The Coming Managerial Class:
Generation Z Women and Their Ethics

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ABSTRACT

A seemingly endless series of high-profile incidents involving the actions of some prominent United States and European corporate and government individuals have occurred in recent years, weakening faith in leaders, intuitions and the marketplace. This has fueled discussions concerning ethical behavior in business by those in leadership positions. These events have brought more attention to post-secondary schools of business that seek to prepare future business professionals for situations and circumstances they may face. Yet, students do not come to post-secondary intuitions as blank slates. With regard to ethics and other aspects of their moral foundation much has already been shaped and determined. The current study explores a specific cohort of these students, namely women of Generation Z who will soon begin their careers in industry and government. A good number of these women will eventually rise to significant leadership positions in their chosen fields. Results from over 250 Generation Z women participating in a Research Lab housed at a medium sized university in the southern part of the United States are presented and discussed. Specifically, the study reports on: (1) research from a number of fields addressing ethical development and systems, (2) the ethical influences on these individuals, (3) self-reported knowledge of various moral perspectives and ethical issues, and (4) their evaluations on the severity of a number of behaviors. Results are discussed in the context of how Generation Z women may manage differently than those currently holding positions of power and authority in our society.

Subject Area: Business and Society, Human Resource Management and Org. Behavior
Article Type: Peer-Reviewed Journal Article

BACKGROUND

The past decade has given rise to numerous accounts of ethically questionable and at times criminal, corporate and organizational activities. All represent examples of illegal and/or unethical activities committed by managers and others in leadership positions. Some widely publicized cases are presented in Table 1. To this list, numerous incidents involving local, state, and federal governmental officials demonstrate that there are many legal and ethical challenges for people seeking to lead organizations of all types, across all sectors of the economy, and at all levels of society.

According to Ferrell, business ethics comprises "principles values and norms that may originate from individuals, organizational statements, or from the legal system that primarily guide individual and group behavior in business" (Ferrell, et al., pg. 4, 2018). There was a time when the American public was reluctant to apply standards of morality to business, and more skeptical of business leaders to "do the right thing" in business contexts. These doubts were

reflected in public opinion studies from the late 1990s and even echoed in academic circles. In an article entitled, "Ethics are Nice but Business is Business," statistics showed that 58% of American adults rated the actions of business executives as only "fair" or "poor," and 90% believed white-collar crime to be "common" or "somewhat common" (Krohe, 1997). At that time, 76% of respondents asserted that lack of ethics in business was contributing to a decline in societal standards of morality. Additionally, less than half of the employees surveyed considered corporate leadership to be persons of high integrity, with nearly a third of employees "knowing or suspecting" ethical violations in their organization (1999 National Business Ethics Study, 1999).

Organization	Year	Ethical Offense – Alleged
Apple	2017	intentionally slowing iPhones' performance
Equifax	2017	data breaches
Facebook	2018	personal information privacy
Fox News	2017	biased news reporting and sexual harassment
Houston Astros baseball team	2017	using technology to steal pitching signs
USA swimming / USA gymnastics	2016	sexual scandals involving coaches and doctors
FIFA	2015	bribery
Int'l Olympic Organizing Committee	2002	bribery
New England Patriots football team	2007	videotaping competition's practice "Spygate"
Theranos	2018	blood testing equipment
Turing Pharmaceuticals	2015	price gouging
Volkswagen	2015	false diesel emissions reports
Weinstein Co	2017	sexual harassment, leading to #MeToo movement
Wells Fargo	2016	phantom financial accounts

Table 1. Organizations and Accusations / Admitted Unethical Conduct

These beliefs were reflected among academics at that time as well. Challenging a once popular view with the expression, "the myth of the amoral business" DeGeorge (1999), argued that the American public does not view business as moral or immoral but as amoral, based on the assumption that ethical considerations are irrelevant or even inappropriate in a business context. The popular view was summarized by "business is not structured to handle questions of values and ethics, and its managers have usually not been trained…to do so," elaborating on the general belief of the public underlying the assumption. For DeGeorge, public re-examination of this reasoning was initiated by three societal events: more reports of scandals and public reactions to them; the organizing of special interests and socially conscious groups like consumers, environmentalists and such; and the proliferation of corporate and professional codes of ethics, in addition to increased attention to the role of ethics in business (DeGeorge, pg. 3-5, 1999).

GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES

In the 20 some years since those surveys, and DeGeorge's essay, the attitudes and beliefs of the American public have changed, along with business practices and social expectations for the behavior of business leaders. This shift has marked a transition from a shareholder perspective of business toward a stakeholder orientation, which has continued into the 21st century (Laplume, 2008). This shift, however, has been accompanied by generational changes in the workforce. Since the emergence of business ethics as a field of study in the 1970's, there has been increasing attention given to generational differences in the workforce (Ferrell, et al. 2018; Lapoint and Liprie-Spence, 2017; Fishman, 2016; and Martin and Ottemann, 2015; Withrow, J.R., 2012). Research concerned with comparing and contrasting generations abounds in a variety of contexts: the popular press, social media, conferences, TED talks, in addition to more traditional academic outlets. Many current examples of unethical conduct in business involve members of the Baby Boom generation and Generation X, even Generation Y (also known as Millennials). One may wonder what effect these incidents may have on the next generation of managers: those belonging to Generation Z.

