Media Ethics
Codes of Ethics	Codes of ethics have been referred to as codes of conduct, codes of practices, values statements, mission statements, or corporate credos Ethics codes are more comprehensive and detailed ethics statements	Ki & Kim (2010, p. 224)	Journal of Business Ethics

	example, Nijhof et al. (2003) referred to an ethics code as ‘‘an instrument for responsibilities within the organization’’ (p. 62) documented policy that guides specific responsibilities of an organization toward its stakeholders and/or the conduct the organization expects of its employees (Kaptein & Wempe, 2002) a written, distinct, and formal document which consists of moral standards which help guide employee or corporate behaviors’’ (Schwartz, 2005, p. 27).		
	a code of ethics describes the morally acceptable conduct expected from individuals, in this case <u>public relations</u> professionals	Holtzhausen (2015)	Public Relations Review
Ethics Statements	standards that are designed by an organization to guide and examine expected ethical and professional norms among all employees, especially those who perform public relations practices	Ki & Kim (2010, p. 224)	Journal of Business Ethics
Ethical Dilemma	Characterized as an internal drama of personal conscience The major determinant has to be the personal morals of the advocate and his or her willingness to stand up for or forgo them under certain conditions (Bivins, 1987, p. 200)	Hove & Park (2017, p. 87)	Journal of Media Ethics
Ethical Decision making	involves making rational choices between what is good and bad, between what is morally justifiable action and what is not”	(Patterson & Wilkins, 2005, p. 4) as cited in Neill (2017, p. 120)	Journal of Media Ethics

involves making rational choices between what is good and bad, between what is morally justifiable action and what is not	(Patterson & Wilkins, 2005, p. 4) as cited in Schauster & Neill (2017, p. 45)	Journal of Media Ethics
Ethical decisions should be based on values, which are considered “guiding principles in people’s lives” (Schwartz, 1996, p. 2) and “enduring notions of goodness and badness that guide behavior in a variety of contexts”	(Burgoon, 1989, p. 132) as cited in Schauster & Neill (2017, p. 45)	
Regarding how ethical decisions are made in public relations has found the process to be complex and guided by multiple philosophical approaches, organizational cultures, or practitioner levels of experience	Place (2015, p. 254	Journal of Media Ethics

Table 2
Definitions of Moral for Public Relations and Communication

	Definition	Scholar(s)	Journal
Moral	Moral values	Hu, Huang, & Zhang (2015, p. 275)	Journal of Public Relations Research
Moral Dilemmas	Conflicting goods	Stoker & Stoker (2012)	Journal of Mass Media Ethics
Morality	Morality appears to be so esoteric and qualitative in nature that it lacks substantive relation to objective and quantitative performance Knowledge of ethical values and moral reasoning	Sims (1992, p. 34) as cited in Lee & Cheng, (2012, p. 80-81).	Journal of Mass Media Ethics
	Morality is defined as those elements which are unchanging or the pervasive societal framework that perpetuates a given social order. Morality is not created anew by each generation, and it is not merely for the individual. Rather, as William K Frankena asserts, "like one's language, state, or church, it exists before the individual, who is inducted into it and becomes more or less of a participant in it, and it goes on existing after him"	Englehardt & Evans (1994, p. 250)	Public Relations Review
	a written, distinct, and formal document which consists of moral standards which help guide employee or corporate behaviors	(Schwartz, 2005, p. 27) as cited in Ki & Kim (2010, p. 224)	Journal of Business Ethics
	a set of values and rules of action that are recommended to individuals through the intermediary of various prescriptive agencies	(Foucault, 1985, p. 25) as cited in Holtzhausen	Public Relations Review

		(2015)	
	Set of standards that are imposed on an individual through his or her affiliation with a social group	Farmer (2018, p. 2)	Journal of Media Ethics
Elemental Morality	Treating another person as a person is to treat them as equals in terms of dignity and to prohibit third parties from instigating any act or saying anything we would judge as threatening to our own dignity	Marat (1975, p. 30), as cited in Xifra (2012)	Public Relations Review
Role Morality	certain roles require choices that benefit a specific person or group at the expense of competing for moral claims from another person or group	Stoker & Stoker (2012, p. 33)	Journal of Mass Media Ethics
Moral Philosophy	Rigorous and formalized study of ethics	Place, Edwards, Bowen (2021)	Public Relations Review
	Justification for moral principles	Bowen (2004, p. 67)	Journal of Public Relations Research
Moral Development	how people's thoughts about ethical issues change over time, partly in response to the development to other portions of the individual—for example, the intellect—and partly in response to the environment	Coleman & Wilkins (2009, p. 318)	Journal of Public Relations Research
Morality-related Crisis	is a critical event that is negatively related to a company's CSR associations (ethical, moral, and societal standards), such as embezzling or operating a sweatshop	Lee, Lim, & Drumwright (2018, p.).	Public Relations Review
Moral Climate	"Derived from a work climate definition, moral climate has been defined as "stable, psychologically meaningful, shared perceptions employees hold concerning ethical procedures and policies existing in their organizations" (cf. Wimbush and	Brinkmann (2002, p. 156)	Journal of Business Ethics

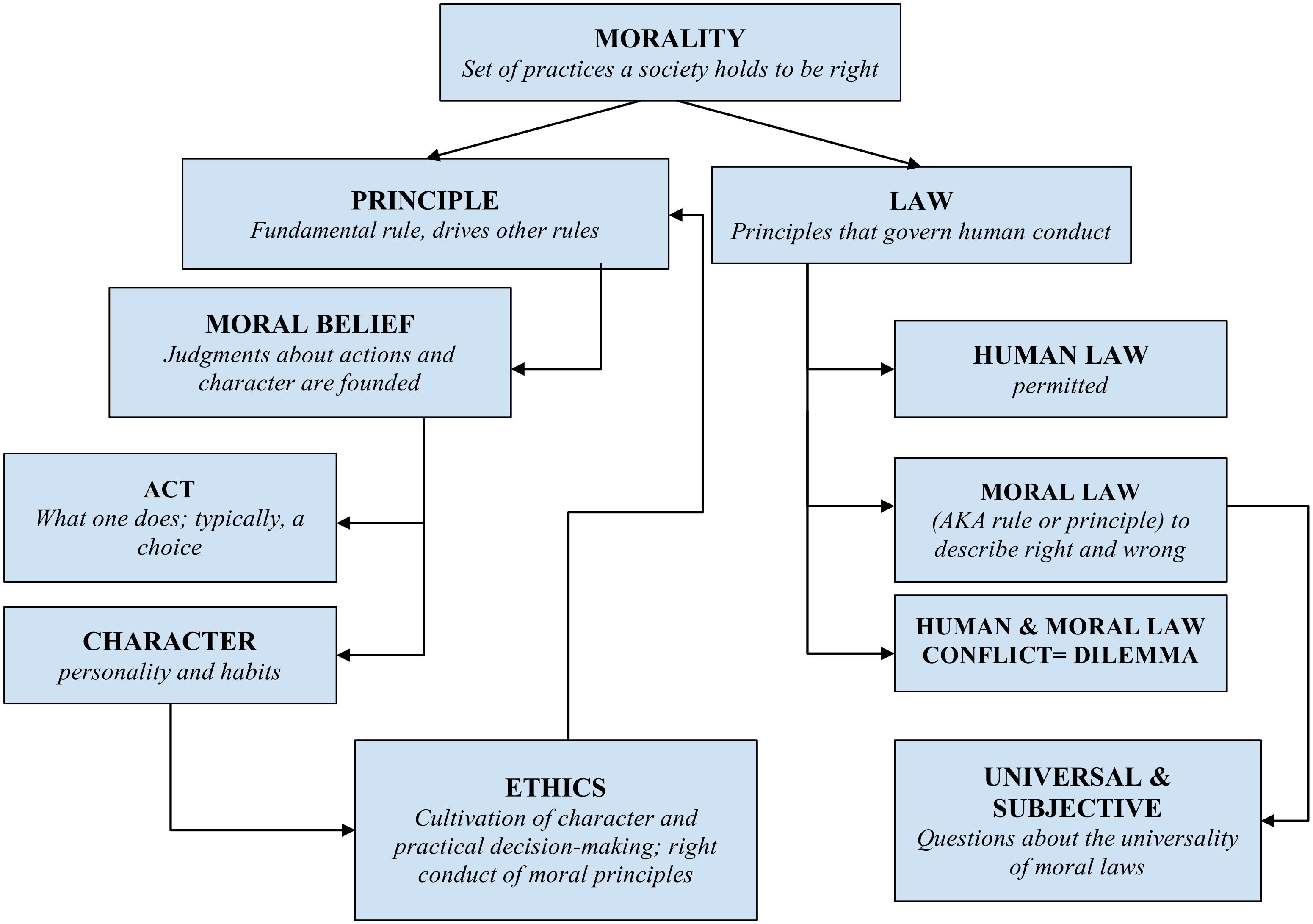
	Shepard, 1994, p. 636; cf also with lengthy elaboration Victor and Cullen, 1987, pp. 52-57 or 1988, pp. 101—104). Ideally, the moral climate in a given profession would be reconstructed from a combination of several different data sources and types - such as history, media, observation of professional board meetings or annual gatherings, professional codes of ethics, group interviews"		
Relativism	Degree to which individuals refuse to follow universal moral rules or principles	Ki, Gonzenbach, Choi, & Lee (2012, p. 142)	Asian Journal of Communication
Idealism	Idealists believe in universal moral principles or laws and adhere to these rules in their evaluations of ethical behavior	Ki, Gonzenbach, Choi, & Lee (2012, p. 142)	Asian Journal of Communication

Table 3
Definitions of Values for Public Relations and Communication

	Definition	Scholar(s)	Journal
Values	Concepts or beliefs that pertain to desirable end states or behaviors that transcend specific situations, and guide selection or evaluation of behaviors and events Do not distinguish between right and wrong (Tsetsura & Valentini, 2016, p. 574) Normative guiding principles that tend to have objective meanings but subjective interpretations	Schwartz (1992, p. 4), as cited in Tsetsura & Valentini (2016, p. 574)	Public Relations Review
Core Values	deeply ingrained principles that guide all of a company's actions" and serve as "cultural cornerstones" (Lencioni, 2002, p. 6)	Neill (2017, p. 122)	Journal of Media Ethics
Personal Values	Classic philosophy suggests that personal values are more deterministic of morality….and we agree that adhering to values is a more dependable predictor of ethics	Grunig, Toth, & Hon (2000, p. 63)	Journal of Public Relations Research
Values Statements	concise documents that refer to corporate qualities such as integrity, trust, teamwork, and fairness with the purpose of guiding a firm's principles	Ki & Kim (2010, p. 224)	Journal of Business Ethics

Figure 1

Flow Chart of Morality and Ethics Definitions



CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The following sections include (1) trends in the public relations ethics field, (2) moral psychology roots and concepts, and (3) the contingency theory of strategic conflict management.

Public Relations Ethics

Ethics and public relations comprise a growing field of interest. Scholars look to either modernize (e.g., Johanneson, 2001) or globalize (e.g., Tsetsura & Valentini, 2016) certain aspects of what it means to be ethical in public relations. Whilst some scholars attend to questions that rely on applying ethics to things that are changing like technology, other scholars take to addressing, or re-addressing, basic principles of ethics (e.g., Bowen, 2016; Paquette et al., 2015). Ultimately, the recent trends in public relations ethics literature can be grouped in three categories: change, choice, and comprehension. Change refers to how researchers capture ethics as impressionable by outside advancements, such as technology and globalization. Choice reflects more of a practical analysis of public relations practices—what practitioners consider ethical in certain situations and what choices are ethical. The last category, comprehension, reflects how researchers attempt to revise principles of ethics through reinterpretations and applications of theories old and new.

These three categories are necessary perspectives for public relations ethics, but they also point to a lack of research for the public relations ethics process of decision-making: why practitioners come to certain conclusions. This area of research can be viewed as a precursor for ethics choices—before the decision to act ethical or not—in a situation and comes from the field of moral psychology. As the current public relations ethics research trends demonstrate, the emphasis is not so much on what happens prior to a decision so much as what constitutes ethical choices and what ethical theories justify said choices. While these are necessary perspectives for public relations, it is prudent to understand the moral psychology of the decision-making of the practitioner.

The following review of literature captures three current trends in public relations ethics (change, choice, and comprehension) and ultimately argues for public relations ethics to essentially take a step back in the decision-making process to understand the manifestation of ethical behavior in the workplace.

Change

Fields evolve, and that evolution is captured in practice and research. It leads researchers to question how much a certain type of change influences both the topic and its application to the field. For the case of public relations ethics, researchers have asked—about the influence of technology on ethics and ethical behavior (e.g., Hagelstein et al., 2021); about the influence of globalization and culture on public relations practice considerations (e.g., Metz, 2018); and the changing practices of public relations, such as the use of social media (e.g., Sebastião et al., 2017; Toledano & Avidar, 2016). Though these change questions are commonly asked, the approach researchers use in asking them vary.

For questions about technology, it is typical for researchers to conduct a comparison approach to ethics then and ethics now (e.g., Schauster & Neill, 2017). Interviews were conducted and researchers used the insights provided by public relations practitioners to determine if and how these changes affect ethics for public relations. Schauster and Neill (2017) operated under the assumption that, while ethics has not changed much, the opportunities for unethical behavior have increased. Part of this claim relies on the addition of technology and social media to the practitioner's repertoire. Indeed, the authors proposed disclosure as a more modern concern for practitioners. The authors do not write much on the previous concern for disclosure (i.e., prior to technological advancements), but the researchers contended that the changing technological environment boosts this issue.

Schauster and Neill (2017) also argued that the field's changing practices result in different conceptions about ethics. Some interviewees suggested that the industry changes rapidly, so rapidly in fact that the consumer cannot keep up with typical practitioner practices. Though the authors do not claim any influence from one field to another, this concept is not new. Indeed, Yang and colleagues (2016) argued that the gap between public relations and journalism is shrinking. The basis for these claims was on what the authors deem converging values found in both fields'—journalism and public relations—codes of ethics. This changing state of both fields' codes and expected practices are relative to the changing power dynamic. The authors cited Heath (2006), "public relations is essential to creating discourse through 'statement and counterstatement, whereby ideas in public can be refined, vetted, and used for enlightened choice'" (p. 109, as cited in Yang et al., 2016, p. 149). This claim was set within the context of technology and social media usage by both journalists and public relations practitioners. Thus, both Schauster and Neill (2017) and Yang and colleagues (2016) posited that technology has led to change in the public relations field and has influence over public relations ethics.

Tsetsura and Valentini (2016) questioned the influence of globalization and culture and proposed a conceptual model of media ethics that better centers these influences. Similar to Heath's (2006) conception of public relations in the public sphere, Tsetsura and Valentini (2016) claimed that public relations "act as sources of information and even influences of media agenda" (p. 573). This perception of public relations places the profession in high regard and uses globalization as a backbone for this claim. Surely, a profession that has influence and can grandstand as a keeper of information has a unique place in a globalizing world. Basing their reasoning on change and globalization, the authors took a conceptual and descriptive approach to public relations ethics, arguing that factors like education impact a person's value system. Similarly, Metz (2018), in his chapter on cultural pluralism and the globalized world, contended that there was a greater need now for ethics researchers to deal with the question of relativism and universalism. Again, the globalization of the world served as the backbone for this concern.

Lastly, social media ethics for the public relations practitioner constitutes a strong change trend for the field (Berg, 2017). White and Boatwright (2020) put it quite succinctly, "consequences and effects of social media on public relations practice and society at large need to be assessed as the technologies around them advance at an increasingly rapid pace" (p. 5). White and Boatwright (2020) urged practitioners to evaluate their business decisions by looking at the consequences of their choices, which alludes to a teleological ethics perspective. Hagelstein and colleagues (2021) used social media and digital communication as the backdrop for their study and discovered that many public relations practitioners encountered moral challenges daily; over two thirds of their respondents agreed with this statement. Digital channel moral challenges include using bots to increase follower numbers, using big data, paying social media influencers to speak favorably, motivating employees to promote organizational messages on their personal accounts, profiling audiences using diversity demographics, and more (Hagelstein et al., 2021). While these social media moral challenges are important to research and understand, these moral challenges are contingent upon the channel.

Many scholars have used culture as an additional factor to understand public relations ethical practices on social media (Davies & Hobbs, 2020; Hagelstein et al., 2021; Sebastião et al., 2017; Toledano & Avidar, 2016; White & Boatwright). Cultural comparisons are typical, as Sebastião and colleagues (2017) conducted a comparison analysis between Portuguese and Brazilian practitioners while Toledano and Avidar (2016) compared practitioners from Israel and New Zealand. Both studies found slight, but typically not significant, differences between the two cultures analyzed. Toledano and Avidar (2016) found few significant differences between the two cultures, though practitioners in New Zealand felt stronger about their education in public relations social media ethics. That is not to say, however, that they felt educated in the topic; they simply rated themselves as more educated in ethics than practitioners using social media in Israel. The authors demonstrated how public relations ethics can become concentrated to a single practice of interest: social media (Toledano & Avidar, 2016).

To review, the change category for public relations ethics is well-rounded. Researchers looked into many outside forces to understand how these forces influence an understanding of ethics. However, these notions of public relations ethics miss a strong foundation of what ethics means to public relations. There is a lack of definitions of ethics and there is a substantive lack of theoretical continuity for the perspective. Much of the basis for this category comes down to power, though it is not always explicitly stated in the studies. However, the authors do acknowledge, at one point or another, the influence of the individual and his/her own understanding of ethics. Such interest should be greater and is cause for research into the moral psychology of ethical decision-making.

Choice

Ethics, for some researchers, can be defined as "rules, principles, or ways of thinking that guide actions" (Bowen, 2016, p. 564), which emphasizes the action and the choices relative to that action. Indeed, another strong body of literature for public relations ethics is that of choice and what constitutes an ethically sound decision. Overall, choice literature includes inquiries into a reflection of the decision-making process (e.g., Place, 2015), justification of choices (e.g., Toledano & Avidar, 2016), and decisions to provide ethical counsel for an organization (e.g., Bowen, 2008; Fawkes, 2018; Neill & Barnes, 2018).

Place (2015) studied ethical decision-making with the purpose of understanding how (if/when) practitioners reflect and evaluate their decisions. While this study demonstrates an attempt to peer into the decision-making process, the "look-in" happens after a decision is made. Findings suggested that practitioners evaluate decisions via "gut checks," by asking questions, reflecting on core values, considering society, and considering the public's feedback. In sum, the author offered this study as a reaffirmation of a rhetorical approach to evaluation. While the article proposed an investigation on how practitioners evaluate decisions, Place's (2015) suggestions were more reflective than evaluative.

Justification—or sometimes lack thereof—of choice in public relations practice can be demonstrated through practitioners' views on whistleblowing. Researchers have asserted the importance of whistleblowing (e.g., Comer & Vega, 2011) and Toledano and

Avidar (2016) found that, while practitioners view whistleblowing as important, many do not consider it the job of the practitioner. This demonstrates a non-choice, one that is based on opinions and considerations of what it means to practice public relations. However, there is little explanation as to how or why the practitioners consider whistleblowing as outside of the public relations profession. Similarly, practitioners have reflected on ethics and their responsibility to it as minimal, claiming, "some practitioners did not want to "let their personal ethical beliefs" influence their work but instead relied on attorneys" (Bowen, 2008, p. 283). This demonstrates how the justification of the practitioner is central to ethics literature and how practitioners understand their role in the organization. This explains, at least in part, why the practitioner is commonly considered the organization's moral conscience.

For some scholars, public relations ethics is visible via a practitioner's decision to act as a moral conscience for an organization. The moral conscience construct has been used by many researchers to describe the practitioner's unofficial role in an organization: the ethics police. It is not unusual for some practitioners to take up the mantle of moral conscience as a survey of both practitioners and mass communication educators demonstrated, "the majority believed public relations practitioners should provide ethics counsel" (Neill & Barnes, 2018, p. 26) while others contend that it would be beneficial to rely on others than on their own personal ethics. Neill and Weaver (2017) found that millennial public relations practitioners were found to be less prepared to embrace the ethical conscience role; further, and more concerning, these practitioners do not expect to face ethical issues in the workplace. However, based on the Hagelstein and colleagues'

(2021) findings that some practitioners encounter daily moral challenges, this expectation is ill-founded.

The number of people involved in communication development can make it easy to pass off accountability even though practitioners are often seen as the ethics conscience for organizations (Bowen, 2008; Neill, 2016). Fawkes (2018) explained that the practitioner as conscience is consistent with the excellence school of thought, "the Excellence school is adamant that the PR person must act as the ethical conscience of the organisation; rhetorical schools, with their Aristotelian foundations, embrace advocacy; and critical schools point out the emptiness of the claim to ethical guardianship" (p. 274). Neill and Barnes (2018) noted that there is no agreed-upon understanding of what this means for the practitioner. What is doubly concerning is how there is no agreement among scholars either. Neill and Barnes (2018) and Bowen (2008) argued for the practitioner as the moral conscience while St. John III and Pearson (2016) abhorred the construct. Those against the moral conscience construct believed it to minimize ethics to a person which can limit ethical discussion throughout an organization. Further, many ethics researchers described the risks associated with speaking out; examples include risks of social disruption, lowering of standing, and job loss. Thus, it would be against the intelligence of the organization to consider one profession the moral conscience because it would only truly put their organizational standings at risk. Regardless, scholars have found that practitioners view the moral conscience role as a choice made by practitioners (Neill & Barnes, 2018).

