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## **A comparison of the moral development of advertising and journalism students**

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A COMPARISON OF THE MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF ADVERTISING AND JOURNALISM  
STUDENTS

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
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in

The Manship School of Mass Communication

by  
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## Abstract

This study employed the Defining Issues Test (DIT) to complete the analysis and comparison of the moral development of mass communication students, specifically those who major in advertising and journalism. The DIT is an instrument based on Kohlberg's moral development theory and is a device for assessing the extent to which a person has developed his or her moral schemas. Results indicate no statistically significant difference in levels of moral development between sampled students majoring in journalism and advertising; no difference in levels of moral development between students who have and have not completed a course in media ethics; and no difference in moral development between students who have or do not have professional media experience. This finding argues that despite the large differences found in the moral development of journalism and advertising professionals, the students sampled are similarly morally developed. The findings also argue that if the goal of mass communication programs is to increase the moral development of students, the programs could benefit from reassessing media ethics education and media internship opportunities.

## Introduction

The public has a right to know, but the public also has a right to doubt. The public's trust in the American media has diminished significantly in the past three decades. Gallup Polls conducted in the 1970s found 72% of Americans said they had a great deal or fair amount of trust in the news media. Today, those trust levels are significantly lower – the most recent Gallup poll conducted in 2007 found that only 47% of Americans said they had a great deal or fair amount of trust in the news media.

The diminishing of public trust could possibly be the result of recent unethical decisions of those in the media. For example, Armstrong Williams was paid by the Bush Administration to promote the No Child Left Behind Act (Toppo, 2005). He was paid \$240,000 to mention the law in his column frequently and to encourage other black journalists to do the same. When *USA Today* broke the story about the deal in January 2005, Williams said that his critics might think his decision was unethical, but he said “I wanted to do it because it's something I believe in.”

Dan Rather had a similar ethical dilemma in 2004 when *60 Minutes Wednesday* aired a story on Bush's National Guard Duty. The program presented forged “Killian Documents” as fact questioning Bush's duty in the Texas Air National Guard. When it was uncovered by bloggers that the documents were forged, the producer Mary Mapes was fired and Rather resigned from *60 Minutes* (Donaldson-Evans, 2005).

Jayson Blair, a former *New York Times* reporter, was forced to resign in 2003 after being caught plagiarizing and making up elements of his articles including articles about injured soldiers and the 2003 Beltway Sniper Attacks (Nwazota, 2004).

Consumer advertising by pharmaceutical companies has been criticized since 2004 when Merck's heavily advertised drug Vioxx was found – in a clinical trial – to increase the risk of heart attacks and strokes. Merck had to pull the advertisements for Vioxx and the pharmaceutical

industry adopted voluntary guidelines asking companies to delay advertising of new products for an unspecified amount of time after the drugs first reach the market. Despite criticism and attempts by government and other industries to curb pharmaceutical drug advertising, spending on consumer drug advertising increased to approximately \$4.8 billion – more than 300 percent from 1997 to 2007 (Saul, 2008).

These dilemmas and many more have brought media ethics to the forefront. Higher education has responded to this by making ethics a priority in mass communication curricula. Mass media ethics courses have tripled in number since 1977 (Lee & Padgett, 2000).

These critiques have also prompted researchers to consider moral development of professionals. Moral development is an explanation of how people develop an understanding of right and wrong and how people think about ethical problems. Previous ethics studies on media professionals found a difference in the level of ethical reasoning between journalism and advertising professionals. While professional journalists scored lower than only three other professions on a test of moral development (Coleman & Wilkins, 2004), advertising professionals had moral development scores similar to high school students (Cunningham, 2005).

This study examines the moral development of journalism and advertising students in mass communication programs using the Defining Issues Test developed by James Rest. By determining the moral development of journalism and advertising students in mass communication programs, we can see if there is a similar disconnect in ethical reasoning between students at the college-level.

Conducting a study of moral development with journalism and advertising students may help illuminate a possible reason for the differences in ethical reasoning between the two professions. If journalism and advertising students have similar levels of moral development, it

may suggest that the profession of advertising can have an adverse effect on ethical reasoning. Conversely, if a disconnect in moral development exists between journalism and advertising students at the college-level, perhaps the professions attract certain types of people with predisposed ethical reasoning levels.

Both outcomes can be beneficial to helping mass communication educators and the professions of journalism and advertising achieve higher ethical standards. If advertising students are predisposed to lower levels of ethical reasoning, a change in advertising curricula to include more advertising-specific ethics training may be necessary. Alternatively, if advertising has an adverse effect on professionals, agencies may need to better train employees on ethical decision making and adhere to higher ethical standards as a profession.

In addition to comparing the moral development of advertising and journalism students, this research will also attempt to determine whether other differences exist in the moral development of students in mass communication programs. The moral development of students who have taken a course in media ethics will be compared with students who have not had a course in media ethics. Previous research suggests that semester-long courses in ethics that focus on dilemma discussion significantly affect the moral development of the students participating (Rest, 1986). While this study will not be able to pre-test and post-test students' moral development in an experimental setting, hopefully the results can help determine whether the students who have taken a course in media ethics use higher levels of ethical thinking than those who have yet to take the course in media ethics.

Also, the moral development of students with professional media experience – whether with a campus newspaper or at an off campus company – will be compared with students who have no professional experience. Some say that the best place for mass communication students to develop their moral reasoning is in a professional setting like a newsroom (Hanson, 2002) and

this comparison will help determine whether this is true for the sample studied. If students who have professional media experience have significantly higher levels of moral development, mass communication programs may want to consider making a semester-long internship in a professional media setting a requirement for graduation. On the other hand, if there is no difference, mass communication programs may want to consider reforming these internships so that students are able to develop morally and have experience using ethical reasoning to solve problems on their jobs.