Establishing one specific year as the starting point for those who belong to Generation Z is problematic. According to Statistics Canada this generation begins with those born in 1993, however, they do not recognize a millennial cohort as most other organizations do (Statistics Canada, 2011). Rather, they state the Generation Z are those who directly follow what they designate as the children of baby boomers (born 1946-1964), also referred to as Generation Y. More typical is the view of a Randstad report which identifies members of Generation Z as those born between 1995–2014 (Randstad and Future Workplace, 2014). The start of Generation Z with the year 1995 is also common to Australia's McCrindle Research Centre and extends to 2010 (McCrindle, 2015). Starting slightly later, van den Bergh and Behrer (2011) define Generation Z as those born after 1996. In Japan, different generations are defined by ten-year spans with "Neo-Digital Natives" (a different name for Generation Z) beginning after 1996 (Anderson, 2016). Using 1997 as the beginning of this cohort is a view shared by the accounting firm Ernst and Young, marketing and consulting firm Magid, and Turner Broadcasting, the latter sources advocating that "Plurals" be the name assigned to this generation (Merriman, 2018; Magid, 2012; Baysinger, 2016). A 2016 report from Goldman Sachs is consistent with the Pew Research Center in describing Generation Z as those born since 1998 (Wolf, 2016; Dimock, 2019). Other firms go as far forward as 2000 or 2001 in identifying the first year of the cohort. One rationale for this was suggested by the American Marketing Association which described Generation Z as those born after September 11, 2001, and that the cohort should be dubbed Gen 9/11 because, "all children born after Sept. 11, 2001, will experience a world totally different from all generations that preceded it" (Fishman, 2015). Employing the standard of experiences that are more common to the group as a galvanizing environment, Generation Z has been shaped by recessions, financial crises, war, terror threats, school shootings and the constant glare of social media (Adamy, 2018).

So, while some variations exist regarding the identification of these age groups, there is a general consensus they can be identified as: Baby Boomers, 1946 to 1964; Generation X, 1965 to 1980; Generation Y (Millennials), 1980 to 1996; Generation Z, 1997 to the present. For purposes of this study, and as a means of erring on the side of inclusion, we decided to use those subjects born in 1993 (Statistics Canada) through 2001 (American Marketing Association). The former year is the earliest identified in the literature and the last is the latest. From a practical point of view, the youngest respondents to our survey were born in 1999 with no one born in the years 2000 and 2001.

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It should be noted that the emergence of a new generational cohort, one beyond Generation Z is beginning to be written about (Perano, 2019). According to the social research agency in Australia, McCrindle, so-called Generation Alpha got its start in 2010, at a rate of 2.5 million births per week. They are primarily the children of Generation Y — Millennials born between 1980 and 1996. Alphas are accustomed to and reliant on instant information and communication. They're tech heavy, extremely connected, and the most senior among them is currently about 10 years old. They have not yet come to the forefront as a population group that can be studied in a post-secondary environment. Their impact, which should be considerable, will not start to occur within organizations or in leadership positions for at least 10 years or possibly more.

WORKPLACE RAMIFICATIONS

Generational differences in the workforce make up a significant portion of business research. In his Doctoral dissertation, Withrow (2012) assessed the impact of generational differences on workforce compensation. Fishman (2016), explored strategies for companies to use to address the aging of Millennials, Generation X, and Baby Boomers in the American workforce. Lapoint and Liprie-Spence (2017), focused on these differences in terms of employee engagement.

This interest is distributed across a wide range of business professions (e.g. Hospitality; Po-Ju and Choi, 2008; Nursing - Saber, 2013) especially as each generational group reaches economic adulthood, which typically begins in their mid-20s. Some scholars have argued that transition to economic adulthood is important because attitudes, values, and preferences (for products, brands, workspaces, even types of work) form before and during this time and are likely to remain constant as an individual age. Changes in attitudes, interests, and values from one generation to the next create new challenges and opportunities for business management and leadership.

Stillman and Stillman (2017) for example, assert that business leaders have often complained about Millennials, that they often seem to have one foot out the door, making retention of high-quality employees a major issue. By contrast, according to their national survey, 61% of Generation Z members stated that they would be willing to work at a company for more than 10 years, and of that group over 30% said they would be willing to remain with an organization for more than 20 years (Stillman and Stillman, 2017). Likewise, Chasanov has asserted that Generation Z is primarily interested in "future-proof" jobs; in contrast to the "job-hopping" Millennials. Generation Z members tend to be more concerned with job stability and security (Chasanov, 2018).

Recent business publications emphasize the important conditions necessary to recruiting and retaining the best of Generation Z: adopting a mobile-friendly and social-media savvy corporate culture; having a socially conscious and environmentally friendly organization; a relaxed dress code and work culture ("Is Your Workplace Ready for Gen Z?, 2019; Miller, 2018). One survey of Generation Z college students about their ideal workplaces suggests that they value feeling safe and secure in the workplace; they are very accepting of diversity, seeing it as a given because they are considered the most diverse generation; and they desire a workplace that is "fun" and promotes personal freedom, reflecting a strong preference for work-life balance in their careers ("New Study, Gen Z Gets to Work," 2018; Robinson, 2018). Rather than a "balance", some have argued that Generation Z members prefer a work-life "blend," since their lives are so intertwined with technology and they are more accepting than Millennials of "always

being on the clock" (LaReau, 2017). In addition to concerns about the workplace, this acceptance of "never being off the clock" creates legal issues for business as well (Marcum, 2018).

In addition to what Generation Z members are looking for in terms of employment, how they approach customers, suppliers, stockholders, and other stakeholders will have major consequences for the general public. Several studies suggest that Generation Z is identifying positive aspects of coming-of-age in an era of disruption: questioning the value of a college education, opting instead for alternative career paths; preferring headphones and online chat rooms to the open spaces desired by Millennials; and being accustomed to change, more comfortable thinking independently and acting more entrepreneurially (Steinmetz, 2018; Tysiac, 2017).

As a result, much attention is given to the consequences of each cohort reaching adulthood, maturing in their roles as consumers, and as coworkers. Also, there is tremendous interest in each generation's emergence as managers, entrepreneurs, and business leaders. How members of Generation Z perform in their roles will impact businesses as Gen Z-ers become colleagues, form strategic alliances, and become business decision-makers. Their impact as leaders at all levels in the military and in government will parallel that in business. Therefore, an examination of Gen Z's ethical values and preferences is called for. Especially given their divergent attitudes toward post-secondary education as they journey toward economic adulthood, one significant research interest is in the possibility of higher education as a transformational experience for Generation Z members. This raises a question about the influence of the classroom on their development and offers a potential access point for investigation.