These three strains of choice demonstrate how both practitioners and scholars grapple with what practitioners should do and how practitioners should do it. Previous literature has also found individual characteristics to be of upmost importance in decision making through an application of the contingency theory (Voges et al., 2022). While the conjoint approach identified the important characteristics behind practitioner decisions following ethical questions, insight is still needed. Notably, the discussion of choice misses an important aspect: how practitioners got to the choice or ethical decision. Such a discussion could provide further insight into why certain practitioners and scholars view the moral conscience as beneficial and why some do not.

Comprehension

Perhaps the most robust category of public relations ethics is comprehension, where researchers present new interpretations of old ethical theories, such as deontology (Bowen, 2008), and newer theories, such as dialogue (Ihlen & Heath, 2019; Paquette et al., 2015). Here, researchers addressed common issues for ethics and public relations, such as misused terminology (e.g., Bowen, 2016), persuasion and dialogue (e.g., Ihlen & Heath, 2019; Paquette et al., 2015; Toledano, 2018), and theory and practice (Thummes & Seiffert-Brockmann, 2019).

Bowen (2016) attempted to clarify ethics terms for the field of public relations because practitioners and scholars alike misinterpret their point or meaning. To rectify this situation, specific terms (like character, transparency, and values) were defined and contextualized by high-ranking practitioners and then placed against their conceptual definitions in ethics literature. Bowen used three main ethics schools of thought—deontology, utility, and virtue—but only referred to deontology and virtue in the analysis. despite the fact that utilitarianism offers a great deal in terms of ethical theories. Bowen

(2016) concluded that many buzzwords for public relations ethics, such as transparency and authenticity, have little to no foundations in ethics literature.

A different, but similar approach to public relations ethics can be found in scholars' works on persuasion and dialogue (e.g., Ihlen & Heath, 2019; Paquette et al., 2015; Toledano, 2018). Ultimately, the core of what these researchers were asking was how to rectify their high notions of ethics with their concerns for persuasion. An ethical problem, for Fawkes (2018), was persuasion and harm. She wrote the "'sin' here is persuasion" (p. 281), though, for the public relations practitioner, persuasion needs to be considered not harmful on its own. Fawkes (2018) proposed, "such experiences call for a new approach to public relations ethics, moving from external codes to internal guidance" (p. 284). This dialogue is important because it explains how ethics, if applied a certain way, can discredit an entire profession. If scholars and ethicists have qualms with persuasion, then the entire profession is called into question.

Many scholars began their dialogue journey with the claim that the current understanding of dialogue in public relations needs reinterpretation, so they started with the Greeks' work on persuasion and rhetoric. Much of this interpretation ended with questions of persuasion (Ihlen & Heath, 2019), similar to Fawkes (2018). Ihlen and Heath (2018) concluded, through their discussions of rhetoric, that persuasion should never be considered a goal because the goal should be truth. Toledano (2018) took a roundabout journey for public relations and dialogue using Buber's dialogic approach and ultimately claimed that the lines between strategic communication and dialogue are blurring. This evidence is based, in part, on how Buber conducted his own style of communication, which moved from what might be considered dialogue to more strategic communication (as he had a self-serving goal).

For Paquette and colleagues (2015), public relations ethics was viewed through dialogic theory, which means a revisit to dialogic principles to present their ultimate conclusion, "...understand what goes into ethical, mutually rewarding relationships, rather than just strategic, manipulative relationships" (p. 37). The latter half of that statement is concerning as it places strategic in company with manipulation. Further exemplars of theory-based approaches include applying Kantian ethics to public relations scenarios (Pratt et al., 1994) and the excellence project (Bowen, 2004), conducting in-depth analysis on public relations and Rawls' veil of ignorance (Roberts, 2012), and using Habermas's Principle U to proscribe a new direction for public relations ethics (Berg & Feldner, 2017). All of these instances demonstrate how scholars revise and revisit old theories of ethics and their principles thereof to reimagine the public relations ethics of today.

Scholars have attempted to infuse ethical theories as justifications for ethical decisions and choices in public relations practice. In part, this fusion can be perceived through the construction of the moral conscience and how practitioners view themselves as ethical consultants for organizations. It is also important to examine how practitioners and scholars understand ethical issues in public relations practice. Thummes and Seiffert-Brockmann (2019) based their research on two varying conceptions of public relations practitioners, as "smart friendly liars" (p. 412) or as communicators who dialogue with transparency, honesty, and respect. Starting from the assumption that neither is wholly true, the authors worked to understand how practitioners enter into modes of self-deception through the use of motivated biases as a way to alleviate conditions of guilt or remorse. Self-deception internally justified poor choices as necessary or within the bounds of values and morality. Danger was associated with self-deception as practitioners are typically "more successful persuaders" and "lose their sense of moral wrongdoing and gradually adapt less moral behaviors" (Thummes & Seiffert-Brockmann, 2019, p. 414).

The authors identified various types of ethical conflicts. They found that there are two levels of conflict, individual and organizational, whereas the interests for each party are relative to the level. For example, an individual conflict could result in a question of loyalty versus duty or individual benefits versus public interests (Thummes & Seiffert-Brockmann, 2019). At the organizational level, a conflict could put an organization's interests against that of its stakeholders. These examples are indicative of one of the most common ethical issues for public relations: conflicts of interest (Plaisance, 2018). In terms of theoretical background, the Thummes and Seiffert-Brockmann (2019) study does not use any specific theory outside of their basis in the two competing constructs. What is of note, however, is how the authors attempted to identify strategies practitioners use to self-deceive, though they acknowledge that they failed in this endeavor. Their attempt to conceive of the decision-making process prior to decisions and choices demonstrates a unique research interest and would ultimately benefit from sound theoretical framework provided by moral psychology.

Embracing Moral Psychology for Public Relations Ethics

As the review of the three robust categories of public relations ethics research demonstrates, scholars viewed ethics through theories and at the point of conception of ethical decisions and reasonings. Moral psychology offers a variant perspective on ethics and actually precedes ethical behavior (Comer & Sekerka, 2018). Indeed, Plaisance (2018) presented moral psychology as a new research direction and claims that research can use:

> Longstanding psychology-related instruments to explore questions of moral perception, moral motivation and moral decision-making…. The largely inductive nature of moral psychology approaches promise to complement the more abstract theorizing that has dominated the media ethics field by providing empirical data on the moral development and orientation of media professionals. (p. 470)

Moral psychology acts as a precursor to ethics, ethical decision-making, and ethical behavior. However, scholars focus on applying ethics to public relations, so there is a lack of moral psychology-based research for the field.

In addition, scholars tended to use similar research methods and choose to either interview (e.g., Bowen, 2016) or survey (e.g., Neill, 2016; Neill & Weaver, 2017) practitioners. While scholars have analyzed trade publications for archival insights into historical perceptions of public relations (e.g., Podnar & Golob, 2009), more research based on this approach is necessary. Indeed, Podnar and Golob (2009) argued that—even though public relations can be used to shape public opinion—the historical perspective on public relations from trade publications is lacking. This presents a unique opportunity for the current study; both ethics and morality are longstanding philosophies, thus it would be appropriate to analyze perceptions of these concepts from the perspective of trade publications. The Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) has, for example, an extensive archive of past trade publication articles. This professional organization was established in 1947 and its longstanding tenure in the public relations field has resulted in around 30,000 current members. Additionally, PRSA presents members with a code of ethics that includes professional values (e.g., advocacy and loyalty) and provisions of conduct (e.g., free flow of informaiton and competition). Trade articles, like those produced for PRSA, should be better understood to see how ethics, a topic the professional association takes seriously, is covered.

Instead of arguing and representing Aristotelian rhetoric or Kant's categorical imperative, the field of public relations would reap benefits by understanding morality in decision-making and the resulting consequences. This field presents concepts found to influence ethics, such as moral courage. Moral psychologists grapple with this concept and consider it paramount to understanding ethics, but there is a distinct lack of moral courage or even moral psychology research in the public relations ethics literature.

Thus, the current study uses moral psychology as the foundation for morality and ethics. If the current study were to fit into the three categories of public relations ethics research, it would be a combination of comprehension and choice: moral psychology as the basis for comprehension to public relations ethics and a shift in choice literature and the *before* moments that capture the process of decision-making. The findings of such inquiries could better illuminate perceptions of public relations behaviors and expectations, a need for more ethics education, a reflection on morals and values, and revised training dockets for public relations practitioners. To conclude, much work has been done on ethics with varying degrees of explication, but work needs to be done on the process and mental faculties associated with ethics and morality in the public relations workplace as related to moral psychology literature.

Moral Psychology

Public relations scholars have demonstrated strong trends into ethical inquiries for the field: examining different theories (e.g., Johannesen, 2001; Paquette et al., 2015), public relations practices (e.g., Toledano & Avidar, 2016), and decision-making (e.g., Place, 2015; Thummes & Seiffert-Brockmann, 2019). These studies captured the current trajectory of public relations ethics, but they relied on disjointed ethical literature that ranges from the various thinkers, such as the Greeks, Kant and Mill, and Buber, and various literature perspectives, such as culture (Choi & Cameron, 2004; Tsetsura & Valentini, 2016), ethical constructs (e.g., *moral conscience*) (e.g., Bowen, 2008; Neill & Weaver, 2017), crisis literature (e.g., St. John III & Pearson, 2016), and more (e.g., Medeiros, 2019; Tao & Kim, 2017).

Very few public relations ethics studies connected or even acknowledged the relationship that moral psychology has with ethics, ethical decision-making, and behaviors (e.g., Cabot, 2005; Wilkins & Coleman, 2005). For moral psychology, the relationship between ethics and moral psychology concepts (such as moral courage) is quite clear. Comer and Vega (2011), among other scholars, demonstrated this intertwined relationship between moral courage and ethics by showing how concepts in morality—moral sensitivity, attentiveness, and courage—facilitated ethics in the workplace. Further, the moral psychology perspective focuses on the process that precipitates ethics. Thus, moral psychology literature demonstrates the inescapable tie between ethics and moral courage and, as public relations finds itself more interested in ethics (especially with technology advancements and crisis situations), it could be in the field’s best interest to ground its ethical understandings in moral psychology which is a precursor to ethics and a compliment to public relations. The following review of moral psychology provides the theoretical foundations of moral courage, as found in moral psychology literature, and suggests a conceptualization of moral courage for the public relations field.

Moral Psychology Roots

Moral psychology finds its roots in psychology literature with Jean Piaget, Albert Bandura, and others working to understand the nature of moral development as related to decisions and actions (Wilkins & Coleman, 2005). Much of the initial, popular work on moral psychology began with Piaget's work with children; he wanted to understand the cognitive stages of child development as children work through games (Wilkins & Coleman, 2005). Piaget identified different stages of development that relate to understanding and enforcing morality. Since this conception, other psychologists, such as Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Rest, addressed and refined these stages of moral development by suggesting that they are tied to the education and maturity of the individual (Wilkins & Coleman, 2005). Researchers used these moral development stages to develop morality questionnaires and measurements, such as with the Defining Issues Test (DIT) and the Personal Ethics Threshold (PET). These tests complement questions of moral courage and how individuals stand true to principles that are under fire. Inquiries into moral psychology concepts, such as moral sensitivity, moral attentiveness, and moral courage, began to take hold.

Moral psychologists have studied how these concepts manifest in organizations. Comer and Sekerka (2018) contended that "unethical behavior tarnishes organizational reputations, creates legal liabilities, and reduces public trust" (p. 116). Moral psychologists argue that research is needed into how individuals, employees in the workplace, make decisions that are either ethical or unethical (Comer & Vega, 2011). This claim is consistent with the ramifications organizations face if their employees act unethically. Many scholars have developed various ways to measure different aspects of morality, such as by using the Defining Issues Test (DIT) and the Personal Ethics Threshold (PET).

Defining Issues Test. The Defining Issues Test (DIT) has been widely used to measure moral reasoning (Wilkins & Coleman, 2005). One of the benefits of this approach is how the DIT can be applied to various professions—including, but not limited to, doctors, journalists, philosophers, advertisers, students, and public relations practitioners (Auger & Gee, 2015; Lieber, 2008; Wilkins & Coleman, 2005). The DIT was developed to measure moral reasoning, but those who take the test cannot easily discern the "best" answer as the answer choices are related to Kohlberg's three stages of ethical reasoning (Wilkins & Coleman, 2005). Participants read scenarios and choose what to do based on the answers provided; however, this test is long at around forty minutes ("About the DIT", 2019) and some scenarios cannot be altered. The DIT is copyrighted, save for the two scenarios which can be developed by researchers applying the DIT (Lieber, 2008; Wilkins & Coleman, 2005). Lieber (2008) found that public relations practitioners scored relatively high while Cabot (2005) found that public relations college students scored relatively low and "demonstrate relatively unsophisticated moral reasoning" (p. 329). The DIT measures moral development, but when Cabot (2005) used the DIT on college students there were little to no differences between freshman and senior scores.

Personal Ethics Threshold. In contrast to the DIT, the Personal Ethics Threshold (PET) measures how (or if) participants have the moral courage to do the right thing (Comer & Vega, 2011). Comer and Vega (2011) considered two instances where people are more likely to abandon moral principles: (1) high situational pressures and (2) low moral intensity. The former, high situational pressures, are thought to place an individual in such a position that adhering to moral standards provides greater loss than if the individual violated moral standards. The consequences to the self and others, like loss of social standing, are emphasized (Comer & Vega, 2011), but the pressures result in moral violations. Additionally, individuals are likely to abandon moral principles if the moral intensity, or the consequences of abandoning moral reasoning, is low (Comer & Vega, 2011). The PET is able to (1) represent how much situational pressures influence a person to act in accordance with moral standards and (2) measure choices based on the moral intensity of the situation.

The PET presents a total of ten scenarios to participants: the first five scenarios reflect moral intensity while the remaining five scenarios capture situational pressures (Comer & Vega, 2011). The moral intensity levels are reflected in the choices for the first five scenarios while the situational pressures remain constant; the reverse is true for the remaining scenarios. A higher PET score suggests that the individual is more likely to follow moral standards (Comer & Vega, 2011). The purpose of the PET is to help explain instances where moral courage fails—when a moral violation occurs—as related to moral intensity and social pressures. Because of the PET, scholars can further refine factors that influence moral courage by identifying scenarios that both stifle and encourage moral courage.

For Comer and Sekerka (2018), ethics and ethical decisions are influenced by moral courage. Asfar and colleagues (2019), Mansur and colleagues (2020), Fenton (2020), Hannah and colleagues (2011), and others submitted similar findings: that moral courage enables behavior. Specifically, moral courage is considered integral to behavior in the workplace because it demonstrates how employees behave with intention in the face of risks and consequences (Afsar et al., 2019). This research foundation demonstrates how moral courage facilitates attitudes, decisions and behaviors.

Moral Courage Definitions

There are many attempts to define moral courage based on pillars found in moral psychology literature. Researchers differed in how they contend with this concept. Some argued that moral courage was more behavioral, "the behavioral expression of authenticity in the face of the discomfort of dissension, disapproval, or rejection" (Lopez et al, 2010, p. 23) or the "willingness to speak up or take action...for oneself as well as for others" (Bronstein, Fox, Kamon, & Knolls, 2007, p. 661). These conceptions of moral courage do not so much lead up to the decision or action as they capture the decision and action itself. If moral courage enables and facilitates ethics, then a definition that further removes moral courage from the decision is needed.

Other conceptions of moral courage are a step removed from the actual decision and capture the process leading up to a decision or action. Indeed, Peterson and Seligman (2004) contend that moral courage "compels or allows an individual to do what he or she believes is right, despite fear of social or economic consequences" (as cited in Comer & Sekerka, 2018, p. 117). In the adoption of this definition, the sphere of concern widened to include the force behind the decision (compels) and the consequences (social or economic). Hannah and colleagues (2011) offered a comprehensive definition of moral courage:

> 1) a malleable character strength that 2) provides the requisite conation needed to commit to personal moral principles, 3) under conditions where the actor is aware of the objective danger involved in supporting those principles, 4) that enables the

> willing endurance of that danger 5) in order to act ethically or resist pressure to act unethically as required to maintain those principles. (p. 560)

Moral courage manifests as a character strength, to Hannah and colleagues (2011) and Mansur et al. (2020), who adopted this definition. This conception of moral courage demonstrates how researchers understand the concept to be far more than a trait; it requires endurance of risk (e.g., points two through four) so that the actor can act ethically to maintain moral principles (point five). The definition captures more than a decision or an enactment of a decision; it captures an acknowledgment of morality and risk that the individual might face as a result of a situation that puts moral principles in jeopardy. The ethical decision to act or resist an unethical act is precipitated by the conscious moral courage process the individual undergoes. While moral courage is considered malleable, the actual principles and standards are more on the fixed side while the environment and social factors introduce variability (Hannah et al., 2011).

Applying Moral Courage to Public Relations Ethics

There is no current conceptualization and application of moral courage to public relations ethics literature. When looking at an application of moral courage to the field of public relations ethics, consider the main assumptions associated with moral courage. Moral psychologists argue that moral courage comes before ethics (e.g., Comer & Sekerka, 2018), can be considered either a decision itself (e.g., Bronstein et al., 2007) or more process-driven manifestation of ethics (Hannah et al., 2011; Mansur et al., 2020), faces intense influences at the workplace in the form of pressures (Asfar et al., 2019; Fenton, 2020; Mansur et al., 2020), and is rare (Sasse et al., 2020). Public relations ethics assumes a moral conscience role (Bowen, 2008), a relationship mediation between the organization and its publics (Ihlen & Heath, 2019; Tsetsura & Valentini, 2016), and can be theoretically situated in a socially constructed realm (L'Etang, 2011, 2012).

An application of moral courage to public relations ethics literature is appropriate because both fields acknowledge the risks to the organization should its employees engage in unethical behavior (Comer & Sekerka, 2018; Toledano, 2018). Moral courage, grounded in moral psychology literature, provides a necessary perspective on how individuals reach ethical—or unethical—decisions. Focusing on the process of moral courage and its manifestation of ethics in the workplace provides insight into *why* or *how* some practitioners decide to be moral consciences for their organizations, which would further illuminate what Neill and Barnes (2018) found. Moral courage literature also demonstrated how the concept was highly relational, with many studies based on leader-follower relationships and their influences on moral courage and ethics (Hannah et al., 2011; Mansur et al., 2020; Sekerka et al., 2011). Findings demonstrated a strong linkage between a leader, such as a supervisor in the workplace, and the follower in terms of influencing moral *principles*, moral courage, and ethics (Hannah et al., 2011). Public relations ethics research constantly contends with questions of leadership and relationships in the workplace (e.g., Hwang & Cameron, 2009; Shin et al., 2011; Waters, 2012). Theories like the contingency theory of strategic conflict management highlight the complexities organizations undergo when developing communication stances with their publics on given issues (Cancel et al., 1997). Reber and colleagues (2003) furthered the contingency theory by suggesting that ethics in conflict management can be viewed as a prohibitor variable to altering an organization's stance. Further information on the contingency theory and its connection to ethics is discussed later.

Shared knowledge between moral courage and public relations literature might demonstrate how, via moral courage and ethical behaviors, leaders influence decisions in their followers that manifest in choices as to how to interact with their organization's publics. Such interest directly coincides with many scholars' work on moral courage in organizations and how such interactions influence ethics. Thus, given the overlay between the two fields, it is pertinent for public relations scholars to include moral courage into the public relations ethics literature. Taking public relations core into consideration, two proposals for moral courage conceptualization are presented.

First, the definition provided by Hannah and colleagues (2011) demonstrates a strong consideration of factors relative to moral courage outside of the decision (e.g., moral principles, risk or threat, conscious choice, and the decision). The conception also allows for more flexible and empirical readings of what it would mean to operationalize moral courage. The second principle, "provides the requisite conation needed to commit to personal moral principles" would be operationalized as such: the extent to which practitioners take time for self-contemplation. The principle implies a conscious choice to realize the moral principles that might be at stake and, as Sekerka and colleagues (2011) suggested, taking time to self-contemplate and think over morality is necessary. For the third principle, "under conditions where the actor is aware of the objective danger involved in supporting those principles," there is an implication of threat or risk awareness. Thus, an operationalization of the moral courage principle follows: the extent to which practitioners consider internal and external threats to their moral principles. This operationalization includes threat, which is consistent with public relations literature on the contingency theory of strategic conflict management (e.g., Jin & Cameron, 2007; Kim & Jin, 2019). The willingness to endure, the fourth principle of moral courage, is reflected in the following operationalization, the level of willingness by the practitioner to stand by moral principles. Lastly, the fifth pillar of moral courage, "in order to act ethically or resist pressure to act unethically as required to maintain those principles" reflects an action or a choice. Thus, an operationalization follows: the extent to which the practitioner chooses to act within the boundaries set by him-/herself, by moral principles. This best describes an internal reaction to moral considerations by the practitioners (e.g., organizational culture and microcultures).