Ultimately, to improve the image of the ethics and credibility of media professionals we need to understand the moral development of media professionals and students and work to solve the problems found. Professionals will be interested in the results of this study because mass communication students will be their future colleagues and employees. The moral development of students has the possibility of affecting the credibility of the profession as a whole once they begin their careers in media. Media professionals need to know whether they can have confidence in recent graduates or if ethics workshops are needed to help them with ethical training.

Society deserves ethical media that it can trust and turn to for credible and truthful information. Students in mass communication need to be able to contribute to creating a more ethical and credible media. To help alleviate the problems of media credibility it is essential for mass communication programs to understand the moral development of their students and offer them an effective ethical education.



## Literature Review

Ethics is a system of moral values. Understanding how individuals acquire their system of values is one of the main goals of the study of ethics. The question on many psychologists' minds in the twentieth century was how do individuals come to understand morality and how do they acquire virtues. When the term development was applied to morality, the understanding of ethical growth became clearer. Moral development is essentially an explanation of how people develop an understanding of right and wrong.

### MORAL DEVELOPMENT

Lawrence Kohlberg set out to create a systematic stage framework for the concept of what he believed was the first virtue of a person - justice. Justice is interpreted in a democratic way as equity or equal respect for all people (Kohlberg, 1981). Kohlberg's definition of moral stages begins with three levels; pre-conventional, conventional, and post-conventional. Each of the levels is then broken down into two groups, totaling six stages of moral development.

At the first level, pre-conventional, a child is aware of cultural rules and understands the difference between right and wrong and good and bad. The child is only aware of these rules and norms in terms of consequences of actions, whether punishment or reward. At the second level, conventional, the individual sees that maintaining rules and norms is valuable in its own right and not just in terms of consequences. The individual conforms to social order and is loyal to it. At the third and highest level, post-conventional, there is an effort to define moral values and principles apart from authority and an individual's identification with social groups.

In the pre-conventional level there are two stages. The first stage is called punishment and obedience orientation. Individuals in this stage obey rules simply to avoid punishment and their action is motivated by this avoidance. The second stage is instrumental relativist orientation. Individuals in stage two will conform to norms and rules to obtain rewards and

favors from others. Action in this stage is motivated by a desire for reward or benefit (Kohlberg, 1981).

In the conventional level there are also two stages. Stage three is the interpersonal concordance orientation. Individuals in this stage operate under a “good boy, nice girl” orientation and believe that good behavior is that which will please or help others and will gain other’s approval. Individuals in this stage conform to rules and norms to avoid disapproval and dislike by others. Action in this stage is motivated by anticipation of disapproval of others. Stage four is society maintaining orientation. Individuals in this stage show respect for authority and consider right behavior as doing one’s duty. Individuals conform to rules and norms to avoid censure by legitimate authorities and their action is motivated by an anticipation of institutionalized dishonor (Kohlberg, 1981)..

The post-conventional level consists of two stages. These two stages are the highest forms of moral development. Stage five is the social contract orientation. Individuals in this stage critically examine the standards and laws of a society and believe that right is a matter of personal values and opinions. Individuals in this stage believe that the law has the possibility to be changed after rational considerations. Individuals in stage five conform to rules and norms to maintain the respect of the impartial spectator judging in terms of community welfare. Action is motivated by a concern about one’s own self-respect and avoiding judging one’s own actions as irrational or inconsistent. Stage six is the universal ethical principle orientation. Individuals in this stage believe that right is defined by abstract and ethical principles that they have chosen themselves. The individual’s action is motivated by a concern to avoid self condemnation for violating one’s own principles. Kohlberg believed that all movement of moral development is in a sequence and does not skip steps (Kohlberg, 1981).

## DISCUSSION OF ORIGINS

This concept of moral development was evident in the work of classical philosophers like Aristotle. Aristotle believed that the virtues of character did not arise in people by nature but come from habituation. Virtues, he said, are acquired by first exercising them. Since we acquire virtues by habituation and by exercising them, Aristotle believed that it is very important how we are habituated from our early days and makes all the difference in our development (Aristotle, 2000). This concept of virtuous people was carried forward practically unchanged until the twentieth century when psychologists began to document how the human mind grows and changes, basically how the mind develops (Coleman & Wilkins, 2004).

One of the early psychologists to study development was Jean Piaget. In an early study, Piaget observed young children playing the game of marbles. Piaget wanted to discover how the children learned the rules of the game as they got older and how they taught each other and played with each other. From his observations of children he specified four stages that the children went through (Piaget, 1932). This was one of the first stage concepts of development and Piaget's work strongly influenced the work of later psychologists like Kohlberg.

Erik Erikson outlined eight "ages of man" that consist of successive crises that humans go through to develop psychosocially. Erikson thought that these crises were critical because individuals went through turning points or moments of decision between each stage which ultimately led to their progress or regression (Erikson, 1963).

Although Kohlberg's stages of moral development were very influential in the study of ethics in the twentieth century, other scholars have found flaws and limitations of his theory. A critic of Kohlberg's theory is one of his own graduate students, Carol Gilligan. Gilligan noticed through her work with Kohlberg and her studies of development that the main experiments and observations that these theories were based on, used mostly male participants (Gilligan, 1982).

Piaget used male children for his famous game of marbles study, Erikson talks mainly about the male child's development and Kohlberg's interviews usually resulted in few women being able to reach the highest stages of development.

Gilligan's research found that the stages of development that a woman goes through have more to do with conceptions of care rather than conceptions of justice (Goree, 2000). Gilligan recognized three stages of care that women go through; caring solely for one's self, caring solely for others, a balanced understanding of one's needs and duties (Gilligan, 1982).