GENDER DIFFERENCES

In addition to generational differences, over the past decades business research has increasingly focused on gender differences in the workforce. Driven by competing forces in fields as diverse as psychology and marketing, some theories have desired to minimize perceived differences while others have sought to substantiate them. These rival positions have been especially relevant to discussions of ethics in business.

In the 1970s and 1980s a research program led by Lawrence Kohlberg sought to uncover the structure of human moral development. Kohlberg's methodology was to present participants, whose ages ranged from preteens to middle age, with brief ethical dilemmas (Kohlberg, 1984). The dilemmas presented situations in "the gray zone," ethical conflicts in which there is no clear-cut right or wrong answer. In fact, Kohlberg was not searching for right answers, but instead focused on the justifications and the levels of moral reasoning used by participants. Influenced by the work on structuralism by Piaget, Kohlberg posited a typology consisting of six levels of moral reasoning: from punishment and obedience (stage I) to universal principles (stage VI). This was not a paradigm of developmental psychology however; persons do not automatically ascend to the highest levels of moral valuation. Rather, similar to Piaget, Kohlberg divided the six stages into three groups (pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional), meaning that most people developed morally to stage III (conformity to social expectations) and stage IV (obedience to social order). Some people, but a minority, develop further into the post-conventional (social contract and universal moral principles) levels of moral reasoning.

Once the typology was in place Kohlberg replicated the study in various parts of the world, including Asia, Europe, and South America, among others. On the basis of the strength of the typology Kohlberg asserted that virtually all human beings develop in similar fashion through these stages. Factors such as ethnicity, nationality, socioeconomic status, even religion might vary, but the typology and the hierarchy of moral reasoning represented by it remained the same. Though not all humans develop to the final stage, at the pinnacle of Kohlberg's typology is the value of justice (said to be inspired by John Rawls' theory of justice as fairness).

Kohlberg's typology of human moral development has made a tremendous impact across all areas of theoretical and practical ethical inquiry. Theoretically, the typology resolves the problem of moral relativism: one point of view is not as "correct" or relevant as any other point of view, but each perspective should be judged according to the level of moral reasoning exhibited by that point of view. Practically, the typology finds application across all areas of professional ethics, especially in business (Ferrell, et al. 2018). Education in business ethics is neither relativistic nor a matter of indoctrination. Rather, it is a matter of recognizing the level at which a student, manager, or business leader brings to the decision-making process, and guiding that person toward higher levels of moral reasoning.

From the perspective of Kohlberg's typology, generational differences might exist but (as they relate to moral values) only at superficial levels, not altering the deep structure of human moral development. Countless journal articles, books, and textbooks refer to Kohlberg's theory, as a way of stating: not all moral arguments are equally valid, and the purpose of a textbook is not to indoctrinate decision-makers into a particular point of view, but to help them recognize and apply higher-level universal moral principles (i.e. justice) to dilemmas that occur in business contexts.

Kohlberg's theory of human moral development has faced numerous criticisms, perhaps none stronger than one given by Carol Gilligan (Gilligan, 1982). As one of Kohlberg's research assistants during the development of his typology, Gilligan became aware that Kohlberg systematically ignored the responses to dilemmas given by female participants. His theory of universal moral development was ultimately based on the responses of males. Subsequently, Gilligan wrote a book entitled, In a Different Voice, in which she argued that some people (primarily females) evaluate ethical dilemmas and make moral judgments based on the principle of care, not justice. For Gilligan, women bring a different perspective to moral conflicts, a perspective not accounted for by Kohlberg's theory – and generally speaking, a perspective ignored in most scientific and normative inquiries. She states,

> At a time when efforts are being made to eradicate discrimination between the sexes in the search for social equality and justice, the differences between the sexes are being rediscovered in the social sciences. This discovery occurs when theories formerly considered to be sexually neutral in their scientific objectivity are found instead to reflect a consistent observational and evaluative bias. Then the presumed neutrality of science, like that of language itself, gives way to the recognition that the categories of knowledge are human constructions (Gilligan, pg. 6, 1982).

By Gilligan's reasoning, Kohlberg did not "discover" the paradigm of human moral development as much as he invented it. This debate between Kohlberg and Gilligan has broad implications for management and business ethics (White, 1992). One aspect is to focus specifically on exploring the perspective of women and their moral and ethical views.

THE NEXT GENERATION OF MANAGERS

Industries and professions are concerned about the impact of the next generation's characteristics and values on their fields of business. Sales and marketing have a huge interest in knowing how to approach a new generation of workers and consumers (Patel, 2017). "Fear of missing out" (FOMO), a trait commonly associated with Generation Z members, may make them particularly adept at persuading potential buyers (Stillman and Stillman, 221). From automotive to agriculture, industries are aware of generational differences and are keen to investigate the consequences for their businesses (LaReau 2017; Johnson 2017). Management and business professions are equally focused on the significance of generational changes for their future employees and customers (Mondres, 2019; McDonald, 2016). Even nonprofits and social entrepreneurship organizations seek to understand and take advantage of traits and beliefs that members of Generation Z bring to the marketplace (Albrecht, et al. 2018).

It is only reasonable to extend the focus on Generation Z members from understanding their roles as employees and consumers to their next logical roles as business administrators and eventually leaders. Given the changes occurring within the American society, as well as elsewhere around the globe, and how their ethical perspectives may differentiate themselves, exploring women's perspectives seems prudent.