Second, a definition provided by May and colleagues (2003, p. 355) can apply moral courage to a grander level like when an organization faces a conflict or crisis: the "fortitude to convert moral intentions into actions despite pressures from either inside or outside of the organization to do otherwise." This conception of moral courage has similar underpinnings as Hannah and colleagues' (2011), but it demonstrates how either internal or external threats, such as a conflict or crisis, might influence the moral courage situation at an organizational level. In turn, a crisis can be defined as "a major occurrence with potentially negative outcome affecting an organization and threatens the existence of the organization" (Fearn-Banks, 2002, p. 2), which disrupts and interferes with the organization's ability to function, its ability to deliver its products and services, its financial stability, its relationship with its publics, and its image and reputation (Jin & Cameron, 2007, p. 257). The concerns—image and reputation—are the concerns Comer and Sekerka (2018) presented and used as a basis for moral courage literature in the workplace. Further, the negative outcomes and the threats described in the crisis definition reflect the pressures in May and colleagues' (2011) concept of moral courage. The pressures can manifest in a variety of ways, as proposed by the contingency theory (Cancel et al., 1997).

This section discussed (1) moral psychology, (2) moral courage, (3) the moral courage and public relations overlap, (4) a conceptualization of moral courage for public relations, and (5) what an operationalization of moral courage for public relations covers. A review—and later application—of the contingency theory is appropriate because the theory seeks to provide mirrored understandings and explanations on choices and decisions. It is to be argued that the contingency theory would benefit from an explication of advocacy via moral psychology literature. Indeed, Cancel and colleagues (1999) wrote, "the contingency theory claims to offer a structure for better understanding the dynamics of accommodation and advocacy, the ethical facets of accommodations, as well as the efficacy of accommodation in public relations practice" (p. 173-174). Accommodation has been well attended to, so this study turns attention to the ethical facets of advocacy. Thus, the next section provides an overview of the contingency theory of strategic conflict management: its inception, evolution, and connection to public relation ethics and advocacy.

The Contingency Theory of Strategic Conflict Management

The contingency theory of strategic conflict management (hereafter the contingency theory) in part exists due to Grunig and colleagues (1992) excellence project. Indeed, even Pang and colleagues (2010) said that the work Grunig produced inspired the contingency theory and claimed that it might not exist without such work. Ultimately, contingency theorists argued that an organization's stance is a result of many variables; they influence the stance toward a given public at a given time during a given circumstance. This stance moves along a continuum, which ranges from pure advocacy to pure accommodation (Cancel et al., 1997). The theory captures the dynamic and changing nature of communication, which allows for flexibility and strategy (Pang et al., 2010). The work on the contingency theory goes beyond stance. Theorists work to create constructs, groups of variables into factors, produce cultural applications of the theory, and introduce new literature (e.g., leadership, crisis, etc.).

Many studies have furthered the theory's application and explanatory power, but it is evident in the literature how researchers favor one aspect of the contingency theory: accommodation. Since researchers rejected Grunig's work (Piezcka & L'Etang, 2001; Holtzhausen, 2015; Pfau & Wen, 2006), in part, on the basis of absolute accommodation and symmetry, it is peculiar why the opposite end of the continuum, advocacy, has not received equal attention. Such an imbalance can be seen as a preference for one style of communication (accommodation) over another (advocacy). Further, part of the initial need for the contingency theory, one that stays strong through recent literature, was based on morals and ethics. Ethics and morality as a reason to fail to accommodate, or reject accommodation altogether, provided a unique research perspective. Therefore, after a review of its origins, evolutions, and extensions, a new research direction is presented: how the contingency theory will benefit from an explication of advocacy through ethics and moral psychology literature.

The contingency theory provides an alternate perspective on communication between an organization and its public—one that captures the complexity of the process and acknowledges the ethical implications of the situation. In the original piece on the contingency theory (Cancel et al., 1997), the authors critiqued Grunig's excellence project and argued that the work was too simplistic. Cancel and colleagues (1997) made two claims that are radically important to note: advocacy can be ethical and two-way symmetrical communication can be improbable and unethical. The authors even questioned the morality of other parties and suggest that their moral holdings (or lack thereof) might be reason to reject two-way symmetrical communication. These claims provided a strong foundation for a rejection of the four models of communication, which were (1) press agentry, (2) public information model, (3) two-way asymmetrical, and (4) two-way symmetrical. They preceded any explanation into the proposed contingency theory itself. Thus, it is evidenced, through their critique, how ethics and morality provided a path for a contingency theory perspective.

Cancel and colleagues (1997) conducted an extensive review of public relations literature and theories, such as game theory and coorientation theory, to construct their perspective of the organization and public communication. Presenting the crux of the contingency theory, the authors defended both advocacy and accommodation. After investigation and analysis, advocacy was identified as an integral part of public relations. Cancel and colleagues (1997) likened advocacy back to Edward Bernays' empirical public relations work. In contrast, some literature on accommodation suggested that practitioners are wary of it because they thought it implied negative activities like manipulation, weakness, and dependency (Cancel et al., 1997). At this stage, the theory was referred to as the contingency theory of accommodation in public relations. The authors were responding, in part, to the claims made by Grunig and colleagues that proposed the only ethical public relations was based on two-way symmetrical communication; so it is unsurprising that the cornerstone was accommodation.

Contingency theory scholars argue that stance-making occurs on a continuum, from pure advocacy to pure accommodation (e.g., Cancel et al., 1999; Pang et al., 2016). The origin of the continuum was in response to a call for scholarship that moves the organization-public communication away from discrete Excel Theory models and into a more nuanced continuum (Cancel et al., 1997). Early scholars identified more than eighty variables (Cancel et al., 1997; Cancel et al., 1999) and scholars continue to refine the variables today (e.g., Pang et al., 2016). These variables were ultimately grouped into two broad categories: internal and external variables (Cancel et al., 1997). This would soon evolve (Cancel et al., 1999) to reflect refined understandings of the subgroups of variables like external publics and issues under question (e.g., Voges et al., 2022).

After the initial conception of the contingency theory, the authors grounded the theory in various studies so as to empirically present a working theory of public relations. A visit to the theory's founding presented Cancel and colleagues (1999) with the opportunity to test the theory by interviewing public relations practitioners. Here, the authors similarly invoke morality saying, "taking a moral stand means *not* engaging in two-way symmetrical communication because to do so would place communication *process* above ethical *principle*" (Cancel et al., 1999, p. 173, emphasis in original). When looking to the interviewees, however, the researchers conducted a slight revision of the original theory and presented two new concepts into the fold: predisposing and situational variables. Predisposing variables shape an organization's stance prior to a situation while situational variables influence the stance's dynamics during a particular situation. These concepts offer a variant perspective on the external and internal variables because of when they influence the stance. For example, Cancel and colleagues (1999) posited that corporation size is a predisposing characteristic (something that is more or less static and predetermined) as opposed to a situational characteristic like urgency of a situation. Furthermore, an external variable can be seen also as a situational variable, like external public characteristics. Lastly, it is important to note that the variables, both situational and predisposing, can move an organization's stance along the continuum from either accommodation or advocacy or not at all. The influence of the variables might not be strong enough to move the organization's stance from its original position.

The contingency theory's variables took another step forward with a study conducted by Cameron and colleagues (2001). They interviewed practitioners and discovered another type of variable: proscriptive. Proscriptive variables have a unique position in the contingency theory. Indeed, as the original theorists proposed, there might be limits to accommodation of parties and the proscriptive variables capture this concept. Proscriptive variables prohibit or limit accommodation and the authors identified six: moral conviction, multiple publics, regulatory constraints, management pressure, jurisdictional issues, and legal constraints. In this study, the authors, in describing advocacy, used "asymmetrical" (Cameron et al., 2001) which suggests that advocacy is inherently one-sided and that, perhaps, accommodation is not.

From this point, the contingency theory expanded because researchers brought different types of inquiries to it. The lifecycle of the theory grew: from theoretical development, interviews, case studies, and scale building. In 2003, the contingency theory was still known as the theory of accommodation though the authors concluded the article by arguing that the theory might be better described as the contingency theory of conflict management (Reber et al., 2003). Accommodation and advocacy have a slight evolution in this piece as well. Indeed, in the case of the Conrail acquisition, there is an immediate coupling of winning with advocacy. Such a presentation of advocacy with winning compliments previous findings in Cameron et al. (2001) where interviewees argued that winning is paramount. One can only wonder about the reverse: accommodation. Researchers Reber and Cameron (2003) brought scale building to the theory and developed five theoretical constructs, which responded to the need for better management of variables. Further, the empirical test demonstrated the theory's breadth and solid foundation.

The empirical foundation was furthered through more surveys and scale developments (Shin et al., 2006; Jin & Cameron, 2006). Shin and colleagues (2006), acting on the notion that the simplest explanation is usually true, conducted a factor analysis and grouped the variables into twelve factors on two dimensions (external factors: external threats, industry environment, political/cultural/social environment, and external publics; internal factors: organization's characteristics, PR department characteristics, management characteristics, and individual characteristics). Following the factor analysis, Jin and Cameron (2006) developed a scale for measuring organization stance as a degree of accommodation. This scale captured action-based accommodations and qualified-rhetoric-mixed accommodations; the authors suggested that both of these constructs "capture the domain of accommodation" and that more research is necessary to "better capture the advocacy facets of the contingency continuum" (Jin & Cameron, 2006, p. 425). This statement illustrates the accommodation emphasis; there is no known scale development for advocacy, which demonstrates how one end of the continuum is overlooked.

After better grounding the contingency theory in empirical evidence and factor analyses, researchers applied it to various situations to explain cultural differences, leadership, and threats and conflicts. The inception of the contingency theory required testing and theoretical foundations, but once the theory began to take shape, researchers began to test its limits in different realms.

Many researchers have used the contingency theory as a point of cultural reference to determine if the variables identified for Western practice hold up under international scrutiny (e.g., Cheng & Cameron, 2019; Choi & Cameron, 2005; Li et al., 2010; Pang et al., 2016; Shin et al., 2011; Xie, 2017). Ultimately, researchers have discovered that most of the variables apply to non-Western practices. Li and colleagues (2010) found individual characteristics to be most important for Chinese public relations practice, which is fascinating given the culture's collectivist nature. Choi and Cameron (2005) operate under the assumption that cultural and social factors influence international public relations and found that fear was a driving motivator for Korean practitioners working for multinational corporations. For the Korean practitioners, the contingency theory variables were invoked because of the fear and emotive response they felt. Here, the authors describe how the variables limited accommodation, which again suggests a slight preference for one half of the continuum. Regardless, researchers have expanded the contingency theory's impact and have determined that the results hold up to international scrutiny.

Researchers also considered an application of leadership for the contingency theory (e.g., Hwang & Cameron, 2009; Shin et al., 2011; Waters, 2012) and estimated accommodation stances as relative to different forms of leadership. Indeed, Hwang and Cameron (2009) found that stance expectations are dependent on the type of perceived leadership (e.g., transformational versus transactional). This finding broadened the contingency theory as it moves into a different realm of research: public estimation and perception. Shin and colleagues (2011) furthered the leadership agenda and analyzed leadership and the contingency theory through two cultures (U.S. and Korea). This analysis determined that leadership characteristics were mediated by culture, so practitioners should understand both the culture and situation (Shin et al., 2011). The end work on this piece, however, moved the contingency theory to the contingency theory public relations leadership model. As a form of contingency theory existed prior to an application of the contingency theory to public relations, it is not surprising that some authors connected the public relations contingency theory to other iterations of the theory (e.g., Waters, 2012).

An important advancement for the contingency theory includes its extension into the conflict and crisis realm. Part of this extension is precipitated by previously-developed models, such as the threat appraisal model by Jin and colleagues (2005). The basis of the extension rests on the notion that the contingency theory is built on the concept of threat without any true operationalization and explication of the term. Thus, Jin and Cameron (2007) explore two dimensions of threat—type and duration. To accomplish the task, the authors examine threat through three levels of consequences: cognitive (mental); affective (emotive); and conative (stance movement). Threat type and duration influenced the three dependent variables, which suggests that understanding the threat is key to making a sound stance movement. This extension of the contingency theory harkens the theory back to its theoretical foundations and provides a solid standing for an organization's stance in times of threat.

Further, the threat extension demonstrates how the contingency theory stands in potentially negative situations. Kim and Cameron (2016) furthered the threat appraisal advancement of the contingency theory by analyzing how identity factors into perceptions made by others. They round out the contingency theory as combined with the threat appraisal model because they consider public perceptions and expectations. And, most recently, Kim and Jin (2020) expanded the understanding of threat by adding another dimension to it: perceived temporal distance. Thus, threat for the contingency theory includes: type, duration, and perceived temporal distance. Situational crisis communication theory provided the basis for the study's stimuli, too, so the contingency theory is grounded again in crisis literature. Researchers considered threat to be a core aspect of the contingency theory, thus the continued research and explication of threat was paramount to the theory's evolution.

Cheng and Cameron (2019) took a similar extension approach to the contingency theory except they expanded it into the relationship management realm. The contingency theory and the relationship management theory served as the basis for what the authors call contingent organization public relationship (COPR). Each theory was chosen because it can help researchers understand the changes to relationships over time and how that change reflected the benefits of both parties. In essence, the authors saw the value of the contingency theory and used it as an opportunity to extend researchers' knowledge on dynamic stances, longevity, and relationships. The authors ultimately contended that, through an integration of the two theories, there were six modes of relationships that exist upon a new continuum that ranges from aggression to accommodation. This continuum reflects a departure from the contingency theory's advocacy and its replacement (aggression) was quite more emotive than its predecessor. This switch can be seen as an attempt to capture what the authors considered self-serving instances (without consideration of the other party) without viewing it through the concept of advocacy.

Cheng (2020) furthered the COPR evolution, brought the development to Western practices, and obtained similar findings to the 2019 study. It was concluded that the consideration of the other and the mutual benefits—brought to COPR from the relationship management theory—are perhaps not reality and more normative scholarship because the findings do not readily demonstrate stances for the better of both parties. What is of note is how Cheng (2020) closed the study: she suggested that researchers should analyze "the impact of contingency factors such as legal and moral restrictions" (p. 151). It is not surprising that Cheng (2020) concluded with such a notion, as the contingency theory could benefit from further research into the moral restrictions to organization stance-making.

Grounding the Contingency Theory's Advocacy with Moral Psychology

The contingency theory has broadened, extended, and evolved to account for various changes into the organization and public stance communication. The contingency theory, in its contingency theory of strategic conflict management phase (as discussed by Pang and colleagues (2010) and others) shall act as the basis for the study. The COPR extension is noted, but the altered continuum moves away from the immediate interest of this study, which is to better explicate the advocacy principle through the use of ethics and moral psychology literature. This is based on the claim that the contingency theory originated as a partial response to questions about a morally repugnant public. Cancel and colleagues (1997) suggested that moral principles might hold an organization back from engaging in two-way symmetrical communication. While it is not explicit, this choice to stand with moral principles has theoretical foundations in moral psychology, specifically moral courage, which "compels or allows an individual to do what he or she believes is right, despite fear of social or economic consequences" (Peterson & Seligman, 2004, p. 216 cited in Comer and Sekerka, 2018, p. 117) and provides those with "fortitude to convert moral intentions into actions despite pressures from either inside or outside of the organization to do otherwise" (May et al., 2003, p. 355). Moral courage captures how individuals choose to stand true to moral principles and then act with ethical behavior, which is consistent with Cancel and colleagues (1997) claim that engaging with a questionably moral public might actually be unethical. Thus, there is a strong and conceivable tie between the contingency theory's foundation and moral psychology concepts.

Moral psychology, a precursor to ethics in many ways, can further an explication of the proscriptive variable moral constraints. In 2003, Reber and colleagues suggested that there are roughly six variables that could constrain or prohibit an organization from engaging in accommodation and moral constraints is one of those variables. They claim that moral convictions may lead an organization to hold a stance based on morally-defensible principles; they also claim that such a stance may suggest superiority and greater knowledge on the side of the organization (Reber et al., 2003).

There are two questions that come to mind: how often do organizations claim moral convictions as a reason to not accommodate and does a stance based on moral conviction imply a certain level of advocacy of those moral principles? Moral courage research suggests that acting based on moral principles is rare and takes a certain knowledge and moral maturity (Sasse et al., 2020). Further, it would not be a leap to perceive moral courage, that results in moral constraints of accommodation, as a form of advocacy. In total, the moral psychology literature—specifically that of moral courage as a precursor to ethical behavior—would explicate advocacy and offer nuanced understanding of ethical decision-making for organization stances. An explication of advocacy through moral psychology and ethics literature would set up a solid foundation for researchers to develop a scale of advocacy for the contingency theory without fear that such advocacy is harmful or second-rate to accommodation.

Specifically, the proposed study would utilize the following contingency theory's proposed variable constructs to measure and understand advocacy: moral constraints (proscriptive), dominant coalition characteristics (predisposing, internal), external publics (situational, external), and individual ethics (predisposing, internal). Each of these variables is chosen for a specific reason.

This study views moral constraints (a proscriptive variable) as a key reason that the contingency exists in the first place: that the original theorists questioned the ethicality of communicating equally with a morally repugnant public. Taking that proscriptive variable and tying it back to moral psychology literature, researchers would be able to better understand what leads up to a decision (ethical or not), which could be relative to an individual's level of ethics education or maturation development of morality. The intent is to determine how the practitioner understands moral constraints as relative to the continuum and if their perceptions demonstrate a call to advocacy.

Two theoretical constructs are to be measured as well, dominant coalition characteristics and external publics, because of their theoretical similarities to moral psychology literature. Indeed, moral psychologists suggested that moral courage in the workplace was influenced by surroundings and leaders (Hannah et al., 2011; Mansur et al., 2020), so it would be prudent to measure how practitioners internalize the influence of the dominant coalition on their ability to act ethically. A leader's influence over followers is substantial, for the case of moral courage, and can influence decisions to act ethically (Hannah et al., 2011). External publics was chosen because it presents one of the barriers to moral courage, which is the threat or risk. Many moral psychologists referred to the great risks associated with morally courageous behavior, such as social standing and job loss (Asfar et al., 2019). Presenting the external publics construct as a threat or risk allows the researcher to capture the pressure of the threat on the practitioner's moral courage allowances. For these two constructs, it would be feasible to create scenarios, based on the Personal Ethics Threshold (PET) that measures practitioners' choices as relative to moral courage (such as supervisors, team atmosphere, support, external public outrage, etc.).

These domains of interest are grounded in both contingency theory and moral psychology, so the study expects furthered relationships and understandings about how a practitioner's moral courage (1) relates to the dominant coalition; (2) is influenced by external publics; and (3) demonstrates characteristics of advocacy as proposed by practitioner's perceptions on moral constraints.

Individual Characteristics

Basic demographics, such as age and education, have been shown to be primary determinants of moral standards (Lieber, 2008; Rest, 1986, 1993; Wilkins & Coleman, 2005). Scholars have attributed higher moral choices to maturation of the individual. Given these findings, this study will differentiate and acknowledge the importance of maturation as seen through experience (10+ years) in the public relations industry.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The literature review identified significant gaps that led to the following research needs for public relations ethics: (1) grounded definition for ethics and morality and (2) an application of the definitions for public relations practitioners during times of conflict and crisis. The current study is organized into two phases that reflect the research needs for public relations ethics. Phase one of the study addresses the need for grounded definitions by looking to past and current conceptions of ethics and morality. Phase two of the study applies the definitions and insights found in phase one to the more general public relations populace. Thus, the current study proposes the following questions:

Phase 1

RQ1.1: How, if at all, do public relations trade publications represent issues of (a) ethics and (b) morality?

RQ1.2: How, if at all, do the public relations trade publications use situations to describe and/or demonstrate (a) ethics and (b) morality?

RQ1.3: How, if at all, do the public relations trade publications reference the PRSA Code of Ethics?

RQ2: How do experienced public relations practitioners define and differentiate between (a) ethics and (b) morality?

RQ3.1: What types of (a) ethically and (b) morally questionable situations do experienced public relations practitioners note?

RQ3.2: How do experienced public relations practitioners reflect on their chosen questionable situation(s)?

Phase 2

RQ4: How, if at all, do public relations practitioners' Personal Ethics Threshold (PET) (moral courage) differ by individual characteristics (a) gender, (b) age, and (c) education?