#### DEFINING ISSUES TEST

Kohlberg used in-depth interviews to determine the moral development of participants he was studying. James Rest wanted to create an easier and more efficient way to gauge moral development. He developed a quantitative instrument to better study Kohlberg's stages. The Defining Issues Test (DIT) is a paper and pencil test that measures a "P score" which stands for "principled morality" and corresponds with the post-conventional level of Kohlberg's stages (Rest, 1986). The P score measures the percentage of time that people use universal principles. For example a P score of 40 means that the highest stage is used 40 percent of the time and lower stages are used 60 percent of the time (Coleman, 2004). The instrument has been extensively studied for reliability and validity (Rest, 1979).

Rest also has a different idea of how people move through the stages. Kohlberg believed that people developed in a forward sequence, never skipping stages. Rest found a few discrepancies in this simple stage model including subject fluctuations. He believed that the notion of step by step development was severely challenged by research in cognitive development (Rest, 1979). Rest believed that the question of moral development should not be what stage a participant was in, but rather to what extent and under what conditions does a person exhibit the various types of organizations of thinking (Rest, 1979).

Rest and his colleagues reconceptualized Kohlberg's hard and fast stages using schema theory. Schemas are expectations about the ways events unfold and are developed by previous interactions. They believe that people are primarily in one stage but can use ethical reasoning from lower or higher stages as well. (Rest, Narvaez, Bebeau, & Thoma, 1999). An easy way to visualize this theory is that moral development is not a staircase with steps, but more like a shifting distribution (Coleman & Wilkins, 2004).

The DIT and its variants have been administered to many samples and used in more than 400 studies to determine the moral development of participants (Rest, Narvaez, Thoma & Bebeau, 1999). Specifically the DIT has been used to test the moral development of media professionals and student samples. This study will help determine the moral development of students majoring in journalism and advertising.

The DIT poses six ethical dilemmas and then after each dilemma gives respondents 12 statements to consider and asks respondents to rate them on the importance it would have on their decision. Each of the 12 statements is based on a stage in Kohlberg's theory of moral development, like Kohlberg's stage 4 of "law and order." Respondents are then asked to rate the statements as to which are the four most important.

The P index measures "principled morality" by determining the percentage a respondent uses Stages 5 or 6 in their moral reasoning. To calculate the P index, one sums the number of times a respondent chooses Stage 5 and 6 items as the first, second, third or fourth important considerations. The P index is considered a reflection of moral development.

The DIT also includes consistency checks by including one meaningless but complex-sounding statement for each dilemma. The participants are made aware and forewarned that there will be pretentious-sounding but meaningless statements in the questionnaire. This is included in the DIT because it serves as a check for participants that select them for the apparent complexity

rather than their meaning (Rest, 1979). If a participant receives too high of an M score, then their questionnaire is regarded as invalid and is discarded.

The DIT allows researchers to come up with two of their own ethical dilemmas and include them when they administer the DIT. Coleman and Wilkins (2004) used this option in their study of the moral development of journalists and Cunningham (2005) created advertising-specific dilemmas for her study on advertising professionals.

#### DEFINING ISSUES TEST AND BEHAVIOR

One of the main questions about the DIT is if the P score of moral reasoning predicts or relates to behavior – because ethics courses would be futile if they increase moral development but do not affect behavior. Studying behavior and moral development is difficult and limited because predicting real-life behavior has long been a concern of research. The conclusion thus far is that there is a consistent, statistically significant link of moral development with behavior, but it is a weak link (Rest & Narvaez, 1994, p.223).

The most spectacular finding linking moral development to behavior is a study on ethical development of nursing students reported by Duckett and Ryden (1994). The researchers found a relationship between moral reasoning and clinical performance showing that the DIT was a strong predictor of clinical performance (Duckett & Ryden, 1994). Other researchers also found links between moral development and behavior – reporting links with athletes' behavior (Bredemeier & Shields, 1994), links with the behavior of medical doctors (Self & Baldwin, 1994), behavior of accountants (Ponemon & Gabhart, 1994), and a report on dentists who get in trouble with the ethics board (Bebeau, 1994). Given that statistics have shown that there is a link between behavior and the P score of moral reasoning on the DIT, the results from using this instrument for my research will show not only the moral development of students, but also can shed light on the behaviors the students exhibit.

## DIT AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN THE PROFESSIONS

People in professions usually have at least average self-discipline, social skills, and impulse control – just by their years of schooling and supervised work (Rest & Narvaez, 1994). The moral issues professionals deal with daily involve deciding between conflicting values, both of which could represent some good. Colleges and universities in the country teach ethics courses aimed at preparing professionals to determine the right course of action and attending college also promotes development in moral judgment (Rest 1988). The DIT helps researchers understand the moral development of professionals and many professions have been studied including nursing, accounting, medicine, teaching, journalism, public relations and advertising. (See **Table 1**)

**TABLE 1: Mean P Scores for Various Professionals**

<i>Group Tested</i>	<i>Mean P Score on the DIT</i>
Seminarians/Philosophers	65.1
Medical Students	50.2
Practicing Physicians	49.2
<b>Journalists (n=249)</b>	<b>48.68</b>
Dental Students	47.6
Nurses	46.3
Lawyers	46
Graduate Students	44.9
Undergraduate Students	43.2
Pharmacy Students	42.8
Veterinary Students	42.2
Adults in general	40
<b>Journalism Students</b>	<b>35.9</b>
<b>Advertising Students</b>	<b>32.6</b>
Accounting Auditors	32.5
<b>Advertising Professionals (n=65)</b>	<b>31.64</b>
High School Students	31
Prison Inmates	23.7
Junior High Students	20

Source: Wilkins & Coleman, 2005

## MEDIA ETHICS

Ethical issues arise in many professions and as Table 1 exhibits, the levels of moral development vary greatly in different professions. Ethical decision making in the mass communication professions is especially important since the products of these media professions potentially reach a mass audience. Ethical codes for journalists and editors were developed in the 1920s and in the 1920s and 1930s *Journalism Quarterly* published articles about media ethics. For the next four decades very few articles were published about media ethics (Anderson, 1987). In the 1970s interest in media ethics increased. John C. Merrill and Ralph C. Barney (1975) noted that the Watergate affair could have been a turning point in calling attention to journalism ethics and caused students to question the ethical foundations of journalism.