Within these contexts, the current research focuses on the following questions:

   (1)   who or what are the major sources and influencers of Generation Z women's ethical values?
         (as a confirmatory or dis-confirmatory reexamination of previously expressed views)

   (2)   how familiar with moral perspectives and ethical perspectives are female members of Generation Z?
         (to gauge respondents' relevant level of knowledge)

   (3)   how do female members of Generation Z assess various actions and events from their moral and ethical perspectives?
         (to identify issues of severity with how respondents view a broad-based number of actions)

THE STUDY

Data collection for the study was conducted at a behavior laboratory established and run by a medium-sized, private university in the Southern region of the United States. Students who signed up for the lab at the beginning of the academic term were assigned between two and three 50-minute sessions over a period of a month. The number of sessions was determined by the number of research projects and surveys approved by the lab's administration as a result of a documented application process. Among the requirements to be approved researchers needed to present evidence of current human subjects' protection training and the study needed to be approved by host and any non-host involved Institutional Review Boards. In return, students earned up to two percentage points extra credit that could be applied to any one course they were enrolled in at the institution for that academic term.

Subjects completed an electronic survey, which asked about: familiarity with different moral perspectives and ethical "theories" (two of which were fictitious and added to the list as a concept check to assess "yea-saying" behavior (Tashchian, White, and Pak, 1988)), the relative

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importance of different social influences on their ethical development, and an assessment of a number of specific "questionable" behaviors.

Respondents

A total of over 250 female students, defined as members of Generation Z using established criteria, drawn from programs and schools across campus, signed up at the beginning of the academic term and responded to the survey (see Table 2).

Birth Year / Age		Number	Percent	College	Number	Percent
				Entertainment & Music		
1993	24	4	1.6%	Business	123	48.6%
1994	23	4	1.6%	Business	108	42.7%
				Liberal Arts & Social		
1995	22	46	18.2%	Sciences	15	5.9%
				Health Sciences and		
1996	21	93	36.8%	Nursing	2	0.8%
1997	20	68	26.9%	Sciences & Mathematics	2	0.8%
1998	19	34	13.4%	Visual & Performing Arts	1	0.4%
1999	18	4	1.6%	Interdisciplinary Studies	1	0.4%
				Theology & Christian		
				Ministry	1	0.4%
Total		253	100.0%			
				Total	253	100%

Class	Number	Percent
Senior	114	45.1%
Junior	90	35.6%
Sophomore	45	17.8%
Freshman	4	1.6%
Total	253	100.0%

Table 2. Respondent Demographics

Although a convenience sample, the profile of the respondents reflects a sufficiently diverse and balanced group across most classification variables to reflect at least minimal generalization to the larger target population of Generation Z women. Respondents are skewed toward the junior/senior levels of the institution's undergraduate population and more concentrated in the schools of business and music business. In terms of age, the majority are near the center of the span of ages associated with Generation Z.

One of the primary reasons for employing an age cohort approach in the study is that each identified cohort tends to be shaped and thus defined through shared experiences, and

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potentially defining moments. Sometimes minor, and oftentimes major, events and disparities in the shared reality can have lasting impacts. To underscore at least some of those differences, Table 3 presents select aspects for each year of Generation Z member's birth that inform the reality that women have faced and the significant changes impacting their world (McBride, Nief, and Westerberg, 2011-2017).

Graduating Class / Significant Cultural Events Related to Women

Class of 2021 / born 1999
   Women have always scaled both sides of Everest and rowed across the Atlantic
 	
Class of 2020 / born 1998
   Outstanding women basketball players have always had their own Hall of Fame in Knoxville, TN
 	
Class of 2019 / born 1997
   The announcement of someone being the "first woman" to hold a position has only impressed their parents
 	
Class of 2018 / born 1996
   Women have always attended the Virginia Military Institute and the Citadel
   Courts have always been overturning bans on same-sex marriages
   Women have always been dribbling, and occasionally dunking, in the WNBA
   Female referees have always officiated NBA games
   One route to pregnancy has always been through frozen eggs
 	
Class of 2017 / born 1995
   Captain Janeway has always taken the USS Voyager where no woman or man has ever gone before
 	
Class of 2016 / born 1994
   For most of their lives, maintaining relations between the U.S. and the rest of the world has been a woman's job in the State Department
   Women have always piloted war planes and space shuttles
 	
Class of 2015 / born 1993
   There have nearly always been at least two women on the Supreme Court, and women have always commanded U.S. Navy ships
   Women have never been too old to have children
   Altar girls have never been a big deal
 	
   (McBride, Nief. And Westerberg, 2011-2017)

Table 3. Select Beloit College Mindset List Items for Generation Z

Many changes in American culture, and for Generation Z women in particular, have highlighted expanded conditions, new employment options, and potential futures. This sampling confirms that the selection of this cohort is ripe for exploration.

RESULTS

Ethics Defined

The first survey task was for respondents to complete the sentence, "ethics is…?" Figure 1 presents a Word Cloud image of the edited responses. It is noted that the editing process removed non-content words such as "the," "and," and "is," which do not add information to the word cloud itself but whose purpose is to facilitate the construction of sentences. What remained was a listing of words that are sized according to their frequency of use (see Figure 1).
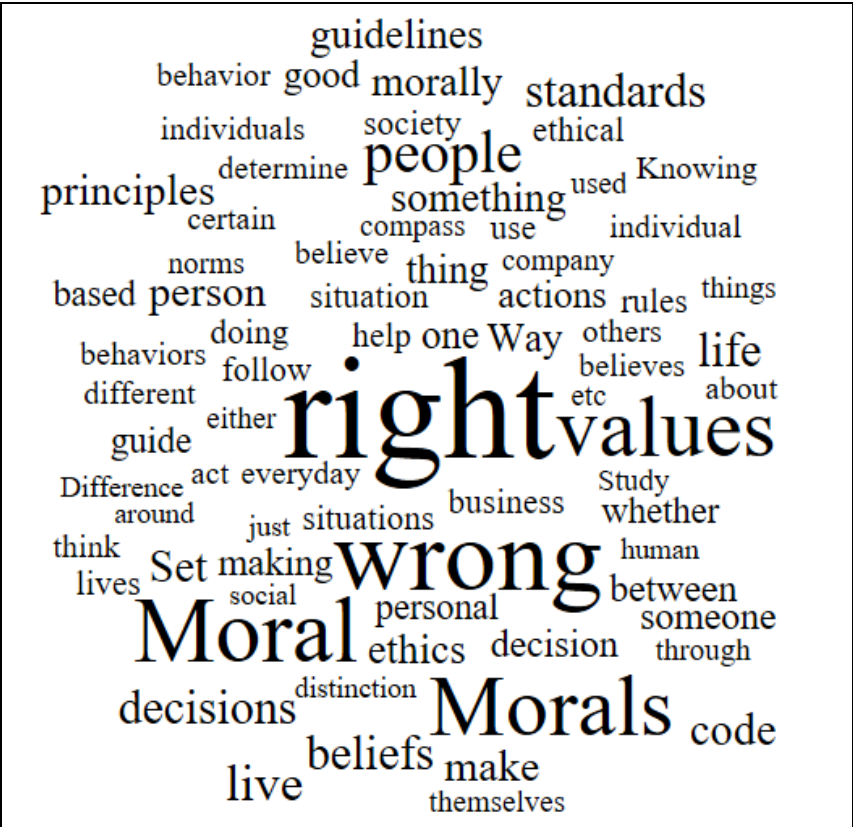