RQ5: How, if at all, do public relations practitioners' Personal Ethics Threshold (PET) (moral courage) differ by professional characteristics (a) professional position, (b) work experience, (c) decision making power, and (d) ethics training?

RQ6: How, if at all, do public relations practitioners' Personal Ethics Threshold (PET) (moral courage) differ by organization (a) size and (b) sector?

RQ7: How, if at all, do moral courage scenarios #1 (PR consultant) and #2 (C-suite) differ?

RQ8: How, if at all, do public relations advocacy differ by individual characteristics (a) gender, (b) age, and (c) education?

RQ9: How, if at all, do public relations advocacy differ by professional characteristics (a) professional position, (b) work experience, (c) decision making power, and (d) ethics training?

RQ10: How, if at all, do public relations advocacy differ by organization (a) size and (b) sector?

RQ11: How, if at all, do public relations practitioners' perceptions of advocacy relate to their Personal Ethics Threshold (PET) (moral courage)?

CHAPTER FOUR

MIXED METHODS DESIGN

The rationale for this mixed methods study is development. DeCuir-Gunby and Schultz (2017) define development as using one phase of a study to sequentially inform the second phase. These different phases are assumed to include both qualitative and quantitative aspects. The study's design is exploratory sequential whereas the first part of the study is qualitatively-driven to set a strong definitional foundation for both public relations ethics and morality and the second part of the study is quantitatively driven to apply and test the generalizability of the insights found during the first part of the study.

Mixed methods, as proposed by Tashakkori and Creswell (2007), is a research design that uses both qualitative and quantitative methods in a single study for the purpose of getting deeper insights through an integration of the collective results. Further, the research questions require both qualitative and quantitative methods to fully answer the inquiries. For this study, the first phase satisfies the qualitative aspect of Tashakkori and Creswell's (2007) definition and the second phase satisfies the second aspect—quantitative methods. Beyond the definition, the suitability of a mixed-methods approach is found in the proposed study's core: the study proposes two phases of exploratory methods as a way to illuminate public relations ethics via moral psychology from unique sequential insights.

Exploratory sequential designs offer the researcher the chance to identify themes during phase one, the qualitative phase, and then explore the identified themes in phase two, the quantitative phase. The qualitative method is conducted in two parts, wherein (1) public relations trade publications are analyzed and (2) depth interviews are conducted with experienced public relations practitioners who have communication team decision-making power. Jointly, the insights from both the trade publications and the interviews will provide insights into public relations ethics and morality. The quantitative method, the survey, is based on the aforementioned qualitative findings and will be distributed to public relations practitioners. This study proposes data triangulation for the data collected. Thus, the data will be analyzed first by method and then understood collectively. The following sections discuss each aspect of the study in detail.

Phase 1.1: Archival Analysis of Trade Publications

Public relations trade publications were analyzed to provide an account of how practitioners in the field described and perceived issues of ethics and morality. The source data, from the Public Relations Society of America, was retrieved from 2009-2021. Contextually, 2009 represents a pivotal time for public relations because of the increased importance of the internet and the increasing number of social media platforms. For example, Facebook was founded in 2004, Twitter in 2006, and Instagram in 2010. According to Ortiz-Ospina (2019), the number of Facebook users increased significantly between 2008 and 2010 to over 500 million users.

There are distinct methodological approaches that directly relate to the conceptions of history. History has been conceptualized as the learned past (Halbwachs, 1992), a past that can be reconstructed from the present (Megill, 2007; Nora, 1989), and as mediated via access to archives and sources (Trouillot, 1995). When analyzing with history at the core, archived or documented sources are the units of analysis (Decker et al., 2021). However, the type of sources analyzed further fall into categories: social documents and narrative sources (Decker et al., 2021); the latter category is relevant for the current study. Decker and colleagues (2021) defined narrative sources as “a tendency for their authors, implicitly or explicitly, to address a wider audience” (p. 1131). The trade publication articles are written with the intent to distribute to public relations practitioners at large. These types of narrative sources are popularly used to answer questions about “(past) actors’ memory, identity, and sensemaking” (Decker et al., 2021, p. 1131). Given this study’s research questions 1.1 and 1.2, the archival narrative analysis of trade publication articles on ethics and morality is appropriate. This archival analysis served as part of the foundation for the second part of the study—the quantitative analysis.

Sampling Strategy

Articles from the following trade publications are included in the analysis: Public Relations Society of America (PRSA) Strategies & Tactics (from 2018 to present) and PR Strategies (from Summer 2009-Fall 2017). It is important to note that *PR Strategies* merged with *PR Tactics* to create *Strategies & Tactics*. These trade publications are included in the analysis because the PRSA is a nonprofit trade association for public relations professionals with around thirty thousand members (PRSA About, n.d.). The association offers professional membership and educational materials for upcoming and current practitioners, so it is prudent to understand how PRSA members understand public relations ethics.

Articles needed to connect to ethics and morality on some level. Roughly six hundred articles (approx. 3 pages each) were compiled and read to determine their connection to ethics and morality. The researcher used a list of ethics and morality keywords and phrases to guide the inclusion process. A complete list of keywords and phrases can be found in Appendix B (List 1). While there were no publication date limitations, articles were excluded if they had no connection to ethics and morality (e.g., "ways to network" or "organization tips for the new year").

Data Management and Analysis Procedure

The trade publication articles' source data was analyzed for how PRSA presents and defines issues of ethics and morality. The research relied on the following data analysis system. After data source identification and article collection, the researcher addressed research questions one through three and identified the themes, using a modified version of analysis as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), to understand the phenomena. The analyses relied on the process explained below:

1. Familiarity with data through transcription, multiple readings, and note taking.
2. Inductively generating initial codes from descriptions of importance.
3. Searching for themes—initial codes are grouped by similarity and organized into potential themes.
4. Reviewing themes, which involved refining the themes from the previous phase.
5. Defining and naming themes, where analysis is organized into a narrative structure with accompanying descriptions. These themes are discussed in their own right and in relation to each other.
6. Producing the report for the results section.

The complete data analysis from the trade publication articles was analyzed singularly, then a brief comparative analysis—against the findings from Phase 1.2—was conducted. Finally, a complete data triangulation analyzed the trifecta of data sources against each other for optimal communication ethics insights.

Conducted in rounds, the trade publication review began with an initial identification of articles published by PRSA. The articles were gathered and read to determine their connection(s) to either ethics or morality. Between the two PRSA sources (i.e., PRSA Strategy and PRSA Strategy and Tactics), six hundred and thirty-seven articles were collected. The first reading of the articles identified articles that addressed the core research question–focusing on how PRSA presents and defines issues of ethics and morality. The research discarded some articles after the first reading because the articles did not pertain to either ethics or morality. Examples of discarded articles include topics like networking, organization tips, and writing and editing tips.

The researcher also used the first round of reading to identify any key articles on ethics and/or morality. Specific keywords and phrases guided the initial inclusion process (see Appendix A). It was during the first reading of the articles that the researcher identified two patterns and adjusted the inclusion criteria. While ethics and morality remained the focus of the analysis, the researcher concurrently identified instances when the article's author(s) commented on either (a) "important" values (e.g., honesty) or (b) the profession's relationship to advocacy. Thus, the initial read-through resulted in just around one hundred articles that directly dealt with either ethics and/or morality, "important" values, and advocacy.

Phase 1.2: In-Depth Interviews of Public Relations Executives

Interviews were conducted to gain insights into how experienced public relations decision-makers perceive ethics and morality related to their personal experiences in the field of public relations. Scholars considered interviews appropriate for ethics and morality because of the sensitive information associated with these concepts (Davis, 2012;

Schauster & Neill, 2017). Further, previous studies have used interviews to gain insights into how ethics have changed (Schauster & Neill, 2017), ethical leadership in public relations (Lee & Cheng, 2011), the public relations practitioners' role as an organization's ethical conscience (Bowen, 2008; Neill, 2016; Neill & Drumwright, 2012),

The interviews were semi-structured and is another commonality of the interview method (Formentin & Bortree, 2018). Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility during the interview process, though the interview followed the interview guide. Interviews lasted around an hour, which allowed for the necessary details to come to light (Formentin & Bortree, 2018; Neill & Drumwright, 2012; Thummes & Seiffert-Brockmann, 2019). The interviews, set to last around one hour, were semi-structured in format with 19 questions organized into three main sections: definitions, applications, and past experiences. The entire interview guide can be found in Appendix B.

Definitions

Given the lack of distinction between ethics and morality in the public relations field, each participant was asked to define both ethics and morality; unethical and immoral. Participants were prompted to describe the difference between the concepts and asked a follow-up question that required the participant to situationally describe each concept. The purpose of this interview segment was to determine the similarities and differences between the umbrella concepts of ethics and morality.

Applications

The purpose of the applications interview segment was to gain insights into how each participant uses ethical and moral principles in the field of public relations; conflicts and crises will be emphasized in the application segment. Previous studies have asked participants to describe ethical situations (e.g., Thummes & Seiffert-Brockmann, 2019), but this study distinguished itself by building on the theoretical and conceptual differences between ethics and morality. Further, the applications grounded the definition segment because the practitioners provide examples of how their definitions relate to conducting public relations practices.

Past experiences

The interviewed captured past experiences because of the importance of memory. The interviews included a memory-based approach because past scholars (e.g., Maclean et al., 2017) found that an individual's memory can illuminate what is valued and provide insights into the individual's sense-making. The purpose of the past experiences segment was to understand how participants perceived conflicts and/or crises in the field as related to ethics and moral principles.

Participants

The participants for the study fit the following qualification criteria: (a) public relations practitioner, (b) high-level U.S.-based industry experience (10+ years), and (c) have current decision-making power. The public relations industry experience (10+ years) was high-level U.S.-based because (national) culture was considered an influential factor in decision-making (e.g., Choi & Cameron, 2005). A higher level of experience was necessary because the participants needed to describe their personal experiences with ethics and morality in terms of applying their principles to their careers. Further, the participants were encouraged to reflect on their past experience(s) that demonstrate ethics and morality situations, which include parties involved, values or principles in question, internal and external pressures, choices, the decision(s), and more. The decision-making power criteria were key because participants were asked to demonstrate and explain their applications of ethics and morality in the public relations field.

Sampling Strategy

The study used a snowball networked strategy to reach qualified participants. The researcher contacted potential participants via an IRB-approved email. To help determine the number of interview participants necessary, Guest and colleagues (2006) urged researchers to consider data saturation against theoretical saturation. They defined data saturation "as the point in data collection and analysis when new information produces little or no change to the codebook" (Guest et al., 2006, p. 65). Guest and colleagues (2006) found that roughly twelve interviews led to data saturation. Weller and colleagues (2018) reached similar findings; sample sizes of around ten reached ninety-five percent data saturation. Given the precedence of data saturation, the researcher conducted six hour-long interviews with practitioners who had 10+ years of communication experience, held decision-making power, and worked as U.S.-based practitioners. Though only six interviews were conducted, the researcher reached data saturation and, recently, other studies (e.g., Voges et al., 2023) reached data saturation after seven interviews. The interviews, coupled with the breadth of trade publication data, provided high-level data saturation.

Data Management and Analysis

The data for phase one of the study was collected using interview audio recordings, handwritten notes, and transcriptions. The notes were kept in a personal notebook while the transcriptions were housed on a password-protected computer. All direct or indirect identifiers were redacted to provide the participants with confidentiality. The same data analysis process—as proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) and used for the trade publication analysis—was used to gain insights into the interview data.

At this stage in the research process, the researcher obtained insights into two sources of public relations ethics and morality information: trade publication articles and practitioner interviews. Before conducting phase two of the study, the researcher conducted a preliminary comparative analysis to finish the survey instrument.

Phase 2: Survey of Public Relations Practitioners

Phase two of the study, the quantitative phase, explored the themes found during phase one (DeCuir-Gunby & Schultz, 2017). Here, the participants were broadened to include a greater number of public relations practitioners. An online survey was administered by Qualtrics, a professional research firm, among a group of practitioner participants Qualtrics recruited according to a set of core sampling criteria: making sure that those who participate were U.S. public relations practitioners, which was the only screener question aside from age (i.e., 18+ years old).

Measurements

The survey measurements were based on definitions of ethics, morality, and moral courage as applied to the field of public relations. Part of the measurements relied on the findings from both the trade publication article analysis and the depth interviews. Some of the previously proposed moral courage operationalizations were based on previously developed scenarios like the Personal Ethics Threshold (PET). The PET measurement included scenarios in which the respondent offers his/her insights into what they would do—such as how, if at all, to act with moral courage. The main benefit was how it offered various choices so the respondent chose based on levels of moral intensity and social pressures. It is important to note, however, that many moral psychology and ethics researchers run into the problem of inflated ethics scores because respondents want to seem more ethical than they are (e.g., Wilkins & Coleman, 2005; Comer & Vega, 2011). It was recommended to use a moral intensity scale because no respondent should score a "perfect" on the PET. If a participant does score "perfectly," then scholars recommend throwing out the individual's responses (Comer & Vega, 2011). The survey included two moral courage (PET-based) scenarios that were multi-choice and single-select. There were four choice options per scenario that progressively required more moral courage, which captured the original recommendation for a moral intensity scale.

The survey instrument captured a multitude of variable segments. Each of the following segments related to an aspect of the literature review: moral courage scenarios, advocacy scale items, ethical training insights, and demographics (both organizational and practitioner). The survey instrument can be found in Appendix C.

Moral Courage Scenarios. Participants were presented with two conflict-based scenarios. These scenarios were drafted based on how the interview participants applied definitions of ethics and morality and their past lived experiences. In addition to the interview inspiration, the scenarios featured two factors from the contingency theory: external publics (external) and internal pressures (internal). These factors captured two potentially opposing forces the practitioners needed to monitor as they make their decisions. Participants were provided with options as to what a practitioner might do in the situation. These choices reflected the personal ethics threshold (PET) wherein the options reflect various levels of moral courage.

Advocacy. Participants answered Likert scale items to capture advocacy as related to the public relations field and as seen through an ethics lens. Five items were presented; response choices range from 1 "strongly disagree" to 7 "strongly agree." The statements depended on the findings from the previous phase. Thus, after analyzing the trade publications and conducting the interviews, the researcher drafted five items to quantitatively test advocacy using a Likert scale.

Practitioner Demographics. Participants provided demographic information related to themselves and their organizations, which provided an overall participant profile. The profile included gender, age, professional experience in public relations, and their decision-making power and position within their communication team. In addition, participants provided information about their formal education including their major, if they have attended higher education, and their introduction, if any, to formal teachings about ethics. Lastly, participants were asked to describe their organization's sector, size, and ethics training, if any as either taken independently or provided by the organization.

Participants

The purpose of the survey was to apply both previous findings as outlined in the literature review along with the findings and insights from the qualitative methods, so the participant qualification criteria for the survey were broader when compared to the interview requirements. Thus, the participants for the study fit the following qualification criteria: (a) U.S. public relations practitioner and (b) at least 18+ years of age.

Sampling Strategy

This study follows Stacks' (2002) sample size recommendations, which were based on a five percent tolerated error and a 95% confidence interval. Given that there are roughly 250,000 public relations practitioners in the United States (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2020), the population size, confidence interval, and tolerated error suggest a sample size of n=384. To achieve this goal, the researcher used a Qualtrics panel and successfully sampled practitioners for a total of n=223 quality responses. The Qualtrics representative initially vocalized concern about reaching a big enough sample of public relations practitioners given the available survey budget and the number of complete responses (n=223) is higher than what was originally projected (n=168). Based on these concerns, it was recommended that the study prioritize questions (e.g., individual characteristics like gender, which was found to be an important predictor of conflict communication decision, see Voges et al., 2022) and keep screener questions to a minimal (i.e., 18+ years old, United States public relations practitioner).

Data Management and Analysis

Phase two of the study required data to be collected over the internet by using Qualtrics for roughly two weeks. The survey data was kept confidential via password protection and indirect identifiers. The subsequent quantitative data was addressed using SPSS functions, such as descriptive data analyses, comparative group analyses (e.g., t-test, ANOVA.), and linear regression. The variables: personal characteristics, professional characteristics, organizational characteristics, and advocacy were measured against a participant's moral courage and advocacy scores. Lastly, organization demographics were analyzed against the moral courage score using ANOVA. These tests were appropriate given their assumptions—the number of groups and variable type—and provided unique insights into public relations practitioners.

The researcher analyzed the data sources independently and later triangulated them. The integration acts as a way to offer a more complete and contextually holistic story regarding public relations ethics and morality. In totality, the complete study required a well-rounded methodology to further the development of ethics and morality in the field of public relations.

CHAPTER FIVE

RESULTS

The results are organized by phase and described independently. Phase one included both the trade publication themes and the interview themes while phase two results included the practitioner survey data. In totality, the results were multidimensional with two data sources from public relations practitioner thought leadership (i.e., trade publications and interviews) and one data source privy to public relations predilections.

Phase 1.1: Archival Analysis of Trade Publications

The trade publication analysis sought to answer the following research questions: (RQ1.1) How, if at all, do public relations trade publications represent issues of (a) ethics and (b) morality? (RQ1.2) How, if at all, do the public relations trade publications use situations to describe and/or demonstrate (a) ethics and (b) morality? (RQ1.3) How, if at all, do the public relations trade publications reference the PRSA Code of Ethics? The multiple read-throughs, memoing, and notetaking resulted in three independent themes. Overall, the trade publication themes demonstrate the interconnectivity of public relations ethics to the professional experience at large.

Theme 1: Ambiguous Understanding of Ethics as "The Right Thing"

Theme one is described as the following: *practitioners believe we should "do the right thing" but do not provide examples or definitions to explain what they mean.* Practitioners noted the importance of "right" actions, but rarely did the authors describe how to find the "right" action or who the "right" action should benefit. For instance, "one of the toughest challenges that a senior PR practitioner will face is persuading the CEO to do the right thing in a crisis" (Gladstone, 2009), according to an article that noted the importance of "the right thing" but neglected to aptly describe it. Similarly, practitioners considered the importance of "the right thing" when dealing with crisis management, "tell the truth and do the right thing. And then, you better let people know about it. You'd better find a way to communicate what it is you're doing. Don't put your head in the sand and ignore it" (Jacques, 2009) and "management must cultivate a culture of openness, honesty and commitment to doing the right thing" (Scudder, 2014). Both quotes mentioned the "right thing" and coupled it with other value descriptors (i.e., truth, openness, honesty, and commitment).

Further examples include "Do the right things, not the usual things" (No Author, 2019), "behavior must validate communication — it's about doing the right thing rather than just saying the right thing" (Ewing, 2021), and "but when we're unsure what to do next, we might…do 'The Next Right Thing.' And then the next. And then the next — with calmness and courage, one step at a time" (Grossman, 2020). Trade journal articles depicted practitioners' reliance and commitment to the ambiguous notion of "do the right thing" sans attribution or explanation. Regardless of the context, practitioners believed ethics came down to innately knowing the right thing, "if, in your heart, you know that you're doing the right thing, then that will get you through" (Elasser, 2015). Practitioners propagated the ambiguous notion of the right thing as the field's ethical standard. There were minimal references to the PRSA Code of Ethics, though one article specifically covered the evolution of the code from one of prescription and enforcement to a code that emphasizes values and principles.

Theme 2: Leaders, Followers, and Organizational Culture

Theme two is described as the following: *practitioners create a reciprocal relationship between culture and ethics wherein a leader's ethics creates the organizational culture that employees use to determine their own ethics.* The overlap between culture and ethics was first highlighted, "culture is one of the biggest buzzwords in business today. It defines the workplace environment and incorporates things like the company's mission, goals and values" (No Author, 2019). Thus, practitioners subsumed ethics within culture in the form of values, "keep values front and center" (No Author, 2019), and "shared beliefs and values spark trust — which is vital to healthy company cultures" (No Author, 2019). Ultimately, practitioners propagated how an "organization's culture and values must align" (Cherenson, 2018).

Practitioners perceived organizational culture and employee ethics as influenced by leadership ethics, "does the corporate culture encourage addressing problems head-on, reporting them, taking responsibility and initiating steps to fix them? Or does it reward cutting corners and covering things up? Employee behavior will follow the culture that management creates" (Scudder, 2011). At times, practitioners used culture to explain how an organization could develop a "corporate culture that encourages unethical behavior" (Elasser, 2016). Practitioners further believed organizational culture and ethics were closely tied and implicated leaders because leaders "set the example for an organization and create its culture, and should have strong ethical values that are demonstrated in everything they do" (No Author, 2013) and "cultivate a culture of openness, honesty and commitment to doing the right thing" (Scudder, 2014). Ultimately, the impact of leader ethics was paramount because “leaders at all levels can impact their organization’s culture” (No Author, 2019).