Interest in the study of ethics of media professionals grew in 1985 with the inaugural issue of the *Journal of Mass Media Ethics*. Specified in the introduction of that issue, the goal of the journal was to bridge the gap of media professionals and academics who are concerned with the ethical performance of the mass media.

Voakes (1997, p.23) found that the public's perceptions of journalistic ethics was starkly different from journalism professionals. Journalists in the study perceived internal factors such as laws and organizational policies as the most significant in their ethical decision making. Meanwhile the public saw external factors such as competition from other media outlets and journalistic norms as the most significant influence on journalistic ethics.

The profession of advertising serves an entirely different function than the profession of journalism. Journalism seeks to inform while advertising seeks to increase market growth by persuading consumers to buy products (Cunningham, 2005). Because of these disparate societal functions, the ethical issues faced by advertising and journalism professionals are different and should be treated separately.



Understanding ethical issues of advertising has a long history. As early as the 1930s, scholars contributed chapters to a book entitled *Ethical Problems in Modern Advertising*. A professor of economics at Northwestern University, Vanderveer Custis, said in the introduction of the book that an adequate consideration of what is ethical in advertising would fill a large book (1931). Fifty years later there was more advertising ethics research which included in-depth interviews with executives of associations with advertising self regulation codes (Labarbera, 1980), surveys of advertising executives (Hunt & Chonko, 1987), corporate and agency practitioners (Krugman & Ferrell, 1981), and employees of advertising agencies (Rotzoll & Christians, 1980).

Labarbera (1980) determined that no advertising self regulation code could serve as a model for other codes and she laid out suggestions for more effective codes. Hunt and Chonko (1987) found that although self-regulation codes only focus on the content of advertising, their survey respondents reported that their major ethical concerns dealt with relationships with clients, suppliers, media, and other agencies, or the nature of the products being advertised. The researchers urged the major industry associations to consider broadening the scope of their ethical codes.

Krugman and Ferrell (1981) discovered that advertising practitioners perceived their peers to hold lower ethical decision making than themselves, which might discourage practitioners from improving their ethical standards if they already believe they are better than their peers. They also found that corporate clients believed their advertising practitioner counterparts had lower ethical standards, but that agencies did not perceive a difference between themselves and their corporate counterparts. If advertising students similarly believe their peers hold lower ethical decision making, they too may also be discouraged from improving their ethical standards.

Rotzoll and Christians (1980) found that advertising agency personnel tend to follow a standard of immediate consequence concerning themselves with only the direct effect of behavior – called act utilitarianism, the most good and least evil. The researchers suggested that practitioners and ethicists should work together to formulate rules that could inject normative consideration into practitioners' decision making and escape the problem of group think – where group situations make maintaining an individual viewpoint difficult. The study of advertising ethics today tends to be marginalized and treated as a special topic with few solutions or models for professionals to better reason through ethical problems (Cunningham, 2005).

#### DIT AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT IN MEDIA PROFESSIONALS

Because ethical issues of media workers can potentially affect mass audiences, understanding their levels of moral development is one step in creating a more moral media. In order to determine the moral development of media professionals, several researchers recently administered the DIT to public relations practitioners, journalism professionals and advertising professionals.

Lieber (2003) studied public relations professionals using the DIT and the TARES test. The mean P score of the 116 professionals in his study was 45.41. He found that levels of moral development in public relations differ based on job segment – professionals in the agency/corporate setting had lower P scores than government and academic public relations professionals.

Until recently, no studies had administered the DIT to professional journalists. Wilkins and Coleman (2005) administered the DIT to a sample of 249 professional journalists and the mean P score of the sample was 48.68. The journalists in the sample scored lower than only three other groups of professionals: seminarians/philosophers, medical students, and practicing physicians. Overall the researchers discovered that journalists are capable of high-level ethical

thinking despite the public's negative perception of media workers (Wilkins & Coleman, 2005). The researchers note that the three groups of professionals that ranked higher than journalists all require more formal education than the bachelor's degree of most journalists. Since formal education affects the moral development on the DIT, these results and the demographics of this study suggest that journalists are slowly becoming better educated (Coleman & Wilkins, 2004).

Following the journalism professionals study, Anne Cunningham (2005) conducted a similar study on the moral development of advertising professionals using the DIT.

Cunningham's study on advertising professionals found very different results. Her snowball sample of 65 advertising professionals found a mean P score of 31.64, which put them only a few tenths of a point above high school students. Another alarming result was that the advertising professionals scored even lower when asked to deliberate on advertising-specific ethical dilemmas. Cunningham (2005) believes that these findings suggest that advertising practitioners are capable of reasoning at a higher stage of moral development, but when they do so in a professional setting they suspend their moral judgment and focus primarily on financial implications.

Cunningham (2005) also found that the more years of experience an advertising professional had, the lower the score of moral development was on the DIT – suggesting that a career in advertising negatively affects moral development. Because of this finding, it is reasonable to expect that advertising students and journalism students will have similar scores on the DIT.