Figure 1. Word Cloud responses to "ethics is…."

Not surprisingly, in Figure 1 the most frequently used words in defining ethics include moral or morals, values, and right and wrong. An examination of the other words such as compass, norms, person-based, and decision highlight the person-centric nature of the evaluation that occurs within the norms of a society and the impact those decisions have on some other larger set of individuals. It leads to a conclusion that an exploration of influences on the individual will be useful to better understand their definitions of ethics and/or how they may apply their ethical definition in the future when they may hold positions of authority.

Influences on ethical and moral development

A list of individuals as well as groups of individuals and classifications of individuals were presented to subjects, each with a five point scale to indicate the degree to which each, if at all, they believed contributed to the person they considered themselves today and their ethical outlook (see Figure 2).

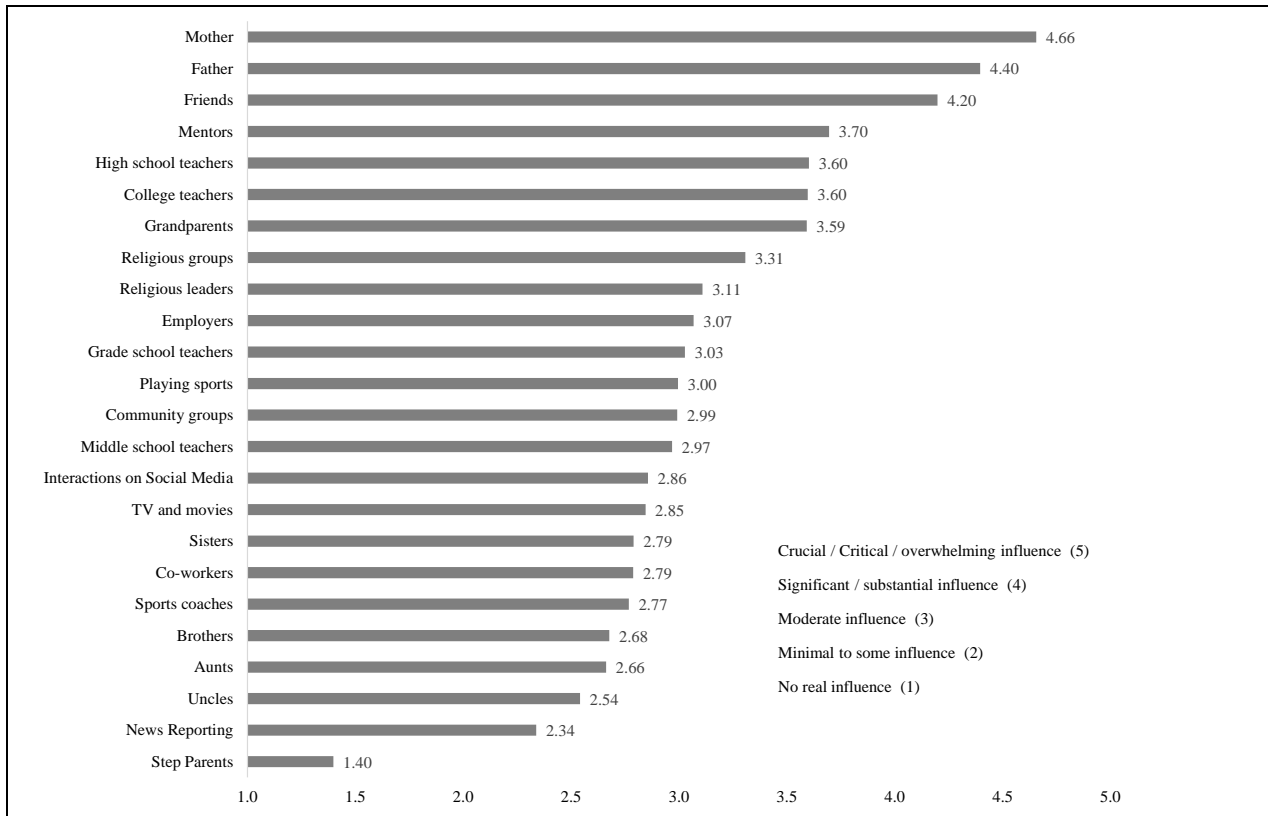| Influence	Assessment

Figure 2. Influences on respondent's ethical development / Assessment of ethical transgressions

In our current environment of significant and quick-moving cultural change it is reassuring, and contrary to fears expressed (Coe, 1995; Krcmar and Vieira, 2005; Eagle, 2007) that parents continue to have the most significant influence on their children's ethical development – even more than friends, or the media. Respondents reported that teachers, at the primary, secondary, and post-secondary levels, all have had a positive impact on their ethical development – greater than siblings but not as great as parents.