Because practitioners drew hierarchical conclusions to demonstrate why leader ethics matter, “a company’s cultural and ethical standards come from the top down, not from the bottom up. Top management sets the moral tone and, while cutting corners and cover-ups are never publicly encouraged, employees usually understand where the boundaries are” (Scudder, 2011), core values were often cited as popular explications of organizational ethics, “leadership ‘starts with core values and the willingness to actually live by them…” (Elasser, 2016) and “leaders’ actions show what the organization values. Leading by example and communicating in an open and transparent way means avoiding ‘say-do’ gaps” (Cartwright, 2014). The perspective that leaders influence organizational ethics has permeated the field to the point that a leader’s influence is not only expected but encouraged: “to effectively shape values and standards, leadership must be aligned and exhibit the critical behaviors and daily actions central to the organization” (Grossman, 2013). Therefore, the need for personal ethical values and standards was considered paramount, “leaders set the example for an organization and create its culture, and should have strong ethical values that are demonstrated in everything they do” (No Author, 2013).

The importance of leadership and organizational culture increased during times of conflict or crisis. First, practitioners considered leadership ethics’ impact on culture. Second, practitioners identified values as a key component of a leader’s influence on the organization. Third, practitioners examined how an organization’s culture could lead to potential issues and crises if ethics were not appropriately handled by practitioners and leaders, “a company whose culture results in turning a blind eye to safety problems invites crisis, and in this case, disaster" (Scudder, 2014). The conversation, with a continued grasp on a leader's influence, explained that leaders were pressured to "make sound ethical decisions during times of uncertainty" (Ewing, 2020) because they "are under attack for ethical lapses…" (No Author, 2013).

Theme 3: The Pressure to Act Against Moral Courage

Theme three is described as: *personal attention to early and continuous advocacy helps minimize risks when a practitioner needs to practice moral courage against internal pressures to act unethically. If risk minimization is not feasible, then it is up to the practitioner to decide if choosing to advocate via moral courage is worth the risks.* Practitioners generally understood the complicated nature of ethics and at times referenced the associated risks within the public relations field. Risks, in most cases, required individual fortitude (i.e., "if you can"),

> If you can take a stand, then you need to do it — but you have to look at all the consequences. You have to ask yourself, "Do I really want to work for an organization like that?" And unfortunately, that tends to be the easier route. You have to know that if you're taking a hard stand, sometimes, you stand alone. (Elasser, 2015)

At times, individual fortitude manifested as a need for courage. Here, courage was understood as the intangible, internal push to stand up against unethical behavior,

> If employees need one thing from their leaders now more than ever, then it's courage. For leaders, courage doesn't mean that you're never frightened. It means being able to take actions that might scare you, or to lead despite feeling frightened…Throughout history, leaders from all walks of life have tapped into their

> own courage and helped others find theirs. Today, we need to do the same. During these uncertain times, it takes bravery to lead an agency, organization or department. You can receive a dose of courage from the examples set by history's leaders or from any leader in your own life — whether it was someone you've worked for, a family member or a friend. (Jacobs, 2020)

The need for courage to "serve as professional change agents — advocates and role models for reducing or eliminating barriers to diversity, gender equality, shared decision-making, enhanced two-way communication, and ethical decision-making and practices" (No Author, 2019) often pushed against potential risks and threats. Practitioners incorporated risks or threats as a critical component of moral courage and a practitioner's willingness to advocate, "we are often subject to that authority. But our own moral codes demand that we stand up to authority when it conflicts with that independence and ethical practice. But standing up against authority can come at great cost" (No Author, 2019).

Practitioners identified different risks that may encourage a person to ignore unethical situations. Some defined the reciprocal route–the hard route–as the "fear of job loss or internal competitive disadvantage" (Scudder, 2012). The potential threats hinged on a person's ability to continue work in the professional field, "I would be torching bridges and would probably not have a chance — if I wanted to work in corporate America — to do that again. I didn't expect to be called by any recruiters" (Jacques, 2009), which requires practitioners to "carefully weigh the consequences of speaking up" (Ewing, 2019). Therefore, practitioners preached the need for "everyone [to] feel comfortable reporting ethical concerns without fears of retaliation" (Ewing, 2020) and emphasized that "there should not be a penalty for a person reporting problems to a superior" (Scudder, 2015) otherwise "taking the most ethical path can cost you your job" (Ewing, 2019).

Phase 1.2: Interviews of Public Relations Executives

The interview analysis sought to answer the following research questions: (RQ2) How do experienced public relations practitioners define and differentiate between (a) ethics and (b) morality? (RQ3.1) What types of (a) ethically and (b) morally questionable situations do experienced public relations practitioners note? (RQ3.2) How do experienced public relations practitioners reflect on their chosen questionable situation(s)? Through the interviewing process, memoing, and note-taking, the researcher discovered thematic elements that addressed the three research questions of interest.

Interviewee Demographics

The participants who agreed to be interviewed were required to meet the following criteria: a high level of experience in the public relations or communications field (at least 10 years), based in the United States, and held decision-making power within their respective organizations. All participants met the basic criteria with some having more than 30 years of experience. Of the participants, four were male and two were female and the majority were of Caucasian descent. If they had a degree, it was in communications, public affairs, or philosophy. All participants worked as in-house communication experts.

Distinguishing Between Ethics and Morality

Prior to describing either ethics or morality, participants were prompted to discuss how they determined right versus wrong and how it applied in their workplace settings. Participants were then asked to describe ethics and morality–and their reciprocals unethical and immoral–independently. Each participant received follow-up questions to clarify how, if at all, ethics and morality overlap.

Right and wrong comes from an internal guide that manifests as a personal checkpoint for decision-making and behavior. The majority of participants referenced a "moral compass" (Participants 1, 2, and 3) or "North Star of do no harm" (Participant 4) that helps the user determine right and wrong. For instance, "everyone has their own sort of compass internally" (Participant 1) and "it centers around your moral compass in terms of your integrity and your values as a person" (Participant 2). One participant referred to this internal checkpoint as a "right and wrong is doing what you feel is right is in your heart and in your gut" (Participant 5). Other descriptions were "you should never do anything you wouldn't want your grandmother to read about in the paper" (Participant 1) and "if you have to ask, it probably mean's it's something you shouldn't do" (Participant 6). Many participants cited leaders as key to this decision-making process, "we have an incredible CEO…gives you a pretty steady line where you can base your decisions" (Participant 1), "certainly the business leaders I work with, I look to them…[the] chief ethics and compliance officer" (Participant 3), and "in the span of a career, you encounter all kinds of leaders that you look at and say, wow, I would really want to emulate that person" (Participant 4). One participant believed right and wrong in the workplace manifested, not via leadership emulation, but as "more of a line and making sure that how we respond to things is consistent. But we all have shared values" (Participant 2).

Ethics is an actionable expression of doing the right thing. Participants perceived ethics as "doing what's right" (Participants 1 and 5) or "doing the right thing when no one is looking" (Participant 3). All participants tied ethics to conduct and expressed how ethics manifested as acts, "following the rules" (Participant 3), "doing no harm" (Participant 4), "pursuing the things that are right for whatever the issue is that you're addressing" (Participant 1), and "how you conduct yourself to bring your moral compass to life" (Participant 2). Because participants held onto behavior as a key component, they pointed to codes that included "employee handbooks, company bylaws, formal and informal training" (Participant 2). When prompted to describe ethics in public relations, participants relied on amorphous examples like "ethics is the truth" (Participant 1), "lead by integrity…treating people with dignity and respect" (Participant 2), "respect for the rules and understanding of what the rules are and applying those in a consistent way" (Participant 3), "transparent, forthcoming, truthful" (Participant 4), and "we will not discriminate" (Participant 5).

The inverse, *unethical, was understood through behavioral examples that either benefited the self, broke a code, or brought harm to another person.* Participants adamantly referred to examples to explain unethical, "it's a violation of rules" (Participant 3), "cheating or lying" (Participant 1), "professional gain, inflating your expense account, discriminating against hiring someone" (Participant 5), "when you are not treating people with fairness, dignity, respect, and equality" (Participant 2), and "if I took a kickback…that would be unethical. if I personally profited from decisions I made in a managerial level. That would be unethical" (Participant 6). One participant specifically brought unethical back to the idea of codes, "it's unethical or it's a violation of our code of ethics and code of conduct" (Participant 3). Only one participant expressed unethical using a conceptual depiction wherein "moving forward on something…sacrifices your own ethics, your own moral compass. When you feel discordant between what you feel is right…this trigger of harm is a critical threshold" (Participant 4).

Comparatively, *morality constitutes personal but socially influenced beliefs of right and wrong.* After thinking through morality, participants settled on morality as "the purest sense…the difference between right and wrong" (Participant 2) and "follow[-ing] your gut, what your gut feel is, you know morality is really doing the right thing" (Participant 5). Morality was further described as "people's belief structures about what they constitute right or wrong" (Participant 6). This personal notion was common as participants emphasized how "morality is more of a personal, nonprofessional sort of concept" (Participant 4) and "morality is different. People have different views on whether something is moral or not…sort of more difference of opinion" (Participant 3). Personal differences were perceived as "questions of faith. Questions of identity…political affiliations" (Participant 2) or the "inner set of, I think your soul, how you think about yourself in the world" (Participant 1) wherein a violation reflected a piece of a person's identity.

The inverse, *immoral, constitutes reckless or purposeful harm that stems from a lacking inner core*. Participants again relied on examples to demonstrate immorality, "it breaks with that moral code, so for example, racial discrimination. Gender discrimination" (Participant 2), "no integrity…can't be trusted. I would say you have no values…[but] everybody's values are different, so it depends on what your values are" (Participant 1), and "people would say killing someone is immoral" (Participant 3). Participants all agreed that morality and immorality were infrequently used to describe business conduct, "I can't imagine a business situation where we would describe something as being immoral"

(Participant 3). A couple of participants speculated that morality and immorality were infrequently used due to the “higher level of comfort to discuss that from an ethical standpoint rather than a moral standpoint” (Participant 6) and because “that’s a line that people would be offended by or feel is overstepping” (Participant 4).

Ultimately, *morality and ethics are interrelated topics that people have difficulty distinguishing but inherently know are different*. Participants struggled to differentiate between ethics and morality, “these lines can be very blurred” (Participant 1), “they’re inextricably linked. You can’t have one without the other” (Participant 2), “if there were a Venn diagram, there would certainly be overlap” (Participant 4), and “that’s a tougher one, right?” (Participant 3). To encourage conceptual separation, the researcher asked follow-up questions about hierarchy, social influence, and importance. One participant succinctly stated, “I could say the trigger. It’s not like one is above the other, it’s that one informs the other” (Participant 6).

Participants organically identified situations that both articulated differences between ethics and morality and referenced the informing process. For example, “am I immoral if I park on the wrong side of the street? I don’t think so. But I’m probably unethical because there’s a law that says you need to be on the left side” (Participant 1). Another participant considered a person’s morality might justify unethical behavior,

> There are examples…where activists have gone undercover. And they pretend to get hired as employees and film things…and then get information, And the reality is, if you're on the receiving end of that and it's made your organization look bad or you yourself look bad, you know, sometimes people will try to say, hey, that was unethical what they did. But unfortunately, it doesn't matter, because now that

> information is out there that you look bad. And so it's kind of sometimes people will overlook the ethics of what they did to you, Right. Like, was that ethical that they went to try to get hired in order just to film? … They would say 'yes…so that I could expose to everyone what they were doing. And therefore, morally, I'm right.' So those are the kind of challenges you would see and some people might agree with that, whatever extreme you have to go to prevent the moral wrong, then that's okay. (Participant 3)

The justification of unethical act to achieve a moral was considered inexplicably tied to the person, "the sense that people have that they feel strongly morally about something. Ethically, while I'm supposed to follow the law and not kill somebody, morally, I feel justified in doing it" (Participant 3) and "you may be more affected by something that is unethical versus immoral. It just depends on where your personal barometer is for both those issues" (Participant 4). One participant openly discussed morality and ethics and landed on the following,

> Probably morality would be more of an individual viewpoint or, you know, philosophy. And then ethics has to fit in the framework of all the other things that everybody else is doing, that we all understand that we are human beings in a big ecosystem and that we need to one, we need to make sure that we behave accordingly. And obviously your morality might be different from my morality, but if we're both working for the same institution, we're probably going to have cause if it works, we should have fairly consistent ethical behavior. (Participant 6)

Other participants directly considered society's influence on the concepts–either ethics or morality–participants and reflected, "I'd say they're both influenced by society. Absolutely" (Participant 2). Another participant outlined the full extent society influenced morality:

> I think morality is more influenced by society and swings where people are…today might have been immoral a hundred years ago just based on people's beliefs and how society acted and vice versa…the beliefs of the day and, don't mean to make it sound like they change every day, but they evolve to places. So I think that one's much more affected by society. (Participant 1)

Ultimately, participants agreed that morality was personal whereas ethics represented a more generally agreed-upon social standard brought forth by codes and openly discussed in business.

Questionable Situations and Rosy Retrospections

Participants were prompted to think about workplace communication situations that required them to deal with an external, morally questionable group. Participants reflected on past situations and determined relevance and careful consideration as the key informers for organizational advocacy. Further, participants used concise language that implied a level of success when dealing with morally questionable groups. For instance, "we engaged everywhere that we needed to…so in those spaces, we knew that we had to get involved. We knew we had to raise our voice" (Participant 1). The organizational advocacy–getting involved, communicating–was not viewed as "negotiations, but you can share what the company does do" (Participant 2).

These situations required careful considerations—"how do we address the situations? What is the requirement of the law? How do you advocate as a public relations professional on behalf of the company without withholding the facts?" (Participant 3). Another participant expressed how careful consideration can influence how the other side is understood, "when you take the time to listen and engage someone who may appear to be on the other side or diametrically opposed to your worldview…there tends to be more common ground than you would presume on the surface" (Participant 4). Participants emphasized the organization's story and the purpose of the communication which was not always to persuade though "I would do my level best to change their minds and I would try to engage allies with me to change their minds" but to "explain to them in such a way that people can at least understand" (Participant 6). Another participant offered similar thinking, "advocacy, that's what you have to do. It's not going to be of interest to the audience unless you explain what's in it for them" (Participant 3). Ultimately, the organization's purpose and what it stands for informed how participants considered a morally questionable public, "whatever happens, we stand by our convictions" (Participant 5) because "telling the truth…that's your strongest position for advocacy" (Participant 6).

Phase 2: Survey of Public Relations Practitioners

A Qualtrics panel sample (n=223) received and completed the survey on public relations advocacy, ethics, and moral courage. Tables 4-6 provide detailed breakdowns of the sample. The respondent sample was 56% female (n= 125), 40% fell within the 25-34 year age range (n=87), and 27% had a bachelor's degree (n=61). Most respondents worked in the public sector (n=85; 38%) and had up to 5 years of experience working in the field (n=113; 50%). Just over a third of respondents (36%; n= 81) were top supervisors but noted that decisions were left up to the communications team. More specifically, decisions were made by the team (n= 95; 42%) or a communications supervisor (n=72; 32%).

Roughly two-thirds of the respondents had taken some form of ethics training (n= 141; 63%) with the most popular training being organizationally required (n= 72; 33%) (See Table 7).

The survey sought to answer the following research questions (RQ4) How, if at all, do public relations practitioners' Personal Ethics Threshold (PET) (moral courage) differ by individual characteristics (a) gender, (b) age, and (c) education? (RQ5) How, if at all, do public relations practitioners' Personal Ethics Threshold (PET) (moral courage) differ by professional characteristics (a) professional position, (b) work experience, (c) decision making power, and (d) ethics training? (RQ6) How, if at all, do public relations practitioners' Personal Ethics Threshold (PET) (moral courage) differ by organization (a) size and (b) sector? (RQ7) How, if at all, do moral courage scenarios #1 (PR consultant) and #2 (C-suite) differ? (RQ8) How, if at all, do public relations advocacy differ by individual characteristics (a) gender, (b) age, and (c) education? (RQ9) How, if at all, do public relations advocacy differ by professional characteristics (a) professional position (b) work experience, (c) decision making power, and (d) ethics training? (RQ10) How, if at all, do public relations advocacy differ by organization (a) size and (b) sector? And (RQ11) How, if at all, do public relations practitioners' perceptions of advocacy relate to their Personal Ethics Threshold (PET) (moral courage)?

Respondents were presented with two scenarios that measured their personal ethics threshold with scaled moral courage response options from one (low moral courage) and four (high moral courage). The analyses were run independently on each scenario—PR consultant and C-suite—and on each respondent's cumulative moral courage score. The cumulative score was computed by adding up the respondent's two scenario scores

(MIN=2, MAX=8). For example, if a respondent selected the second response option for scenario one and the first response option for scenario two, then the respondent's cumulative moral courage score would be three (See Table 9).

Respondents also answered five Likert-scale items that asked the respondent to rate advocacy statements. The response options ranged from (1) Strongly Disagree to (7) Strongly Agree. Each respondent's five responses were averaged, which was appropriate given the scale's Cronbach's alpha $a = .84$ (See Table 8).

Moral Courage and Individual Characteristics

Research question four focused on differentiating between different individual characteristics and individual professional characteristics. The variables tested were gender, age, and education; professional position, work experience, decision-making power, and ethics training.

Moral Courage and Gender*.* The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV gender on DV moral courage at the p<.05 level for the four conditions $[F(3, 219) = .631, p = \ .60]$. There is no significant difference between males $[n = 95;\ M = 5.14, SD = 1.66]$, females $[n = 125;\ M = 5.08, SD = 1.67]$, other $[n = 1;\ M = 7, SD = -]$, or prefer not to say $[n = 2;\ M = 6, SD = 2.83]$.

For the PR consultant scenario, an ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV gender on scenario #1 (PR consultant) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions $[F(3, 219) = .78, p = \ .51]$. There is no significant difference between males $[n = 95;\ M = 2.48, SD = .99]$, females $[n = 125;\ M = 2.55, SD = 1.03]$, other $[n = 1;\ M = 4, SD = -]$, or prefer not to say $[n = 2;\ M = 2.5, SD = 2.12]$.

An ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV gender on scenario #2 (C-Suite) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions $[F(3, 219) = .89, p = .434]$. There is no significant difference between males $[n = 95;\ M = 2.65, SD = .98]$, females $[n = 125;\ M = 2.53, SD = 1.00]$, other $[n = 1;\ M = 3, SD = -]$, or prefer not to say $[n = 2;\ M = 3.5, SD = .70]$.

Moral Courage and Age. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV age on DV moral courage at the p<.05 level for the six conditions $[F(5, 219) = 1.07, p = .376]$. There is no significant difference between 18-24 $[n = 76;\ M = 5.14, SD = 1.49]$, 25-34 $[n = 87;\ M = 4.93, SD = 1.61]$, 35-44 $[n = 35;\ M = 5.37, SD = 2.14]$, 45-54 $[n = 15;\ M = 5.4, SD = 1.76]$, 55-64 $[n = 5;\ M = 4.4, SD = 1.14]$, or 65+ $[n = 5;\ M = 6.2, SD = 1.64]$.

For the PR consultant scenario, an ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV age on scenario #1 (PR consultant) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions $[F(5, 217) = 2.06, p = .071]$. There is no significant difference between 18-24 $[n = 76;\ M = 2.64, SD = .95]$, 25-34 $[n = 87;\ M = 2.37, SD = .95]$, 35-44 $[n = 35;\ M = 2.57, SD = 1.24$, 45-54 $[n = 15;\ M = 2.73, SD = 1.03]$, 55-64 $[n = 5;\ M = 1.80, SD = .84]$, or 65+ $[n = 5;\ M = 3.40, SD = .89]$.

An ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV age on scenario #2 (C-Suite) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions $[F(5, 217) = .515, p = .765]$. There is no significant difference between 18-24 $[n = 76;\ M = 2.50, SD = .95]$, 25-34 $[n = 87;\ M = 2.56, SD = .97]$, 35-44 $[n = 35;\ M = 2.80, SD = 1.13]$, 45-54 $[n = 15;\ M = 2.67, SD = 1.05]$, 55-64 $[n = 5;\ M = 2.60, SD = .55]$, or 65+ $[n = 5;\ M = 2.80, SD = 1.10]$.

Moral Courage and Education. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV education on DV moral courage at the p<.05 level for the six conditions [$F(5, 217) = .452, p = .81$]. There is no significant difference between high school or GED [$n = 59;\ M = 5.12, SD = 1.66$], associate's degree [$n = 28;\ M = 4.86, SD = 1.46$], bachelor's degree [$n = 61;\ M = 5.30, SD = 1.70$], master's degree [$n = 54;\ M = 5.09, SD = 1.70$], doctoral degree [$n = 17;\ M = 4.88, SD = 1.80$], or other [$n = 4;\ M = 5.75, SD = 2.63$].

For the PR consultant scenario, an ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV education on scenario #1 (PR consultant) at the p<.05 level for the six conditions [$F(5, 217) = .31, p = .91$]. There is no significant difference between high school or GED [$n = 59;\ M = 2.46, SD = 1.06$], associate's degree [$n = 28;\ M = 2.57, SD = 1.00$], bachelor's degree [$n = 61;\ M = 2.64, SD = .95$], master's degree [$n = 54;\ M = 2.52, SD = .99$], doctoral degree [$n = 17;\ M = 2.35, SD = 1.73$], or other [$n = 4;\ M = 2.50, SD = 1.02$].

An ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV education on scenario #2 (C-Suite) at the p<.05 level for the six conditions [$F(5, 217) = 1.02\ p = .41$]. There is no significant difference between high school or GED [$n = 59;\ M = 2.66, SD = .99$], associate's degree [$n = 28;\ M = 2.29, SD = .98$], bachelor's degree [$n = 61;\ M = 2.66, SD = .98$], master's degree [$n = 54;\ M = 2.57, SD = 1.00$], doctoral degree [$n = 17;\ M = 2.53, SD = .94$], or other [$n = 4;\ M = 3.25, SD = .96$].

Moral Courage and Professional Characteristics

Research question five focused on differentiating between different professional characteristics (1) professional position (2) work experience, (3) decision making power, and (4) ethics training.

Moral Courage and Professional Position. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV professional position on DV moral courage at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = .924, p = .43$]. There is no significant difference between top supervisors who make communication decisions [$n = 56;\ M = 5.20, SD = 1.90$], top supervisors whose communication team make the decisions [$n = 81;\ M = 4.90, SD = 1.56$], practitioners on a team [$n = 66;\ M = 5.35, SD = 1.46$], or those who work alone (no communication team) [$n = 20;\ M = 5.12, SD = 2.04$].

For the PR consultant scenario, an ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV professional position on scenario #1 (PR consultant) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = 1.17, p = .322$]. There is no significant difference between top supervisors who make communication decisions [$n = 56;\ M = 2.52, SD = 1.20$], top supervisors whose communication team make the decisions [$n = 81;\ M = 2.43, SD = .961$], practitioners on a team [$n = 66;\ M = 2.71, SD = .973$], or those who work alone (no communication team) [$n = 20;\ M = 2.35, SD = 1.34$].

An ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV professional position on scenario #2 (C-Suite) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = .685, p = .562$]. There is no significant difference between top supervisors who make communication decisions [$n = 56;\ M = 2.68, SD = 1.06$], top supervisors whose communication team make the decisions [$n = 81;\ M = 2.47, SD = .95$], practitioners on a team [$n = 66;\ M = 2.64, SD = .905$, or those who work alone (no communication team) [$n = 20;\ M = 2.70, SD = 1.17$].

Moral Courage and Work Experience. The ANOVA revealed that there was a significant effect of IV work experience on DV moral courage at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = 3.00, p = .031$]. There is a significant difference between those with up to 5 years of experience [$n = 113;\ M = 5.27, SD = 1.70$], those with 6 to 10 years of experience [$n = 73;\ M = 4.73, SD = 1.69$], those with 11 to 15 years of experience [$n = 24;\ M = 5.75, SD = 1.22$], and those with over 16 years of experience [$n = 13;\ M = 4.84, SD = 1.68$]. A Tukey post hoc test showed that practitioners with 11 to 15 years of experience responded with higher levels of moral courage than practitioners with 6 to 10 years of experience (p = .044).

For the PR consultant scenario, an ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV work experience on scenario #1 (PR consultant) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = 2.16, p = .093$]. There is no significant difference between those with up to 5 years of experience [$n = 113;\ M = 2.67, SD = 1.06$], those with 6 to 10 years of experience [$n = 73;\ M = 2.30, SD = .982$], those with 11 to 15 years of experience [$n = 24;\ M = 2.63, SD = .711$], and those with over 16 years of experience [$n = 13;\ M = 2.38, SD = 1.12$].

An ANOVA revealed there was a significant effect of IV work experience on scenario #2 (C-Suite) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = 3.21, p = .024$]. There is a significant difference between those with up to 5 years of experience [$n = 113;\ M = 2.60, SD = 1.01$], those with 6 to 10 years of experience [$n = 73;\ M = 2.42, SD = .956$], those with 11 to 15 years of experience [$n = 24;\ M = 3.13, SD = .85$], and those with over

16 years of experience [$n = 13;\ M = 2.46, SD = .877$]. A Tukey post hoc test showed that practitioners with 11 to 15 years of experience responded with higher levels of moral courage than practitioners with 6 to 10 years of experience (p = .013).

Moral Courage and Decision-making. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV decision-making on DV moral courage at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = 1.88, p = .133$]. There is not a significant difference between decisions made by top supervisors [$n = 72;\ M = 4.93, SD = 1.72$], decisions made by communication teams [$n = 95;\ M = 5.12, SD = 1.64$], decisions made by another department supervisor [$n = 30;\ M = 4.97, SD = 1.45$], and decisions made by survey respondent [$n = 26;\ M = 5.81, SD = 1.79$].

For the PR consultant scenario, an ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV decision-making on scenario #1 (PR consultant) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = .663, p = .576$]. There is no significant difference between decisions made by top supervisors [$n = 72;\ M = 2.42, SD = 1.07$], decisions made by communication teams [$n = 95;\ M = 2.59, SD = 1.02$], decisions made by another department supervisor [$n = 30;\ M = 2.47, SD = .86$], and decisions made by survey respondent [$n = 26;\ M = 2.69, SD = 1.05$].

An ANOVA revealed there was a significant effect of IV decision-making on scenario #2 (C-Suite) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = 2.85, p = .038$]. There is a significant difference between decisions made by top supervisors [$n = 72;\ M = 2.51, SD = .964$], decisions made by communication teams [$n = 95;\ M = 2.54, SD = .954$], decisions made by another department supervisor [$n = 30;\ M = 2.50, SD = .938$], and decisions made by the survey respondent [$n = 26;\ M = 3.12, SD = 1.12$]. A Tukey post hoc test showed that practitioners who make the communication decisions themselves responded with higher levels of moral courage than practitioners whose communication decisions are made by the top communications supervisor ($p = .037$) and practitioners whose communication decisions are made by the team ($p = .039$).

Moral Courage and Ethics Training. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV ethics training on DV moral courage at the $p<.05$ level for the two conditions [$F(1, 221) = .106, p = .745$]. There is no significant difference between those with ethics training [$n = 141;\ M = 5.15, SD = 1.68$] or those without ethics training [$n = 82;\ M = 5.07, SD = 1.67$].

For the PR consultant scenario, an ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV organization sector on scenario #1 (PR consultant) at the $p<.05$ level for the two conditions [$F(1, 221) = .048, p = .827$]. There is no significant difference between those with ethics training [$n = 141;\ M = 2.52, SD = 1.68$] or those without ethics training [$n = 82;\ M = 2.55, SD = .996$].

An ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV organization sector on scenario #2 (C-Suite) two conditions [$F(1, 221) = .607, p = .437$]. There is no significant difference between those with ethics training [$n = 141;\ M = 2.63, SD = .989$] or those without ethics training [$n = 82;\ M = 2.52, SD = .984$].

Moral Courage and Organizational Characteristics

Research question six focused on differentiating between different organizational characteristics. The variables tested were organizational size and sector.

Moral Courage and Organization Size. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV organization size on DV moral courage at the $p<.05$ level for the four conditions $[F(3, 192) = 1.78, p = .152]$. There is no significant difference between 1-49 employees $[n = 36;\ M = 5.42, SD = 1.65]$, 50-999 employees $[n = 83;\ M = 5.24, SD = 1.72]$, 1,000-4,999 employees $[n = 50;\ M = 5.04, SD = 1.46]$, or 5,000 or more employees $[n = 27;\ M = 4.52\ SD = 1.85]$.

For the PR consultant scenario, an ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV organization size on DV scenario #1 (PR consultant) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions $[F(3, 192) = 1.39,\ p = .249]$. There is no significant difference between 1-49 employees $[n = 36;\ M = 2.56, SD = .969]$, 50-999 employees $[n = 83;\ M = 2.64, SD = 1.05]$, 1,000-4,999 employees $[n = 50;\ M = 2.54, SD = .908]$, or 5,000 or more employees $[n = 27;\ M = 2.19\ SD = 1.08]$.

The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV organization size on DV scenario #2 (C-suite) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions $[F(3, 192) = 1.67, p = .174]$. There is no significant difference between 1-49 employees $[n = 36;\ M = 2.86, SD = .99]$, 50-999 employees $[n = 83;\ M = 2.61, SD = 1.03]$, 1,000-4,999 employees $[n = 50;\ M = 2.50, SD = .909$, or 5,000 or more employees $[n = 27;\ M = 2.33\ SD = .961]$.

Moral Courage and Organization Sector. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV organization sector on DV moral courage at the p<.05 level for the six conditions $[F(5, 217) = .834, p = .527]$. There is no significant difference between the public sector $[n = 85;\ M = 5.14, SD = 1.60]$, the private sector $[n = 54;\ M = 4.80, SD = 1.83]$, the government sector $[n = 27;\ M = 5.11, SD = 1.60]$, higher education $[n = 32;\ M = 5.47, SD = 1.44]$, the non-profit sector $[n = 17;\ M = 5.18, SD = 1.91]$, or other $[n = 8;\ M = 5.63, SD = 2.00]$.

For the PR consultant scenario, an ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV organization sector on scenario #1 (PR consultant) at the p<.05 level for the six conditions [$F(5, 217) = 1.25, p = .285$]. There is no significant difference between the public sector [$n = 85;\ M = 2.53, SD = 1.03$], the private sector [$n = 54;\ M = 2.31, SD = 1.00$], the government sector [$n = 27;\ M = 2.44, SD = .934$], higher education [$n = 32;\ M = 2.84, SD = .954$], the non-profit sector [$n = 17;\ M = 2.71, SD = 1.95$], or other [$n = 8;\ M = 2.63, SD = 1.30$].

An ANOVA revealed there was no significant effect of IV organization sector on scenario #2 (C-Suite) at the p<.05 level for the six conditions [$F(5, 217) = .500, p = .776$]. There is no significant difference between the public sector [$n = 85;\ M = 2.61, SD = .965$], the private sector [$n = 54;\ M = 42.48, SD = 1.02$], the government sector [$n = 27;\ M = 2.67, SD = 1.00$], higher education [$n = 32;\ M = 2.63, SD = .871$], the non-profit sector [$n = 17;\ M = 2.47\ SD = 1.18$], or other [$n = 8;\ M = 3.00, SD = 1.07$].

Moral Courage Scenarios

Research question seven differentiates between PET (moral courage) scenario to see if there is a relationship between scenario #1 (PR consultant) and scenario #2 (C-Suite).

There was a significant effect of IV scenario #2 (C-suite) on DV scenario #2 (PR Consultant) at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = 17.04, p =< .001$]. There is a significant difference between scenario #1 (PR consultant) [$n = 223;\ M = 2.53, SD = 1.02$] and scenario #2 (C-suite) [$n = 223;\ M = 2.59, SD = .99$]. A Tukey post hoc test showed that practitioners who would voice objections to the C-Suite regardless of the conditions responded with higher levels of scenario #1 (PR consultant) moral courage than practitioners who would voice objections if asked to ignore stakeholder issues ($p =$ .020), practitioners who would voice objections if asked to quietly delete our previous communication about the issue ($p <$ .001), and practitioners who would not voice objections under any conditions ($p <$ .001). The Tukey post hoc test also showed that practitioners who would voice objections if asked to ignore stakeholder issues responded with higher levels of scenario #1 (PR consultant) moral courage than practitioners who would voice objections if asked to quietly delete our previous communication about the issue ($p =$ .003), and practitioners who would not voice objections under any conditions ($p =$ .021).

Advocacy and Individual, Professional, and Organizational Characteristics

Research questions eight, nine, and ten focused on differentiating between different individual characteristics, professional characteristics, and organizational characteristics. The variables tested were gender, age, and education; professional position, work experience, decision-making power, ethics training, and organizational size and sector.

Advocacy and Gender. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV gender on DV advocacy at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) =$ .681, $p =$ .565]. There is no significant difference between males [$n = 95;\ M = 4.70, SD =$ 1.41], females [$n = 125;\ M = 4.66, SD = 1.24$], other [$n = 1;\ M = 3.6, SD = -$], or prefer not to say [$n = 2;\ M = 3.6, SD = .85$].

Advocacy and Age. The ANOVA revealed that there was a significant effect of IV age on DV advocacy at the p<.05 level for the six conditions [$F(5, 219) = 3.09, p =$ .010]. There is a significant difference between 18-24 [$n = 76;\ M = 4.40, SD = 1.39$], 25-34 [$n =$

87; $M = 4.54, SD = 1.18$], 35-44 [$n = 35;\ M = 5.05, SD = 1.46$], 45-54 [$n = 15;\ M = 5.56, SD = .91$], 55-64 [$n = 5;\ M = 4.72, SD = 1.03$], or 65+ [$n = 5;\ M = 5.20, SD = .89$].

Advocacy and Education. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV education on DV advocacy at the p<.05 level for the six conditions [$F(5, 217) = 1.27, p = .278$]. There is no significant difference between high school or GED [$n = 59;\ M = 4.82, SD = 1.24$], associate's degree [$n = 28;\ M = 4.55, SD = 1.35$], bachelor's degree [$n = 61;\ M = 4.56, SD = 1.22$], master's degree [$n = 54;\ M = 4.91, SD = 1.35$], doctoral degree [$n = 17;\ M = 4.32, SD = 1.61$], or other [$n = 4;\ M = 4.20, SD = 1.26$].

Advocacy and Professional Position. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV professional position on DV advocacy at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = 1.33, p = .265$]. There is no significant difference between top supervisors who make communication decisions [$n = 56;\ M = 4.67, SD = 1.73$], top supervisors whose communication team make the decisions [$n = 81;\ M = 4.46, SD = 1.31$], practitioners on a team [$n = 66;\ M = 4.89, SD = .88$], or those who work alone (no communication team) [$n = 20;\ M = 4.69, SD = 1.08$].

Advocacy and Work Experience. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV work experience on DV advocacy at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = .147, p = .932$]. There is not a significant difference between those with up to 5 years of experience [$n = 113;\ M = 4.70, SD = 1.39$], those with 6 to 10 years of experience [$n = 73;\ M = 4.60, SD = 1.23$], those with 11 to 15 years of experience [$n = 24;\ M = 4.60, SD = 1.50$], and those with over 16 years of experience [$n = 13;\ M = 4.78, SD = 1.41$].

Advocacy and Decision-making. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV decision-making on DV advocacy at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 219) = 1.88, p = .133$]. There is no difference between decisions made by top supervisors [$n = 72;\ M = 4.88, SD = 1.41$], decisions made by communication teams [$n = 95;\ M = 4.54, SD = 1.24$], decisions made by another department supervisor [$n = 30;\ M = 4.22, SD = 1.06$], and decisions made by survey respondent [$n = 26;\ M = 5.02, SD = 1.40$].

Advocacy and Organization Size. The ANOVA revealed that there was a significant effect of IV organization size on DV advocacy at the p<.05 level for the four conditions [$F(3, 192) = 2.84, p = .039$]. There is a significant difference between 1-49 employees [$n = 36;\ M = 4.87, SD = 1.11$], 50-999 employees [$n = 83;\ M = 4.84, SD = 1.34$], 1,000-4,999 employees [$n = 50;\ M = 4.24, SD = 1.32$], or 5,000 or more employees [$n = 27;\ M = 4.92\ SD = 1.22$].

Advocacy and Organization Sector. The ANOVA revealed that there was not a significant effect of IV organization sector on DV advocacy at the p<.05 level for the six conditions [$F(5, 217) = .656, p = .657$]. There is no significant difference between the public sector [$n = 85;\ M = 4.66, SD = 1.37$], the private sector [$n = 54;\ M = 4.88, SD = 1.15$], the government sector [$n = 27;\ M = 4.49, SD = .98$], higher education [$n = 32;\ M = 4.59, SD = 1.57$], the non-profit sector [$n = 17;\ M = 4.32, SD = 1.39$], or other [$n = 8;\ M = 4.80, SD = 1.40$].

Advocacy and Ethics Training. The ANOVA revealed that there was a significant effect of IV ethics training on DV advocacy at the p<.05 level for the two conditions [$F(1, 221) = 5.66, p = .02$]. There is a significant difference between those with ethics training [$n = 141;\ M = 4.82, SD = 1.32$] or those without ethics training [$n = 82;\ M = 4.39, SD = 1.25$].

Moral Courage and Advocacy

Research question eleven focused on determining the relationship between moral courage and advocacy. A linear regression was carried out to investigate whether moral courage ($n = 223;\ M = 5.12, SD = 1.67$) could significantly predict participants' advocacy ($n = 223;\ M = 4.66, SD = 1.31$). The results of the regression indicated that the model explained 4.1% of the variance and that the model was a significant predictor of advocacy, [$F(1, 221) = 9.34, p = .003$]. Moral courage contributed significantly to the model (B = .201, SE= .066, p<.05).

A linear regression was carried out to investigate whether scenario #1 (PR consultant) ($n = 223;\ M = 2.53, SD = 1.02$) could significantly predict participants' advocacy response ($n = 223;\ M = 4.66, SD = 1.31$). The results of the regression indicated that the model explained 1.3% of the variance and that the model was not a significant predictor of scenario #1 (PR consultant), [$F(1, 221) = 3.84, p = .051$]. Moral courage scenario #1 did not contribute significantly to the model ($\mathrm{B} = .17, \mathrm{SE} = .086, \mathrm{p} = .051$].

A linear regression was carried out to investigate whether scenario #2 (C-suite) ($n = 223;\ M = 2.59, SD = .986$) could significantly predict participants' advocacy response (C-suite) ($n = 223;\ M = 4.66, SD = 1.31$). The results of the regression indicated that the model explained 4.3% of the variance and that the model was a significant predictor of scenario #2 (C-suite), [$F(1, 221) = 9.83, p = .002$]. Moral courage scenario #2 did contribute significantly to the model ($\mathrm{B} = .274, \mathrm{SE} = .087, \mathrm{p} = .002$].