This study will try to answer the question of why media professionals exhibit such different levels of moral development and try to pinpoint where the differences begin. Studying the moral development of advertising and journalism students can contribute to finding solutions

for advertising and journalism professionals by better training and preparing students for their professions in higher education mass communication programs.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND ETHICS

Through past research using the DIT as a measure of moral development, it has been determined that college promotes development in moral judgment. Studies have been conducted to find what aspects of college promote this development. James Rest (1988) evaluated many studies using the DIT on college students and discovered that the evidence suggests that college itself is not necessarily the cause of moral judgment development, but that those who go to college increase their development because college students tend to be more academically oriented and experience continued intellectual stimulation. King & Mayhew (2002) conducted a meta-analysis on 172 articles that used the DIT to investigate the moral development of undergraduate college students. They conclude that participation in higher education makes a substantial contribution to development in moral development that cannot be attributed to age alone.

A meta-analysis conducted by Rest (1986, p. 83) found that medium-duration (4-12 weeks) and longer-duration (13-28 weeks) treatments were more effective in producing significant changes in moral development than short duration treatments (0-3 weeks).

One unique intervention study tested the effect of adding a service-learning component to an ethics course. The experimental group was required to complete 20 hours of community service work in addition to completing an ethics course, while the control group was only required to complete the ethics course (Boss, 1994). At the end of the semester the experimental group had a mean P score gain of 8.61 between the DIT pre-test and the DIT post-test, while the control group only had a 1.74 mean gain. Boss (1994) also discovered that community service work without discussion of relevant moral dilemmas is ineffective.

Overall, Rest (1986, p. 85) concluded that moral education programs emphasizing dilemma discussion and personality development produce modest but definite effects. If ethics education contributes to higher moral development in students, the students in this study who have taken a media ethics course should score higher than students who have not taken that course.

## MEDIA ETHICS EDUCATION

Apparently the field of mass communication is capable of having high level ethical thinkers, but some professionals suspend that ethical judgment in certain situations. It needs to be determined if students in mass communication are capable of this level of ethical thinking and if they choose to use it when applying it to decisions on media specific dilemmas. Ruminiski and Hanks (1995) said news managers demand that newly hired employees possess better critical thinking skills. If mass communication education has answered that demand, undergraduate students should have an understanding of ethical obligations and possess moral reasoning skills and there should not be a difference in the moral development of journalism and advertising students.

Interest in the state of ethics education in mass communication programs began in 1977 when a survey of the heads of mass communication programs found that only 68 media ethics courses were offered in the 237 schools that responded to their survey (Lambeth, Christians, Fleming, & Lee, 2004). The same survey has been administered three other times in 1984, 1992, and most recently in 2002. In the 1992 survey, the number of media ethics courses had tripled since the landmark 1977 survey (Lambeth, Christians, & Cole, 1994). The most recent survey determined that 152 of 247 schools offered a separate media ethics course (Lambeth et al., 2004). These results show that media ethics education has grown in the past 30 years and is a standard in many mass communication programs. Therefore many graduates of mass communication

programs will be exposed to ethics education regardless of their advertising or journalism concentration and should have similar levels of moral development.

The surveys also looked at instructional goals identified by teachers of media ethics courses. Teachers in the 1992 and 2002 surveys identified “fostering moral reasoning skills” as the most highly ranked objective (Lambeth et al., 2004). A similar survey asked college students about their perceptions of media ethics instruction and what they believed the instructional goals should be for an ethics course. Only 26% of the students agreed that “fostering moral reasoning skills” should be a main objective in media ethics courses (Braun, 1999). The students in the survey rated “preparing students for professional work” as the most highly ranked objective. Overall, Braun (1999) found that students would respond well to a stand-alone media ethics course that used a variety of educational methods. By asking students in this study if they completed a media ethics course, the moral development scores can show us whether completing an ethics course helps improve their P score.

#### EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDIA ETHICS EDUCATION

Studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of a media ethics course using the Rokeach Value where respondents rank values to determine a value system. Surlin (1987) found that media ethics education in his study increased the ranking of “equality” and reduced the gap between “freedom” and “equality.” The greater the gap between these two values is an indicator of individuals who would exhibit unethical professional behavior, because it represents desiring freedom for oneself more than freedom for others as expressed by the term “equality” (Surlin, 1987). Researchers tried to replicate the results of this study and the results rejected Surlin’s two hypotheses (Black, Rawlins, Viall, & Plumley, 1992). The discrepancies between the two studies could be attributed to a lack of a control group in the Black et al. study and a different pedagogical emphasis between the two studies (Lee & Padgett, 2000).

Lee and Padgett (2000) conducted a study using the Rokeach value to determine the effectiveness of a short-term ethics component in a course. The results of their study suggest that a short-term mass media ethics component was ineffective in developing values considered essential for ethical behavior. The researchers suggest that a full-semester ethics course is desirable. These findings coincide with similar research on the effectiveness of ethics intervention programs measuring the effect with the DIT. Therefore, students in this study who have completed a media ethics course should have a higher P score on the DIT.

Studies found that advertising and public relations textbooks fail to provide student readers with any discussion of ethical theory (Bivins, 1989, Plumley & Ferragina, 1990). If students do not learn the framework of ethical theory for decision making, they will have no concrete guidelines for ethical decisions (Plumley & Ferragina, 1990). Educators need to strengthen the ethical reasoning of future practitioners with at least a brief overview of moral philosophy (Bivins, 1989). The future ethical reputation of the media profession rests upon the shoulders of students preparing for careers in the field and the educators preparing the students (Plumley & Ferragina, 1990). This study will allow educators to see if students are receiving the necessary ethical reasoning skills and if mass communication higher education needs to change or improve ethics education.

In a content analysis of media ethics textbooks, Whitehouse and McPherson (2002) found that most of the case studies in the textbooks are from the point of view of a high-level media employee like a manager or management team. New hires need independent analytic skills and should be taught how to communicate difference of opinion from a position of low power (Whitehouse & McPherson, 2002). This study will help determine whether students are morally developed enough to be able to do these things in the media workplace.