Interestingly, news reporting and entertainment media, long touted as having a significant (and negative) impact on children have apparently not had as significant an effect on their ethical development). Most likely though, our results are due to the positive, insulating effect of the other influences respondents rated higher. Lastly, social media was reported as a medium-level influence. Given the point in time under which the survey was administered, social media's impact on people's behavior (largely pegged as beginning with the introduction of the iPhone in 2007) and this cohort's own exposure and experiences with social media, future surveys may show a shift in importance in this factor's impact.

Depth of knowledge of moral and ethical perspectives
In addition to the influences various people and groups may have had on Generation Z women, another goal of the current study was to determine the extent to which this generational cohort of women have been exposed to, and/or have retained knowledge of various moral perspectives and ethical principles through education. Based on an examination of selected textbooks (e.g., Peter and Donnelly, 2018; Kerin, and Hartley, 2017) a listing of ethical perspectives was

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amassed. This list was supplemented with several additional theories as a result of discussions with other researchers (See Figure 3).

Ethical Concept	Simplified Interpretation

The Golden Rule: Treat others as you want to be treated
Professional Ethic: Action viewed as ethical by colleagues in your field
Utilitarianism Principle: Greatest good for the greatest number of people
Cost / Benefit Analysis: Gain / loss comparison and tradeoff
Situational Ethic: The context of the act helps determine whether it is ethical
Materiality: Significance in amount or degree makes a difference
Moral Idealism: Certain individual rights or duties are universal
Tell your Parents Test: Comfortable explaining to your parents?
Kant's Categorical Imperative: Universal law or behavior.
Machiavellianism: It is ethical if you can get away with it
Nelson Decision Rule: Non-existent ethical "Theory"
Narcissism: No regard for others
TV Test: Comfortable explaining to a TV audience?
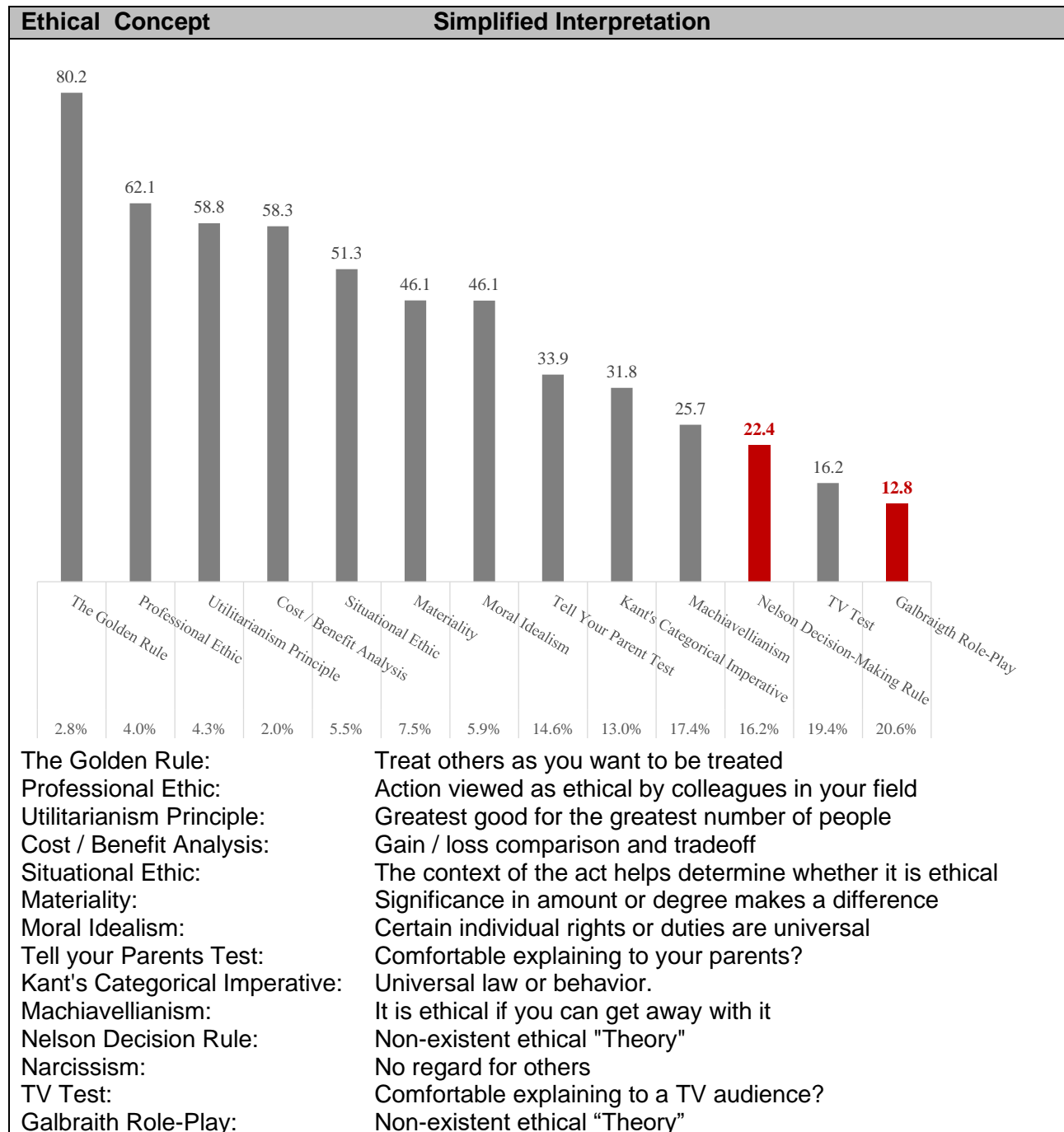Galbraith Role-Play: Non-existent ethical "Theory"

Figure 3. Knowledge of ethical concepts

Subjects were asked to assess their degree of familiarity with each of the 14 ethical constructs by positioning a slider for each that ranged from zero (no knowledge or familiarity) to 100 (which represents a great deal of knowledge or familiarity). The percent of respondents answering

zero is presented below the graph along with the average knowledge for those respondents who indicated some degree of familiarity on the 100 point scale.