Table 4
Survey Respondents Individual Characteristics

	N	Percent	M	SD
Gender	223	100%		
Male	95	42.6%		
Female	125	56.1%		
Other	1	.4%		
Prefer Not to Say	2	.9%		
	N	**Percent**	**M**	**SD**
Age	223	100%	31.1	10.90
18-24	76	34.1%		
25-34	87	39%		
35-44	35	15.7%		
45-54	15	6.7%		
55-64	5	2.2%		
65+	5	2.2%		
	N	**Percent**	**M**	**SD**
Education	223	100%		
High School or GED	59	26.5%		
Associate Degree	28	12.6%		
Bachelor's Degree	61	27.4%		
Master's Degree	54	24.2%		
Doctoral Degree	17	7.6%		
Other	4	1.8%		

Table 5
Survey Respondents Professional Characteristics

	N	Percent
Professional Position	223	100%
I am the top supervisor on the communications team.	56	25.1%
I am the top supervisor on the communications team, but the communication decisions are up to the team.	81	36.3%
I am a practitioner on the communications team.	66	29.6%
I work alone–there is no communications team.	20	9%
Work Experience	223	100%
Up to 5 years	113	50.7%
6 to 10 years	73	32.7%
11 to 15 years	24	10.8%
16 years or more	13	5.8%
Decision-making	223	100%
Communication decisions are made by the top communications supervisor.	72	32.2%
Communication decisions are made by the team.	95	42.6%
A supervisor in another department makes my communication decisions.	30	13.5%
I make the communications decisions.	26	11.7%

Table 6
Survey Respondents Organization Characteristics

	N	Percent
Sector	223	100%

Public	85	38.1%
Private	54	24.2%
Government	27	12.1%
Higher Education	32	14.3%
Non-profit	17	7.6%
Other	8	3.6%
Organization Size	196	87.9%
1-49 Employees	36	16.1%
50-999 Employees	83	37.2%
1,000-4,999 Employees	50	22.4%
5,000 or more Employees	27	12.1%
Missing	27	12.1%

Table 7
Survey Respondents Ethics Training

	N	**Percent**
Have you taken any ethics training?	223	100%
No[1]	82	36.8%
Yes	141	63.2%
	N	**Percent**
Ethics Training[2]	223	100%
My organization put together a required ethics training seminar.	72	33%
My organization put together a recommended ethics training.	38	17.6%
My organization required a third-party ethics training seminar.	27	12.5%
My organization recommended a third-party ethics training seminar.	16	7.4%

[1] *If no was selected, then participant did not see remaining ethics training questions.*
[2] *Participants (n=141) could select more than one option.*

	N	Percent
I attended an ethics seminar through an industry organization.	27	12.5%
I attended an ethics seminar through a university (post-college).	18	8.3%
I researched ethics and ethics training on my own.	17	7.9%
Other	1	.5%
N/A (answered "no" to ethics training)	82	36.8%
	N	**Percent**
Ethics Training Frequency	141	63.2%
Every month	36	16.1%
Every four months (roughly 3 times a year)	42	18.8%
Every six months (roughly 2 times a year)	30	13.5%
Once a year	20	9%
Just once (throughout entire career)	13	5.8%
N/A (answered "no" to ethical training)	82	36.8%

Table 8
Survey Respondents Advocacy

	N	Percent	M	SD	Cronbach's Alpha
Advocacy Average	223	100%	4.67	1.31	.84
	N	**Percent**	**M**	**SD**	
A1: Public relations practitioners are mainly advocators.	223	100%	4.36	1.78	
Strongly disagree	27	12.1%			
Disagree	9	4%			
Somewhat disagree	23	10.3%			
Neither agree nor disagree	51	22.9%			
Somewhat agree	50	22.4%			

	N	Percent	M	SD
Agree	37	16.6%		
Strongly agree	26	11.7%		
	N	**Percent**	**M**	**SD**
A2: Public relations practitioners should advocate for a client no matter what.	223	100%	4.67	1.66
Strongly disagree	12	5.4%		
Disagree	15	6.7%		
Somewhat disagree	26	11.7%		
Neither agree nor disagree	39	17.5%		
Somewhat agree	48	21.5%		
Agree	55	24.7%		
Strongly agree	28	12.6%		
	N	**Percent**	**M**	**SD**
A3: Public relations practitioners advocate for a client, but not their client's public(s).	223	100%	4.48	1.64
Strongly disagree	16	7.2%		
Disagree	11	4.9%		
Somewhat disagree	24	10.8%		
Neither agree nor disagree	63	28.3%		
Somewhat agree	44	19.7%		
Agree	39	17.5%		
Strongly agree	26	11.7%		
	N	**Percent**	**M**	**SD**

	N	Percent	M	SD
A4: Advocating for a client means not being swayed by popular opinions.	223	100%	4.93	1.68
Strongly disagree	12	5.4%		
Disagree	10	4.5%		
Somewhat disagree	19	8.5%		
Neither agree nor disagree	42	18.8%		
Somewhat agree	38	17%		
Agree	61	27.4%		
Strongly agree	41	18.4%		
	N	**Percent**	**M**	**SD**
A5: Public relations practitioners should advocate for the client even if they disagree with the client.	223	100%	4.87	1.62
Strongly disagree	15	6.7%		
Disagree	6	2.7%		
Somewhat disagree	14	6.3%		
Neither agree nor disagree	44	19.7%		
Somewhat agree	60	26.9%		
Agree	48	21.5%		
Strongly agree	36	16.1%		

Table 9
Survey Respondents Moral Courage

	N	Percent	M	SD
Moral Courage Cumulative Total	223	100%	5.12	1.67
	N	**Percent**	**M**	**SD**

	N	Percent	M	SD
Scenario #1 PR Consultant	223	100%	2.53	1.02
MC1.1: I would not voice my objections to the partners under any conditions.	35	15.7%		
MC1.2: I would voice my objections to the partners if they asked me to conduct as many studies as this deep-pocket company could afford.	87	39%		
MC1.3: I would voice my objections to the partners if they asked me to conduct just one more large project.	48	22%		
MC1.4: I would voice my objections to the partners if they asked me to conduct any additional project, no matter how small.	52	23.3%		

	N	**Percent**	**M**	**SD**
Scenario #2 PR & C-suite	223	100%	2.59	.99
MC2.1: I would not voice my objections to the C-suite under any conditions.	34	15.2%		
MC2.2: I would voice my objections to the C-suite if they asked me to quietly delete our previous communication on the issue.	70	31.4%		
MC2.3: I would voice my objections to the C-suite if they asked me to ignore our stakeholders' questions about the issue.	72	32.3%		
MC2.4: I would voice my objections to the C-suite regardless of their conditions.	47	21.1%		

CHAPTER SIX

DISCUSSION

Each phase is discussed independently and then implications are triangulated for deeper insights into public relations ethics and morality. The study uniquely contributes to public relations ethics scholarship by providing a holistic view of both ethics and morality from three unique data sources: trade publications, practitioner interviews, and a practitioner survey. In addition, their continued integration into the contingency theory offers opportunities to understand how individual characteristics like ethics can manifest as moral courage that impacts a person's willingness to advocate as a public relations practitioner.

Archival Analysis of Trade Publications

"Do the Right Thing"

The trade publication analysis contributes to public relations ethics literature by identifying growth areas for public relations ethics. First, there are opportunities to better understand and standardize ethics as related to public relations. The review of the trade publications indicated that practitioners have a limited understanding of ethics; practitioners relied on everyday nomenclature to describe ethics. Practitioners touted the importance of "do the right thing" without expressing how practitioners should come to the right decisions. Indeed, the interpretation of ethics is singularly depicted, which siloes an understanding of ethics into an inherent gut reaction that relies on a practitioner's judgment of right. It is unclear if practitioners are aware of the level of subjectivity "do the right thing" invites. Thus, questions of (1) who's definition of "the right thing" (2) for whom (i.e., stakeholders, the organization, etc.) become important. The "what" (do the right thing) is answered but the "how" is not. The perspective hinges on an act— "*do*" the right thing. Empiricism, then, is considered in high regard as practitioners expect a manifestation of ethics. However, if the act—the *do*—is paramount to ethics, then guidelines are needed to develop standardizations and expectations for ethical acts.

As it stands, "do the right thing" implies a level of faith in society because the speaker suggests that rightness is understood on a broader level than their own. Do the right thing would be rendered irrelevant if the speaker did not believe that other practitioners would understand the phrase. Thus, the phrase provides practitioners a chance to use colloquial language as a shortcut to invoke meaning for the complex concept. The number of practitioners that invoke the phrase demonstrates how the phrase permeates cultural thought when dealing with issues of ethics. The phrase prescription transcends time as it was used consistently throughout the twenty-year review. Additionally, the references to the PRSA Code of Ethics were minimal and is another indicator that practitioners overuse and over-rely on the 'do the right thing' phrase.

Some depictions of practitioner ethics indicate ethics is secondary or tertiary to another core interest like leadership and/or organizational culture. For example, ethics is central to leadership and organizational culture but not well-described. It can be assumed that ethics is empirical, but the reader is left to decide how ethics is understood, seen, and measured. Indeed, an understanding of ethics teeters between the tangible and intangible. Practitioners struggle to comprehensively describe ethics and seem to offer tangible and relatable metaphors to capture a seemingly amorphous subject. This attempt to make the intangible tangible highlights the need for better education on ethics as a concept. There needs to be middle ground so practitioners do not have to be exposed to original ethicists thought pieces or use colloquial analogies to facilitate ethics discussions.

These questions are especially important when understood against popular views of how public relations should act as an organization's conscience (Bowen, 2008). Some practitioners and academics perceive the role of public relations as an ethics counsel (Neill & Barnes, 2018) but practitioners are either unable or unwilling to describe ethics beyond a menial phrase. This demonstrates a disconnect between the practitioner-as-conscience role and its purpose. Practitioners generally have role expectations—outside of ethics—that require qualifications. If a practitioner chooses to act as the ethics counselor or conscience, then a deeper understanding of ethics should be encouraged. Theoretically, this finding supports the argument that a public relations practitioner should help facilitate ethics discussion rather than act as 'the' organization's conscience (St. John III & Pearson, 2016).

Ethics as Connected to Leaders and Organizational Culture

Another important finding for public relations ethics is the interconnectivity of certain concepts. It is clear that practitioners looked to leaders to provide and influence culture and that culture dictates how organizational employees act ethically. Indeed, practitioners viewed ethics as central to culture and often described ethics as both a culture influencer and a product of culture. At times, the conversation around ethics and culture resembled the old adage "chicken or egg" where it can be argued that ethics create culture and vice versa. The integration of a leader's ethics changes the ethics/culture roundabout conversation because practitioners believe leaders influence behavior.

The practitioner perspective to acceptable behavior lies mainly with leadership and the tone the leader sets for the rest of the organization's employees. This approach additionally suggests that the result of the tonal space "shapes values and standards," which can be seen as the organization's culture and general approach to ethical behavior. Leaders, while important and often the "trendsetters" for their organizations, make mistakes because of their human nature and often find themselves held accountable for organization ethics. The assumed mediation of leadership on creating organization standards places a great emphasis on the leaders themselves. Alignment, too, is key. In this approach, the values and actions need to be appropriately aligned and this relies on the assumption that the organization's values are known and understood by *all* employees. Ethics, essentially, can be understood twofold: (1) leaders set the tone for the employees at large and (2) the overall alignment of the organization's values and standards to its actions demonstrates its level of ethics.

A leader's ethics are viewed as especially important because they set the tone for the organization and standardize acceptable behavior. This perception of ethics is deterministic where culture and leaders are viewed as key characteristics. This assumed order puts leadership first because a leader's approach sets the organizational tone or culture. From there, the culture is determined by the leader's direction as seen through the following trade publication quote, "top management sets the moral tone…employees usually understand where the boundaries are" (Scudder, 2014). The leader/follow structure can explain behavioral choices since followers look to leaders for cues on how to think and act. Because of this, it can be determined that, in some way, leaders set the original tone for the organization's culture while followers—or employees—reinforce the tone. If left unattended, ethics takes a secondary role to both leadership and culture.

A noteworthy idea comes another trade publication quotation, "a company whose culture results in turning a blind eye to safety problems invites crisis, and in this case, disaster" (Scudder, 2014). Theoretically, the practitioner refers to concepts relative to ethics and moral courage (or a lack of moral courage). The lack of ethics is referenced in "...turning a blind eye" while the importance of ethics is emphasized with "...invites crisis [and] disaster" (Scudder, 2014). The following questions remain: how can an organization ensure its leaders are ethical and/or moral? Whose version of morality and ethics is preferred? Should organizations rely on leaders to determine organizational culture and ethics? The last question, referring to leaders' versions of ethics, brings into question how much organizations should and often *do* rely on leaders to set the ethics tone. However, a typical organizational structure would show that leaders are few while employees are many. Of course, then the conversation naturally becomes what constitutes a leader. An organization literally calls out certain employees as leaders (e.g., CEO) while other employees might act as leaders in more subordinate roles. Regardless of the conception of leadership, the last choice an organization should make is one that allows for an abdication of responsibility. Leaders are the faces of companies and are the people who receive negative coverage and take the responsibility if there are organizational ethics failings. If employees are believed to look to leaders for ethics and appropriate behavior, it would be equally as probable that they also look to how leaders are treated for ethical lapses even if the lapses are not their own.

Moral Courage and Advocacy

While it is often difficult to speak out against preconceived beliefs, it is imperative to avoid groupthink and an unethical culture. Employees have agency and are able to make ethical choices even if leaders do not set an ethical tone. This agency is personal and is often thought of as moral courage, which is a person's willingness to stand up in situations where their moral principles are threatened (Comer & Vega, 2011). Moral courage comes with a cost, and practitioners are not unaware of the risks that come with standing up against popular opinions. The risks practitioners include—job, ability to work in the industry—are tangible. In fact, the risks are typically more tangible than what practitioners would stand up for like ethics (do the right thing) and moral principles like truth. The explication of ethics as do the right thing furthers the intangible and tangible dichotomy because of the gray area and subjectivity of the phrase. Practitioners unintentionally set themselves up for disparate situations wherein the tangible loss can easily seem to outweigh the intangible benefits.

Fortitude, then, becomes paramount to ethics survival in organization times of conflict or crisis. Practitioners align with the benefit of attending to personal moral courage because courage can result in a willingness to advocate for moral principles. The willingness to advocate for moral principles that result in ethical situations are identified at two levels: acting with moral courage against an organization and acting with moral courage for an organization. In either situation, practitioners emphasized time for contemplation to determine the best course of action. Practitioners only referenced this need for contemplation when moral principles were threatened, which suggests that moral courage activation is reactive rather than proactive. Future research should be conducted to determine the interplay of moral courage on these two types of advocacy scenarios.

Some practitioners referred to whistleblowing as an option for flagging unethical behavior, but the overreliance on a whistleblowing line of communication creates an atmosphere that deals with situations after they have become problems. Organizations should create internal structures that enable ethical thoughts and behaviors without relying on people to dictate appropriate behavior.

Practitioners equate an organization's culture as a predisposing characteristic to ethical decision-making and behavior. This does coincide, however, with moral courage research that continues to demonstrate that different influences can lead to questionable behavior or cause a person to stay silent (e.g., Comer & Sekerka, 2018). This assumed influence between leadership and employee ethics offers a unique theoretical contribution to both public relations ethics scholarship and the contingency theory. An integration of the assumed influence between different contingency theory subcategories management characteristics and personal characteristics could better explicate this relationship. There is room, too, for scholarship to better understand the influence of professional factors on ethics and if there is a distinction between professional and personal ethics.

Interviews of Public Relations Executives

The practitioners interviewed all demonstrated in-depth knowledge about public relations and provided high-level thinking about ethics and morality. In review, practitioners were interviewed to provide insights into the differences between ethics and morality and asked to provide examples of morally difficult situations wherein they had to deal with questionable stakeholder groups.

Ethics and Morality: Definitions, Metaphors, and Examples

When prompted to provide insights into public relations ethics, practitioners relied on personal metaphors, gut instincts, and values to describe their understanding of the concept. The personal approaches to ethics were consistent but their reliance on personal indicators made them ironically unhelpful due to the allowance for personal subjectivity. This is furthered when the metaphors practitioners offered are included. For example, the would-grandma-approve metaphor invites questions of culture, which previous scholars have noted as an influential factor in ethics (Davies & Hobbs, 2020; Hagelstein et al., 2021; Sebastião et al., 2017). Regardless of the metaphor or phrase, interviewed practitioners relied on action as a way to describe ethics as doing the right thing, "how you conduct yourself" (Participant 2) and "if you have to ask then it probably means it's something you shouldn't do" (Participant 6). For the practitioner, ethics manifests as an empirical expression that can be pointed to as an act. These acts are influenced by leaders like CEOs and that help outline how organization employees have shared values. In contrast to the trade publication analysis, the practitioners consider leaders a positive influence on organization ethics.

When practitioners described ethical behavior, they stayed in spaces that allow for interpretation with "tell the truth" and uphold honesty. The reliance on values like truth and honesty demonstrate how practitioners cling to organizational flagships as their own depictions of ethics and rightness. Conversations around unethical behavior resulted in more situational examples like kickbacks, favors, and conflicts of interests. There is a tendency to view ethical as undefined and unethical as situational. It can be argued, then, that ethical behavior is expected and considered normal, but this expectation can result in a diluted perspective of ethics as seen with ethics as rightness and values. Unethical behavior included a reference to the other or a directly impacted party. Ethical behavior generally benefits stakeholders, people, and society while unethical behavior is in part identified because of its impact on another person. These circumstances demonstrate the uneven perspective on ethics be it from positive or negative behaviors. Positive behaviors are seen to generally benefit organizations and society but negative behaviors have pointed implications on people.

Practitioners additionally defined morality, which proved difficult as interviewees reiterated their definitions for ethics. The overlap in definition between ethics and morality demonstrates how practitioners are unable to easily ascertain the differences between the concepts. However, each interviewee stated—at some point in the interview—that morality is not ethics. Therefore, practitioners have an inherent knowledge about the differences between the concepts but still describe them as if they are the same concept. There is an intense need to differentiate the concepts and provide public relations practitioners with educational materials that help them process and articulate the differences. Organizational conflicts may arise if professionals contribute to conversations with unknowing references to different aspects of ethics and morality. When given time to contemplate the differences between ethics and morality, practitioners settled on belief (morality) and action (ethics), but this distinction required contemplation and conversation. When asked if ethics and morality had a hierarchical relationship, practitioners responded “no” but this one to two interpretation does imply a level of hierarchy because belief typically comes before actions.

Interviewees more readily defined and identified immorality. There were fewer overlaps and questions of "is this unethical" because practitioners recognized that calling something immoral was severe and a different level of personal implications ("lacking an inner core"). Further, the unwillingness to use morality in the workplace demonstrates, again, the differences people inherently know. Though morality is unused in the workplace there is lowered concern over interchanging ethics and morality whereas interchanging unethical and immoral left practitioners uncomfortable. They are able to come to terms with the differences between the concepts but, alongside the tendency to generalize the positive, practitioners are left without strong tools to best segment the concepts and see the concepts with more clarity. People rely on their ability to identify unwanted—unethical or immoral—behavior. If this reliance continues, practitioners could transform their understanding of ethics into a situational trigger point that is activated when unwanted behavior comes into play. What is lacking is the justification for why certain behaviors are fostered while others are neglected and this stands for both ethics and morality.

Difficult Situations: Morally Questionable Stakeholders

The practitioner insights into situations involving morally questionable stakeholders illuminated how practitioners rely on organizational standards and stories. The role of public relations was centralized. The moral aspect became an us/them situation wherein the morality of the outside stakeholder group was understood from an organizational perspective but the organization communicating did not obviously respond in kind with morality. Rather, practitioners relied on their organization's purpose to guide their advocacy choices. Organization ethics and advocacy efforts are complex because the findings demonstrate that different factors, like an external group's lack of morality and an organization's purpose, influence a practitioner's decision to stand up for a cause and advocate.

Further, the identification of outside stakeholder groups as morally questionable indicates that practitioners have at least a baseline understanding of morality for their own organizations because it would be difficult to identify the other if the identifier had no sense of the self. Indeed, the organization purpose that practitioners cite acts as the baseline identification mechanism from which to determine if engagement is necessary. This interplay between organization purpose and advocacy relies on outside influences that again indicate that advocacy as related to ethics and morality, for public relations, is reactive.

Practitioners' reflections on instances of dealing with questionable stakeholders are rosy retrospections because not one practitioner mentioned the risk to them. Organizational risk—like telling the full truth versus partial truth—was touched on but the true risks that come with moral courage that results in advocacy efforts were not mentioned. The allowance of passing time from these instances surely influenced how practitioners perceived the personal risks but they still existed to a certain extent. While it is admirable that all the scenarios and reflections resulted in positive perceptions of the situations, practitioners failed to reflect on different threats to moral courage and advocacy stances, like job loss and social standing.

Survey of Public Relations Practitioners

The survey results provide insight into public relations moral courage, ethics training, and advocacy perceptions. The findings demonstrate the complexity of moral courage and advocacy as related to both practitioner and organizational characteristics. In general, the ethics training had little influence over advocacy and moral courage tendencies. This disconnect demonstrates that ethics training might need revamping to address or better facilitate moral courage and ethical decision-making. While there is no way of knowing what the ethics training each practitioner took was about, the lack of differentiation based on training/no training indicates that there is a need to reevaluate the impact and purpose of ethics training. Conceptually, ethics training should impact a person's moral courage choices unless there is an intense disconnect between the person's morality and the training. Organizations should review their ethics training seminar materials and determine whether the seminars are geared toward corporate anti-theft behavior or assisting employees during hardship.

Public Relations: The Role of Advocacy

Public relations research demonstrates the complexity of the practitioner role as an advocate, ethical conscience, or a strategic decision-maker moving along a stance continuum. The core purpose of the survey was to identify how different characteristics—both individual and organizational—relate to a longstanding interest for the public relations role: advocacy. The survey provides pointed insights into public relations tendencies and a person's willingness to act with moral courage. Findings indicate that, generally, practitioners consider themselves to be advocates. Consistent with research that demonstrates the complexities of the role, practitioners similarly believe advocacy to be a part of the role but not the core aspect of the role. Nuanced insights into advocacy demonstrate, however, that practitioners are willing to moderate personal beliefs in order to advocate for clients. Most practitioners further believe that the position means advocating for a client without being swayed by outside groups. Surprisingly, practitioners indicate that a client's message outweighs personal beliefs and differences. Indeed, there is a level of assumed responsibility that practitioners have for clients. The reason behind this willingness, however, can be speculated as driven by professionalism, financial gain, or another internal motivation. Regardless, there is a certain understood agreement among practitioners that the role requires client advocacy that (1) is not swayed by outside stakeholder groups and (2) does not need to be in agreement with personal beliefs. These findings demonstrate the complexity of belief congruency. The regression findings also indicate that moral courage influences advocacy. This conceptual linkage further demonstrates why ethics (and morality) are important concepts to consider in the workplace. Both clients and practitioners would benefit from understanding the extent the practitioner would be willing to go to advocate for the client in question.

Moral Courage Variability

The majority of characteristics like gender, age, education, organization size, organization sector, ethics training, professional position, and decision-making power, did not impact moral courage willingness. Previous research has not found differences based on gender, so the survey's findings are consistent with past literature regarding that demographic (Comer & Vega, 2008). For example, Han (2023) found that moral reasoning in the DIT did not vary based on gender. This gender consistency—i.e., little variation, demonstrates that the tests do not have gender bias. Past research has not measured organization and professional characteristics like sector, size, and professional position, so these findings add to current understanding on what impacts moral courage.

The characteristic that did impact moral courage was work experience, which was measured by asking the practitioner to provide the number of years they worked in a communication field. The fact that work experience impacts moral courage demonstrates how professional experience aids practitioners when deciding when to stand up against others. Specifically, practitioners with 11-15 years of experience demonstrated higher levels of moral courage than those with 6-10 years and implies that a certain level of tenure results in heighted thinking about moral principles and resulting ethical actions. It can be speculated that those with roughly 11-15 years of experience are at the core of their careers and have enough experience to identify questionable scenarios. Surprisingly, tenure length did not automatically correlate with higher levels of moral courage and suggests that other factors may be at play (e.g., new technology or more interaction with C-suite executives) and have a greater impact on individuals with more experience.