Hanson (2002) found in his survey that both students and media professionals think the best laboratory to learn about journalism ethics is the workplace. Students are less enthusiastic than the professionals about the classroom as a vehicle for teaching ethics. Students in this study will be asked if they have any professional experience, the moral development scores of those students with experience will allow us to see if students and media professionals are correct in their assumptions that the workplace is the best laboratory for learning ethics. Because professional experience while in school allows students to apply their knowledge and exposes them to real life ethical situations, students who have professional experience should have a higher P score on the DIT.

#### MEDIA ETHICS EDUCATION'S IMPACT ON THE FUTURE

In the 2004 Lambeth et al. study, it was discovered that more than 88% of media ethics teachers said researchers need to explore the nature and extent of the impact media ethics teaching has on students, specifically when they begin working in newsrooms. Although this study will not determine the impact of ethics training once a student begins a media career, it will help media ethics instructors see whether or not their courses impact the development of students' moral judgment. Also, if there is a difference in moral development between journalism and advertising students changes may need to be made in the mass communication curricula.

A survey of 206 advertising professionals found that the youngest and least experienced professionals tended to be "bottom-line" oriented on decision making about advertising content and policy instead of being influenced by ethical considerations (Davis, 1994). The author suggests that liberal/fine arts and journalism education needs to make curricular changes that emphasize ethics instruction. This study will determine whether advertising students today are



morally developed enough to be influenced more by ethical considerations than the bottom line in decision making about their jobs.

A survey of advertising professors revealed that almost 75% of the instructors used pre-conventional or conventional levels of ethical reasoning as identified by Kohlberg's codebook of the six stages of development (Tucker & Stout, 1999). The authors note that this frequent reliance on the lower levels of development may result in a style of teaching that emphasizes breadth over depth. If students are not taught the complex ethical principles, they will most likely not be able to apply them to their professional experiences. Tucker and Stout (1999) suggest that this predicts that only a minority of advertising students will be equipped enough to resolve ethical dilemmas with sophisticated ethical reasoning. The researchers concluded, "Additional research and dialogue about ethics pedagogy are needed before we can expect advertising students and future professionals to speak a congruent and cogent ethical language." The results of this study can shed light on whether this prediction of low levels of moral development of advertising students is accurate and the research will add to the dialogue of ethics pedagogy.

## HYPOTHESES

Based on the review of literature, I propose the following three hypotheses. The first hypothesis is that there will be a significant difference between advertising and journalism students' moral development scores on the DIT. The second hypothesis is students who have completed a media ethics course will have higher scores of moral development. The third hypothesis is students who have professional experience will have higher scores of moral development.

## Methods

The dependent variable in the study is moral development and it is studied using the Defining Issues Test. The test generates a P score from the amount of times a participant uses principled moral reasoning, or a Stage 5 or 6 issue statement in their ethical reasoning.

For the study I used an online-version of the DIT in order to distribute the test easily to undergraduate students at Louisiana State University and other universities. The survey was set up using SurveyMonkey, a survey software program, which allows researchers to easily create and distribute online surveys. The online version of the DIT has two advertising-specific dilemmas and four of the original DIT dilemmas, one of which is journalism-specific. See Appendix A for the advertising-specific dilemmas and corresponding issues statements.

After completing the questionnaire, participants completed a short demographic survey to gather information about participants including their age, gender, race, major, classification, and university they attend. The participants were also asked whether or not they have completed a media ethics course and if they had any professional experience in advertising or journalism. See Appendix B for the demographic survey used in this study.

I surveyed mainly upper-level students, so the effect of years in college will not play a huge factor in the differences of moral development in the students. Previous research using the DIT has found that students' moral development increases significantly during their four years in college (Rest, 1988).

As mentioned above, I administered the DIT to undergraduate journalism and advertising students from several universities. I administered the DIT to students at Louisiana State University during the first few months of the Fall 2007 semester (August-October). Instructors from upper-level advertising and journalism courses at Louisiana State University either gave me permission to administer the instrument during class time or to speak with their students about

the survey and encourage them to participate outside of their class. The advertising courses surveyed enroll approximately 120 students and the journalism courses enroll approximately 120 students.

In order to administer the DIT to universities other than Louisiana State University, I utilized contacts within our faculty with other mass communication programs in the nation to administer the DIT elsewhere. I also contacted mass communication-related student groups from multiple universities utilizing the social networking site, Facebook.com. I wanted to collect data from students at several universities to include students from other areas of the nation and to hopefully have more than just one college represented in the sample. I planned to administer the test to approximately 100 Louisiana State University students and 20 students from other universities. At the end of the data collection period I downloaded the results of 117 surveys. I had to throw out 37 incomplete surveys leaving 80 completed surveys for data analysis. Samples of 100 or fewer are the norm in studies that use the DIT to test moral development (Wilkins & Coleman, 2005).

The use of a convenience sample is common in studies using the DIT since it adheres to three necessary conditions justifying its usage (Riffe, Lacy, & Fico, 1998 as cited in Lieber, 2003). First, the material – moral development – is difficult to obtain, second the online survey and limited resources make generating a truly random sample difficult, and third, the topic of moral development in advertising remains under-researched – it is only the second study utilizing the DIT on advertising participants.

The data from the online version was sent to a database in a spreadsheet format for analysis. The first step of analysis was to conduct the consistency checks built in to the DIT and throw out any invalid or inconsistent data.

After the data purging, I calculated the P scores for each participant. The P scores were analyzed according to the information from the demographic survey. I compared the P scores of advertising and journalism students using one-way ANOVA and utilizing the computer program SPSS. I also compared P scores based on the completion of media ethics course and based on professional media experience using one-way ANOVA. I also compared P scores based on other responses to the demographic survey to see if there were any interesting results.