Of the 14 theories and constructs, two non-existent ethical "theories" were also included: the Galbraith Role-Play and Nelson Decision Rule. Respondents admitted having no knowledge of either construct, indicating a minimum of yea-saying behavior or problems with social desirability responses more than for any of the other constructs which the exception of the TV test. For the remaining respondents, those who indicated some degree of familiarity, the relatively low averages among these individuals lends credence to the interpretation that the generic terms "role-play" and "decision rule" were significant enough to elicit some response, even though the personalization aspect must have been unfamiliar.

For the other twelve moral perspectives and ethical principles respondents reported varying levels of familiarity. The one most familiar to all respondents was "The Golden Rule" (i.e. treat others as you want to be treated) by a significant margin. A Professional Ethic, Utilitarianism, and Cost/Benefit were viewed as a cluster of three of the next most familiar. It is likely that formal coverage of the other concepts is minimal to non-existent in courses taken by respondents. Additionally, exposure to these constructs in everyday life or conversation is also unlikely, especially compared to such a widely known construct as the Golden Rule.

For the next portion of the survey, subjects were presented with the following instruction:

> "You are sitting in a public area when two people whom you do not know sit down at the table next to you. You happen to overhear the conversation they are having with each other. One person tells the other that they have engaged in the behavior listed below. For each behavior, please rate how unethical (if at all) you believe each behavior you overhear is."

Respondents are given the opportunity to classify each behavior as: severely unethical (5), moderately unethical (4), somewhat unethical (3), involves a very minor ethical issue (2), or isn't unethical at all (1). Tables 7-10 reflect the averages for respondents, employing midpoints between adjacent labels as boundaries. Hence, 4.50 to 5.00 averages are associated with behaviors respondents consider severely unethical, 3.50 to 4.49 averages are associated with moderately unethical behaviors, etc. (See Figure 4).
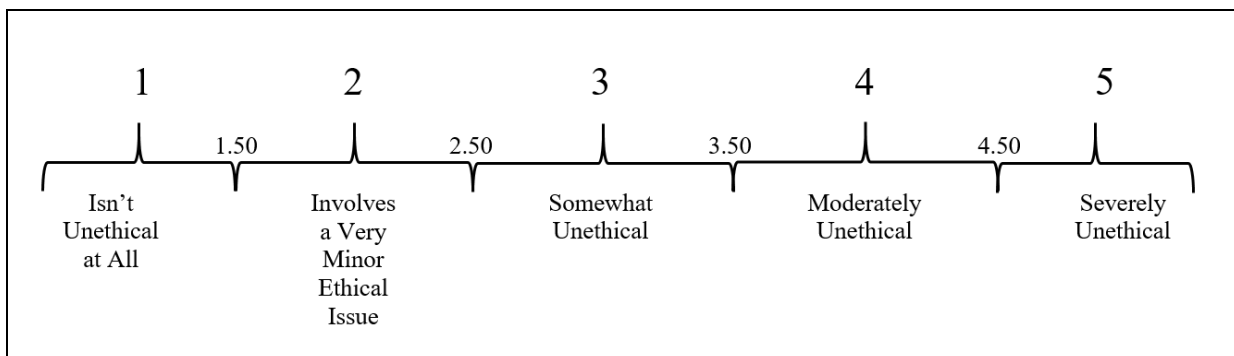

Figure 4. Classifying Respondent Assessments

It should be noted that none of the average ratings were below the 1.50 threshold to be classified by respondents as behaviors that the behavior wasn't unethical at all.

Table 4 presents the two behaviors Generation Z women found to be severely unethical. The first, so-called "revenge porn" is sadly a practice and topic that has grown in notoriety as the smartphone and social media have grown in popularity.

Rating	Behavior
4.58	They posted nude or compromising images of an ex online (also called "revenge porn")
4.55	They drive while "under the influence" (pot or alcohol) frequently

Table 4. Severely Unethical Behaviors: Ratings 4.50 and above

Rating	Behavior
4.49	They bullied, harassed, or shamed someone online
4.40	They drive while "under the influence" (pot or alcohol) once in a while
4.33	They took a medication from someone's medicine cabinet when they weren't around
4.32	They left a restaurant after eating without paying (also known as "dine & dash")
4.29	They shoplifted an item from a store worth more than $20
4.19	They posted online embarrassing photos of others taken in a gym or locker room without their knowledge
4.14	They declared more charitable donations on their taxes than they actually gave
4.00	They hit or scratched someone's car and didn't leave a note
3.98	They posted online embarrassing photos of others taken in public without their knowledge
3.97	They shoplifted an item from a store worth more than $5 but less than $20
3.95	They purchased a service animal vest online to use so they could get preferential treatment when they don't really need it
3.95	They took something from someone's closet when they weren't around
3.94	They pretended to be injured or needing additional help so they could board an airplane early
3.90	They reported someone to a manager for bad service when they didn't receive bad service
3.88	They gave an interviewer false information in a job interview
3.87	They purchased an illegal drug harder than weed
3.79	They text and drive frequently
3.77	They took office supplies home from work worth more than $20
3.75	They cheated on a test or other assignment
3.73	They parked in a handicapped parking space they weren't entitled to use
3.71	They reported losing money in a vending machine when they hadn't to get money or a free product
3.70	They sponsored someone for a charity event and didn't follow through with the donation
3.70	They padded their resume with information or achievements that aren't accurate
3.67	They purposely opened a letter/package addressed to someone else that was delivered to them in error
3.66	They wrote a negative Yelp review for bad service when they didn't receive bad service
3.64	They shoplifted an item from a store worth less than $5
3.57	They used thin round metal discs or "slugs" in a vending or washing machine

Table 5 Moderately Unethical Behaviors: Ratings 3.50 – 4.49

The only other behavior rated as severally unethical refers to an ongoing practice of driving while impaired – specifically marijuana or alcohol. Interestingly, compared to the same behavior exhibited with less frequency (reported in Table 5) respondents still consider it unethical, but categorize it as moderately unethical. That distinction apparently did not apply to the same degree with another driving distraction, namely driving frequently while texting. In the case of texting, frequently engaging in the behavior rated a moderately unethical label while doing it once in a while was rated as somewhat unethical. This distinction, absent situational ethics concerns like texting about seeing an accident or other emergency would support an

interpretation that some behaviors only are significantly more unethical if they are more frequent.