Practically, practitioners should rely on peers with more experience to provide insights into how to deal with difficult situations. This insight further demonstrates that practical experience provides more impact than worldly experience. Age did not impact moral courage to the same extent as professional work experience did. Age did, however, impact advocacy tendencies and this impact illuminates how advocacy willingness evolves over a lifespan. Thus, scholarship should look to differentiate between experience to best explicate moral and ethical decision-making and a practitioner's willingness to advocate.

Lastly, though decision-making did not consistently impact moral courage, there was significant variation for scenario #2 (C-Suite) based on decision-making ability. Practitioners who held positions wherein they made communication decisions themselves demonstrated higher levels of moral courage than practitioners whose communication decisions were made by (1) a top supervisor and (2) a team. These findings imply that a certain level of agentry—making the decision him-/herself—results in a greater sense of situational understanding that includes higher levels of moral courage. Decision ownership, then, plays a role in moral courage willingness.

The Impact of Individual, Professional, and Organizational Characteristics

Similarly, findings indicate that a person's advocacy tendencies are impacted by organization size and practitioner's ethics training. Indeed, the size of an organization impacts a practitioner's advocacy tendencies. Practitioners who work at large organizations (5,000 or more employees) have the likeliest tendencies to act as advocates for clients. The finding demonstrates the importance of not assuming advocacy likelihood based solely on the profession. Clients that similarly expect higher advocacy levels, like not being swayed by public opinion, should be mindful of the organization's size as results demonstrate that practitioners' at large organizations have the highest propensity of advocacy.

While not impactful for moral courage, ethics training impacts advocacy tendencies. Practitioners with ethics training are likely to agree with advocacy statements that require the practitioner to act and advocate for the client. The fact that ethics training impacts advocacy and not moral courage further points to the likelihood that ethics training does not deal appropriately cover ethics material. For example, things to consider are the examples included in the training, like stealing offices supplies (i.e., something that is unlawful), and how the training characterizes the impact (i.e., financial loss for the organization).

Theoretically, the contingency theory includes different characteristics that can potentially impact a practitioner's stance and these variables align with the characteristics tested in the study. Therefore, the survey findings illuminate how different variables within the contingency theory umbrella interact. Indeed, both organization characteristics and individual characteristics interacted with moral courage and advocacy at different levels. Given, too, how the contingency theory offers a stance between accommodation and advocacy, the advocacy tendency findings provide a solid foundation for why the advocacy side of the continuum needs to be explored and further explicated. Practitioners agree that advocacy is a part of the role, but the current contingency theory based stance measurement scales (Jin & Cameron, 2006) measure accommodation—not advocacy. Further, the contingency theory was originally conceptualized because of situations where accommodation or two-way symmetry might prove impossible or wrong. The impact of moral courage—standing up against people or unpopular opinions—on advocacy demonstrates the theoretical linkage between morality and advocacy. It is appropriate to consider advocacy as through a lens of moral courage with moral psychology as a part of the conceptual foundation.

Integrated Insights: Theoretical and Practical Implications

In totality, the multi-phase exploratory sequential study findings illuminate the work that needs to be done for public relations ethics. Scholars have been studying ethics, in varying degrees, for centuries and the interest level is accounted for based on the sheer number of articles on public relations ethics. However, as demonstrated earlier, not all scholars outwardly define ethics, which provides too much allowance for interpretation (see again Table 1). Practitioners also rely on general colloquialisms, metaphors, and internal guides (i.e., gut or heart) and compounds the issue and results in unclear ethics. Both scholars and organizations should encourage contemplation, which helped practitioners better formulate answers as seen in the interviews. Ethics is complex and many scholars have developed various approaches to understanding ethics, so there is not a single "right" way. In fact, there are various "right" ways that depend on the systematic justification of the ethics review (i.e., deontology versus teleology). For example, Ralph Potter developed the Potter Box as a way to enhance systematic ethics decision-making. The Potter Box acts as a thought exercise for moral reasoning but does not prescribe an approach to ethics; instead the system enhances ethics contemplation by encouraging systematic thinking (Franquet-Santos-Silva & Ventura-Morujao, 2017). This example further demonstrates how far "do the right thing" is from the complexity of ethical thinking.

Theoretically, scholars should evaluate which ethics lineage they are assuming in an article because this will provide some clarity for future scholars and ethical conceptualizations. These linage identifications are severely lacking—ethics definitions are a step in the right direction and scholars need to continue walking toward clarity and authenticity. Indeed, the ethics lineage evaluation illuminates points of bias, as this study did: practitioners overwhelmingly rely on values and character to describe ethics. The trade publication analysis demonstrates how practitioners include values to describe optimal culture and ethical behavior. Similarly, those interviewed used values like honesty and truth when describing ethical behavior. When coupled with the tendency for practitioners to look to leadership for character influence, the main approach to public relations ethics manifests as a Western perspective: values-based with loose Aristotelian roots. The quotes from phase one illuminate how values act as metaphoric boundaries for practitioners because they use values to prescribe ethical behavior. There is some reliance on deontology, however, as some practitioners promote truth-telling as the optimal ethical behavior. Under deontology, truth is upheld to the highest standard because of the concern for the categorical imperative which urges people to act as though every new act should become the new norm. Both of these perspectives demonstrate the overwhelming reliance on ethics from a Western influence but neither data source—trade publications nor interviews—outwardly discussed their ethical approaches.

What was more obviously described were the definitions and examples of ethical behavior. Both qualitative data sources emphasize the need for better definitions of ethics for the field of public relations. Practitioners too often rely on metaphoric interpretations of ethics, which results in a clouded depiction of an already complex subject matter. Scholars, practitioners, and education systems need to be able to describe ethics in order to facilitate and foster ethical behavior. The depictions of ethical and unethical behavior already demonstrate a reliance on empiricism to inform knowledge, which means that unethical behavior generally needs to exist in order for practitioners to identify it as inappropriate and unwanted. Further, there is a poor ethics foundation for systematic justification because of the lack of a strong, consistent definition. The phrase "do the right thing" does not invite obvious and systematic justification for actions like ethical approaches do (i.e., deontology). Instead, the phrase invites too much interpretation and takes a step away from a systematic justification of ethical behavior.

While it was known that scholars sometimes conflate ethics and morality into a singular concept, the interview findings demonstrate the nuances between ethics and morality and unethical and immoral. First, the trade publication analysis did not find a misuse of ethics and morality. Instead, the practitioners overwhelmingly relied on ethics and certain values, like honesty and transparency. This coincides with what practitioner interviewees said about using morality in the workplace: its nonexistent. The consistency between the data source findings provide a strong reason for why scholars need to explicate their use(s) of ethics and morality because, if they are using 'moral' in the research, there needs to be a good explanation or reason why.

To further complicate ethics and morality, interviewed practitioners did not find space for 'moral' in the workplace but were unable to truly separate the concept from ethics. This begs the question: If the concepts are so similar, why is one inappropriate in the workplace? The answer lies in the inherent understanding practitioners had when describing morality's antithesis: immorality. So, ethics and morality are similar and have overlapping conceptual foundations but only ethics is workplace appropriate. Unethical and immoral, however, are separate concepts to which immoral has an unspoken level of severity. To this end, unethical—as a concept—is viewed as a professional manifestation of values and appropriate behavior as set forth by codes, culture, and peer expectations.

This influence system—education, culture, and social—can be found within the contingency theory of strategic conflict management. Scholars can use the findings that suggest such an influence between organization characteristics and individual characteristics to determine organizational stance movement. Survey findings indicate that various individual and organizational characteristics influence both moral courage and advocacy tendencies. Scholars can develop more robust conceptual linkages that express ethics relation to workplace behavior, advocacy and professional outputs like communication stories and organization stances. Advocacy can, and should, be viewed through the lens of a person's willingness to enact moral courage.

Limitations and Future Research

This study used data sources from over a span of fifteen years, so contextual influence is acknowledged because of the de facto changes in cultural and social norms. While these changes did not obvious impact the study's findings, these subtle changes result in long-term influences like what constitutes ethical/unethical behavior (e.g., equity and gender discrimination). Also, the study relied on limited interviews with high-level public relations executives. Though the interviews were informative and provided data saturation, the interviewees were predominately Caucasian, so the impact of race was not included or explored. The study focused on age and gender, which provides limited insight into if or how race and ethnicity might impact both moral courage and advocacy. As scholars continue to parse out the impact of individual characteristics on both moral courage and advocacy, race and ethnicity (along with other characteristics) should be included. The survey instrument was developed using initial findings from the study's first phase. Based on the results, only a specific element of advocacy was tested: the role/place of advocacy within public relations. The findings from this study present a solid case for advocacy in the profession, but future studies should determine if advocacy is multi-dimensional and build out an advocacy scale for the contingency theory of strategic conflict management.

Looking forward, practitioners and scholars should work together to help close the gap on ethics understanding. Scholars should continue research and, using definitions and referencing ethics linage, continue to parse out implications like workplace verses worldly experiences. There is potential, too, for organizations and educational institutes to partner to create ethics thought leadership material to offer practitioners. This material can be mutually beneficial as it educates upcoming practitioners and provides current practitioners with better baselines for ethics in the workplace that transcends tell the truth and do not steal. Ethics, true ethics where right and wrong are decidedly difficult and sometimes intertwined, require time, contemplation, and support.

Additionally, the contingency theory of strategic conflict management can be strengthened if scholars focus efforts on advocacy and use this study—alongside one of the original reasons for the theory—as a basis for continued advocacy refinement and advocacy stance movement scale development. Results demonstrate the conceptual linkage between moral courage and advocacy, so a perspective is offered and the foundation is set. Public relations, as a whole, will benefit from a return to the basics with ethics definitions and thought leadership, educational materials, moral courage support, and a solid theoretical framework for a core aspect of the role: advocacy.

CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSION

The field of ethics and morality originated millennia ago to which philosophers and scholars carry the metaphoric torch and commit themselves to the mission to understand right and wrong, values and principles, and acceptable human attitudes and behavior. Scholars and practitioners both recognize the absolute complexity of ethics and morality and note the rigor it takes to differentiate between these core human concepts.

The field of public relations ethics needs to recenter itself to address some key issues. There is uncertainty regarding ethics and morality definitions—for both scholars and practitioners. Practitioners also overwhelmingly rely on personal metaphors in professional settings, "do the right thing" or "follow your gut," that further complicate ethics and morality. However, questions of ethics and morality do enter the workplace and practitioners acknowledge the level of thought required to approach these complicated situations. Ultimately, these complicated situations resulted in some level of moral courage or, colloquially, a willingness to *do the right thing*. Advocacy is influenced, to some degree, by this moral courage activation and demonstrates the potential impact moral courage has on the role of public relations.

The sheer number of articles on and approaches to ethics makes it difficult, at times, to understand how an author conceives of either ethics or morality. Authors need to dedicate themselves to explicating ethics for their readership because understanding the approach to ethics is almost as important as understanding the insights. Indeed, the contemplation and mindfulness demonstrated by the interviewees in this study should be replicated among all scholars and practitioners. The public relations ethics field needs to encourage lineage-driven research so practitioners and scholars can appropriately process the insights.

Practitioners, too, need to revisit their ethics knowledge to understand how their perceptions of ethics move beyond personal metaphors and colloquial sayings. Scholars and organizations have the opportunity to introduce collaborations that elevate ethics in the workplace which would result in deeper understandings of what is/is not considered ethical or moral. Ethics training and peer mentorship are key cornerstones for workplace ethics.

Further, the need for the contingency theory's advocacy scale is heightened. Indeed, this study demonstrated how different variables impacted either moral courage or advocacy and then paired the two core concepts against each other, which resulted in an interconnected relationship. With the role of public relations grounded in advocacy and considered a core part of the job, advocacy's relationship to moral courage activation becomes important. Therefore, continued research is necessary to better define the impact of the personal in the professional space.

Ethics and morality occupy a unique space within public relations research. The concepts' intense philosophical backgrounds require deep thought and contemplation that, when done well, result in nuanced understanding of human attitudes and behaviors. Public relations practitioners need to be attuned to how their choices translate into professional decisions to advocate for organizations and clients. The public relations ethics and morality space will evolve but scholars need to harness the evolution and encourage concept explications, mindfulness, training, and discussion to further the role of public relations in ethics, morality, and advocacy.

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APPENDIX A

Qualification for Trade Publication Article Analysis

Ethics and Morality: Words and Phrases from Popular Ethics and Morality Literature

- Ethics
- Morality
- Value(s)
- Moral(s)
- Unethical
- Good versus bad
- Questionable situation(s)
- Ethos
- Character
- Integrity
- Principles
- Organization or practitioner conduct
- Courage
- Standards
- The golden rule (Confucius/Aristotle)
- Do unto others (Confucius/Aristotle)
- The best option for the best number of people (Mill-utility)

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Introduction

1. Could you please describe your experience in public relations?
    a. *Probe*: How long have you worked in this area?
    b. *Probe*: What are your primary responsibilities in your current role?
    c. *Probe*: Have you worked elsewhere as a public relations professional? If so, please describe that work.
    d. *Probe*: What was your educational background? Have you had any education on ethics?
        i. *Probe*: During college?
        ii. *Probe*: At your organization? Past or present?
2. How do you determine right and wrong?
    a. *Probe:* Do you look to anyone, or an organization, to help you determine right and wrong?
    b. *Probe:* What role do rules/norms play in your job? Can you provide an example?
    c. *Probe*: Does your organization offer ethics training?
        i. *Probe:* Is it mandatory? If so, how often do you have to take it?
3. I'd like you to reflect, for a moment, on a time where your organization had to communicate with a morally questionable public. How did you approach the situation? *If you can't think of a time, hypothetically reflect*.
    a. *Probe*: What did (would) you talk about when drafting the message(s)?
    b. *Probe*: What was (would be) included in the message?
    c. *Probe*: What type of wording (would you) was used?

Definitions

I'd like you to reflect on your understanding of ethics and morality. I'm going to ask you to define both of these concepts.

4. How would you define ethics?
    a. *Probe*: Why did you include XYZ?
    b. *Probe*: How would you define or characterize XYZ?
5. How would you describe "unethical"?
    a. *Probe:* How do you know when something is unethical?
6. How would you define morality?
    a. *Probe*: Why did you include XYZ?
    b. *Probe*: How would you define or characterize XYZ?
7. How would you describe "immoral?"
    a. *Probe*: Why did you include XYZ?
    b. *Probe*: How would you define or characterize XYZ?

Applications

I'd like you to reflect on your public relations experiences. I'm going to ask you to reflect on these challenges, issues you may have had, throughout your time as a public relations practitioner.

8. How often, on average, do you find yourself in a challenge or issue at work?
    a. *Probe*: How did you determine this?
    b. *Probe*: Why did you include XYZ?
9. Using your definition of ethics, how would you apply it (the definition) to your work as a practitioner? *Looking to generate around 3-5 examples (can be hypothetical, though actual is preferred)*
    a. *Probe*: Why did you choose XYZ as your example(s)?
    b. *Probe*: Would this application change if you used your definition of morality?
    c. *Probe:* Using this example, or basic issue, how would you know if someone acted unethically?
10. Using your definition of morality, how would you apply it (the definition) to your work as a practitioner? *Looking to generate around 3-5 examples (can be hypothetical, though actual is preferred)*
    a. *Probe*: Why did you choose XYZ as your example(s)?
    b. *Probe*: Would this application change if you used your definition of ethics?
    c. *Probe:* Using this example, or basic issue, how would you know if someone acted immorally?
11. Before we move on, do you believe you would respond differently as a "private" person rather than a practitioner?
    a. *Probe*: If so, how would your determination of right and wrong shift?

Closing

We discussed ethics and morality definitions, along with their counterparts, unethical and immoral; applications of these definitions, and discussed one in-depth past example of an issue of right and wrong.

12. Is there a particular challenge you believe the field of public relations faces?
13. If you had to give advice to upcoming public relations practitioners, what 3 pieces of advice would you give them on how to prepare for issues of ethics and morality?
14. Is there anything we haven't discussed that you would like to add?

APPENDIX C

Survey Questionnaire

SCREENERS

1. Consent
2. Are you a US based public relations practitioner?
    1. Yes
    2. No- term

Section 1: ADVOCACY

Advocacy: Please rate the following statements from (1, Strongly Disagree) to (7, Strongly Agree).

1. Public relations practitioners are mainly advocators. (1)
2. Public relations practitioners should advocate for a client no matter what. (2)
3. Public relations practitioners advocate for a client, but not their client's public(s). (3)
4. Advocating for a client means not being swayed by popular opinions. (4)
5. Public relations practitioners should advocate for the client even if they disagree with the client. (5)

Section 2: Scenarios

Scenario #1

You are an associate public relations research consultant who had just completed an expensive and comprehensive project for a client company. You know you can offer no more service of value to this client and that any further research would be unnecessary and a waste of the client's time and money. However, your superiors, the partners of the firm, insist that this thriving company can afford more research. You believe it would be wrong to undertake any additional research for this client, but the partners, who are very strong-willed, are pressuring you.

Under what conditions, if any, would you voice your objections to the partners? (single-choice)

1. I would not voice my objections to the partners under any conditions. (1)
2. I would voice my objections to the partners if they asked me to conduct as many studies as this deep-pocket company could afford. (2)
3. I would voice my objections to the partners if they asked me to conduct just one more large project. (3)
4. I would voice my objections to the partners if they asked me to conduct any additional project, no matter how small. (4)

Scenario #2

You are the lead public relations practitioner. Your company has taken a strong stance on an issue related to the company's purpose with a page specially dedicated to the issue on the company's website. The company has promised your company's stakeholders that you will always defend the issue. Recently, rival groups have spoken out against the issue in a negative and loud way. Your company's C-Suite has caught wind of the conversation and has decided you are not to develop any communication about the issue. They are fearful of the potential negative attention even though your company considers itself a leader on this issue.

Under what conditions, if any, would you voice your objections to the C-suite?

1. I would not voice my objections to the C-suite under any conditions. (1)
2. I would voice my objections to the C-suite if they asked me to quietly delete our previous communication on the issue. (2)
3. I would voice my objections to the C-suite if they asked me to ignore our stakeholders' questions about the issue. (3)
4. I would voice my objections to the C-suite regardless of their conditions. (4)

Section 3: Ethics Training

1. Have you taken any ethics training?
   ___No (*if no, skip to section 4*)
   ___Yes
2. (If yes) Which best describes your ethics training? Select all that apply.
   ___My organization recommended a third-party ethics training seminar.
   ___My organization required a third-party ethics training seminar.
   ___My organization put together a required ethics training seminar.
   ___My organization put together a recommended ethics training.
   ___I received ethics training from a past employer.
   ___I attended an ethics seminar through an industry organization.
   ___I attended an ethics seminar through a university (post-college).
   ___I researched ethics and ethics training on my own.
3. (If yes) How often do you take ethics training at your current job?
   ___Every month
   ___Every four (roughly 3 times a year)
   ___Every six months (roughly 2 times a year)
   ___Once a year
   ___Just once (throughout your entire career)

Section 4: Job Demographics

1. What sector do you work in?
   ___Public
   ___Private

___Government
___Higher Education
___Non-profit
___Other

2. What is the approximate total number of employees at your company/organization at all the locations?
    ___ 1 ~49
    ___ 50 ~999
    ___ 1,000 ~4,999
    ___ 5,000 or more
    ___ Don't know
3. How many years of experience do you have in communication?
    ___ Up to 5 years
    ___ 6 to 10 years
    ___ 11 to 15 years
    ___ 16 years or more
4. Which best describes you?
    ___I am the top supervisor on the communications team.
    ___I am the top supervisor on the communications team, but the communication decisions are up to the team.
    ___I am a practitioner on the communications team.
    ___I work alone—there is no communications team.

5. Which best describes who makes the communication decisions at your organization?
    ___Communication decisions are made by the top communications supervisor
    ___Communication decisions are made by the team
    ___A supervisor in another department makes my communication decisions.
    ___I make the communication decisions.

Section 5: Demographics

6. How old are you?
    ___ Age

7. What is your gender?
    ___ Female
    ___ Male
    ___ Other

8. Please state the highest academic/educational qualification you hold:
   ___ High school graduation or equivalent
   ___ Associate bachelor degree
   ___ Bachelor's (or formal college) degree (B.A., B.Sc., etc.)
   ___ Master's (or formal graduate school) degree (M.A., M.Sc., M.B.A., etc.)
   ___ Doctoral degree (highest graduate school academic degree)
   ___ Other, please specify: __________

9. If you completed a higher education degree (at a 2 or 4-year university), what was your undergraduate major?
   a. Select one (or more than one)

End of Survey