## Results

Before the analysis, the M score for each questionnaire was calculated and if a participant scored a three or higher their questionnaire was thrown out. No questionnaires were thrown out of the sample.

The sample (n=80) was 70% female and 30% male. The mean age was 20.8. The students participating were mostly upperclassmen with 53% seniors and 28% juniors – the rest of the students were either sophomores or freshmen. Minorities made up 9% of the sample. The majority of respondents attend Louisiana State University (96%) while students from Texas A&M University, University of Florida and University of Wisconsin also participated.

The respondents majoring in advertising made up 54% of the sample and students in journalism made up 31%. Students in the sample also majored in public relations (8%) and other majors (6%). The majority of students majoring in advertising were upperclassmen (95%) and the majority of journalism students were also upperclassmen (54%). (See table 1).

**Table 2: Year in School by Major**

Major	Year in School						Total
	Senior	Junior	Sophomore	Freshman	Graduate	No response	
Journalism	5 (6.25%)	8 (10%)	10 (12.5%)	1 (1.25%)	0	1 (1.25%)	25 (31.25%)
Advertising	31 (38.75%)	10 (12.5%)	2 (2.5%)	0	0	0	43 (53.75%)
Public Relations	4 (5%)	2 (2.5%)	0	0	1 (1.25%)	0	7 (8.75%)
Other	2 (2.5%)	2 (2.5%)	1 (1.25%)	0	0	0	5 (6.25%)
Total	42 (52.5%)	22 (27.5%)	13 (16.25%)	1 (1.25%)	1 (1.25%)	1 (1.25%)	80 (100%)

Since the focus of this study was determining the differences between advertising and journalism students, the analysis comparing the two groups focused solely on students majoring

in either advertising or journalism. The majority of students majoring in advertising had either completed or was currently enrolled in a media ethics course. The majority of journalism students, 80%, had not taken a media ethics course. The majority of journalism majors (76%) and advertising majors (56%) reported having professional media experience. See tables 2 and 3 for a break down of the characteristics by major.

**Table 3: Media Ethics Course Completion by Major**

		Media Ethics Course			Total
		Completed	Enrolled	Not Taken	
Major	Journalism	3 (3.75%)	2 (2.5%)	20 (25%)	25 (31.25%)
	Advertising	16 (20%)	10 (12.5)	17 (21.25%)	43 (53.75%)
	Public Relations	2 (2.5%)	1 (1.25%)	4 (5%)	7 (8.75%)
	other	0	1 (1.25%)	4 (5%)	5 (6.25%)
Total		21 (26.25%)	14 (17.5%)	45 (56.25%)	80 (100%)

**Table 4: Professional Media Experience by Major**

		Professional Media Experience		Total
		Has Experience	No Experience	
Major	Journalism	19 (23.75%)	6 (7.5%)	25 (31.25%)
	Advertising	24 (30%)	19 (23.75%)	43 (53.75%)
	Public Relations	5 (6.25%)	2 (2.5%)	7 (8.75%)
	Other	4 (5%)	1 (1.25%)	5 (6.25%)
Total		52 (65%)	28 (35%)	80 (100%)

A P score was calculated for each questionnaire counting the amount of times that Stage 5 or 6 moral reasoning was chosen as one of the four most important issues statements in decision making. The P score is the percentage of time the respondent used Stage 5 or 6 principled moral reasoning. The mean P score for the entire sample was 33.8. The mean P score for the advertising majors was 32.6 and the mean P score for journalism students was 35.9 (see Table 4).

**Table 5: Mean P Scores by Major**

Majors:	Sample Size	Mean	Std. Deviation
Journalism	n=25	35.9	15.1
Advertising	n=43	32.6	14.3
Public Relations	n=7	32.9	14.4
Other	n=5	26	15.9
Total	n=80	33.2	14.6

**H1:** The difference between advertising and journalism students' moral development scores on the DIT will be significant.

In order to test the first hypothesis, a one way ANOVA was run to determine whether the difference between P scores of advertising students and journalism students was significant. No significant difference between means was found,  $F_{(1, 66)} = .811$ ,  $p < .05$ . (see Table 5). Therefore the first hypothesis was not supported.

**Table 6: P Score Comparison between Advertising and Journalism Students**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	173.049	1	173.049	.811	.371
Within Groups	14080.382	66	213.339		
Total	14253.431	67			

**H2:** Students who have completed a media ethics course will have higher scores of moral development.

In order to test the second hypothesis, the mean scores for students who have completed a media ethics course and students who have not yet taken a media ethics course were calculated. This analysis included the entire sample, not just advertising and journalism students. The group of students who completed a media ethics course had a mean score of 35.00, while students who

had not yet taken a media ethics course had a mean score of 32.96. No significant difference between means was found,  $F_{(2, 77)} = .278, p < .05$ .

**Table 7: P Score Comparison between Media Ethics Course Completion**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	120.597	2	60.299	.278	.758
Within Groups	16672.597	77	216.527		
Total	16793.194	79			

**H3:** Students who have professional experience will have higher scores of moral development.

In order to test the third hypothesis, the mean scores for students who have professional media experience and students who have not had experience were calculated. This analysis included the entire sample, not just advertising and journalism students. The students who have professional media experience had a mean score of 33.56 and the student who do not have professional media experience had a mean score of 32.56. No significant difference between means was found,  $F_{(1, 78)} = .084, p < .05$ .