Other behaviors in Table 5 under the moderately unethical label run the gambit (see Table 5). One unusual assessment was that shoplifting an item worth under $20 was more unethical than stealing something from employer for worth over $20. Perhaps being acquainted with the individual or organization they work for, along with any grievances that are part of the relationship, allows for making the differentiating assessment.

Table 6, listing those behaviors categorized as somewhat unethical, might be collectively classified as behaviors that involve a larger degree of a situational ethics, without the more severely assessed outcomes that are more commonly associated with the behaviors rated as severely or moderately unethical.

Rating	Behavior
3.41	They sneaked into a movie without paying
3.41	They ate food in a grocery while shopping and didn't pay for it (free samples don't count)
3.33	They gave an interviewer exaggerated information in a job interview
3.33	They told someone they were an organ donor when they weren't
3.30	They used a fake ID card
3.23	They rocked a vending machine to get a product they didn't pay for
3.19	They donated blood when they weren't feeling well
3.13	They text and drive once in a while
3.13	They took office supplies home from work worth more than $5 but less than $20
3.07	They took something from a hotel minibar and didn't pay for it
3.04	They loaded a copy of a software program they didn't pay for on their computer
3.03	They sent nude or intimate photos of themselves to others (also called "sexting")
2.96	They purchased weed/marijuana
2.91	They resold a concert ticket for more than face value (also known as "scalping")
2.85	They told people they donated blood when they didn't
2.82	They took snapchat photos of themselves while driving
2.79	They looked in someone's medicine cabinet when they weren't around
2.70	They took plastic baggies to an all you can eat buffet to take home extra food
2.66	They took office supplies home from work worth less than $5
2.65	They called in sick to work when they weren't
2.58	They saw someone else cheat on a test or assignment and did not report it
2.55	They took a towel from a hotel

Table 6. Somewhat Unethical Behaviors: Ratings 2.50 – 3.49

Issues the respondents identified as involving very minor ethical issues (see Table 7) mostly constitute behaviors that would by most be considered non-material, at least from a monetary perspective. The one potential exception is looking in someone's closets when they weren't

around. This is an intrusion into someone's expected privacy. Respondents drew a distinction to looking in someone's medicine cabinet which they classified as a somewhat unethical behavior.

Rating	Behavior
2.49	They used Canadian money in a U.S. vending or washing machine
2.40	They looked in someone's closets when they weren't around
2.32	They don't recycle
2.21	They took a magazine from the waiting area of a doctor's office, dentist's office, or haircutting salon
2.05	They ripped an article out of a magazine from the waiting area of a doctor's office, dentist's office, or haircutting salon
1.83	They tried to use a coupon after it had expired

Table 7. The behavior involves a very minor ethical issue: Ratings 1.50 – 2.49

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Indications are that while female members of Generation Z do possess, to differing degrees, knowledge about different moral perspectives and ethical principles, they are more willing to engage in socially responsible behavior (e.g. recycling efforts on campus, community service projects, and volunteerism) than members of previous generations.

Concerns often expressed in the media that this generational cohort has been negatively affected by violent video games, movies, and music; sexually explicit messages; behaviors of athletes, influencers, actresses and other celebrities appear to be unfounded. In reality, as with previous generations, parents continue to represent the most prominent influence on their children's world-view of what constitutes ethical behavior. How this will play out as they take their places at the table of leadership and control of institutions has yet to be determined.

An article by Johnson (1985), asserts that professional codes of ethics should be created with four types of obligations in mind: (1) obligations to society; (2) obligations to the employer; (3) obligations to customers; and (4) obligations to colleagues. If Johnson's (1985) general approach is adopted as a goal or template of organizations, these women are poised to become more circumspect in their decision-making and potentially more ethical leaders.

It will take years for the female members of Generation Z to come into their own as full and controlling members of business organizations, government, and other facets of society. Only then will we begin to see the evidence of how they handle issues and difficulties. Will their performance more mirror environmental activist Greta Thunburg, former Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes, or somewhere in between? Potentially we will find that with power and authority Generation Z women will fall prey to the same forces and temptations that men have for compromising and breaking ethical constraints.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The genesis for this paper was the seemingly growing number, and impact, of ethical transgressions populating the news landscape in recent years. Seizing on these observations an exploratory study was conceived. Because of factors including the professional location of the authors as well as budgetary and data collection constraints, the study would be an exploratory one – despite the limitations that accompany exploratory studies.

Generation Z women throughout the United States are significant in number. Their enrollment (and study participation) at a medium-sized, private university in the South was sufficient to allow for externally valid conclusions to be drawn.   Additionally, the collection of behaviors, both business and non-business related were amassed using an informal process of author self-generation plus questioning of available colleagues. The goal was not to derive an empirically based set of behaviors but rather a generous number of behaviors that ideally would span the range from ethical to severally unethical. In retrospect, the results appear to show that it is the case.

That being said, the limitations of the sample and collection methodology limits the degree of external validity that follow-up investigations will provide. Future studies in this area will take a more tailored approach, grounded in the results we have learned here. We encourage the reader to consider what was found and hope that it can spark interesting and needed discussions in the classroom with their students.

The current authors are contemplating a more formal, longitudinal study. Patterned on the groundbreaking British documentaries, The Up Series by director Michael Apted where 7-year-old children were interviewed every seven years through their early 60s concerning a range of issues. The potential ethical equivalent would follow select Generation Z women and interview their every year concerning their careers paths, views on issues related to ethics and development, and then report the research periodically as a longitudinal study.

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