**Table 8: P Score Comparison between Professional Media Experience**

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	18.133	1	18.133	.084	.772
Within Groups	16775.061	78	215.065		
Total	16793.194	79			

The students in the sample scored the highest on the dilemma about an escaped prisoner with a mean score of 5.43, while the students scored the lowest on an advertising-related dilemma, the mean score for the Webster dilemma was 2.15. The third and fourth lowest scoring dilemmas were media related, with a mean score of 3.09 on the dilemma about a student



newspaper and a mean score of 3.11 on the dilemma about advertising alcohol. To see the mean score for each dilemma by major, refer to table 8.

**Table 9: Mean Score for Each Dilemma by Major**

		N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Heinz Dilemma	Journalism	25	2.88	2.22
	Advertising	43	3.02	2.64
	Public Relations	7	2.14	1.68
	Other	5	2.00	2.12
	Total	80	2.84	2.40
Prisoner Dilemma	Journalism	25	6.20	2.25
	Advertising	43	5.00	2.24
	Public Relations	7	5.71	1.98
	Other	4	4.75	3.40
	Total	79	5.43	2.31
Student Newspaper Dilemma	Journalism	25	3.44	2.60
	Advertising	43	2.77	2.54
	Public Relations	7	3.29	2.93
	Other	5	3.80	2.86
	Total	80	3.09	2.59
Doctor Dilemma	Journalism	25	3.76	2.24
	Advertising	43	3.44	2.49
	Public Relations	7	2.71	2.06
	Other	5	1.80	1.64
	Total	80	3.38	2.35
Webster Dilemma	Journalism	25	2.28	2.59
	Advertising	43	2.00	1.91
	Public Relations	7	2.57	2.82
	Other	5	2.20	1.79
	Total	80	2.15	2.19
Alcohol Advertising Dilemma	Journalism	25	2.96	2.81
	Advertising	43	3.30	2.61
	Public Relations	7	3.29	2.21
	Other	5	2.00	1.87
	Total	80	3.11	2.59

When comparing the mean scores of each individual dilemma between journalism and advertising students, the only dilemma which had a significant difference was the escaped

prisoner dilemma. The journalism students score significantly higher than the advertising students on this dilemma,  $F_{(1, 66)} = 4.526$ ,  $p < .05$ .

**Table 10: Mean Score for Each Dilemma Comparison between Journalism and Advertising Students**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Heinz Dilemma	Between Groups	.324	1	.324	.052	.820
	Within Groups	411.617	66	6.237		
	Total	411.941	67			
Escaped Prisoner Dilemma	Between Groups	22.765	1	22.765	4.526	.037
	Within Groups	332.000	66	5.030		
	Total	354.765	67			
Student Newspaper Dilemma	Between Groups	7.151	1	7.151	1.088	.301
	Within Groups	433.834	66	6.573		
	Total	440.985	67			
Doctor Dilemma	Between Groups	1.600	1	1.600	.277	.600
	Within Groups	381.165	66	5.775		
	Total	382.765	67			
Webster Dilemma	Between Groups	1.239	1	1.239	.260	.612
	Within Groups	315.040	66	4.773		
	Total	316.279	67			
Alcohol Advertising Dilemma	Between Groups	1.853	1	1.853	.257	.614
	Within Groups	476.030	66	7.213		
	Total	477.882	67			

No significant differences were found when comparing the P scores of males and females. When comparing the mean scores on individual dilemmas, females scored significantly higher than the males on the student newspaper dilemma,  $F_{(1, 78)} = 6.483$ ,  $p < .05$ .

**Table 11: Mean Score for Each Dilemma Comparison by Gender**

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Heinz Dilemma	Between Groups	7.334	1	7.334	1.278	.262
	Within Groups	447.554	78	5.738		
	Total	454.888	79			
Escaped Prisoner Dilemma	Between Groups	.106	1	.106	.020	.889
	Within Groups	415.261	77	5.393		
	Total	415.367	78			
Student Newspaper Dilemma	Between Groups	40.548	1	40.548	6.483	.013
	Within Groups	487.839	78	6.254		
	Total	528.388	79			
Doctor Dilemma	Between Groups	.952	1	.952	.170	.681
	Within Groups	435.798	78	5.587		
	Total	436.750	79			
Webster Dilemma	Between Groups	.688	1	.688	.142	.707
	Within Groups	377.512	78	4.840		
	Total	378.200	79			
Alcohol Advertising Dilemma	Between Groups	6.815	1	6.815	1.020	.316
	Within Groups	521.173	78	6.682		
	Total	527.988	79			
P Score	Between Groups	267.202	1	267.202	1.261	.265
	Within Groups	16525.992	78	211.872		
	Total	16793.194	79			

## Discussion and Conclusion

Statistically, there was no difference in moral development between journalism and advertising students. Thus the outcome of this research was the discovery of a null hypothesis between the two groups of students. Conversely, studies of moral development on advertising and journalism professionals showed significant differences in moral development between groups. The findings of this study could suggest that as advertising professionals advance in their careers, their profession has an adverse effect on moral development, while the journalism profession has a positive effect on moral development. Students entering these professions begin with similar levels of moral development, according to the findings.

Journalism professionals in the 2005 study by Coleman and Wilkins had a P score of 48.68. The journalism students in this study had a mean P score of 35.9. Cunningham (2005) found a mean P score of 31.64 for advertising professionals in her study. The advertising students in this study had a P score of 32.6. While the difference between journalism students and professionals is very large – almost a 13 point difference, the advertising students in this study actually scored a point higher than advertising professionals. When comparing these two studies to this study it appears that journalism students will continue to develop as they enter their profession and throughout their career, but advertising students' moral development either stays the same as it is in college, or actually decreases throughout their career.

Rest (1986) noted that formal education itself was not the cause for development in moral reasoning, but rather the people who develop their moral judgment are those who love to learn, enjoy intellectually stimulating environments, see themselves in the larger social context of history and institutions and receive encouragement to continue their education and are rewarded for their accomplishments. It can be argued that the profession of journalism and the daily work in a newsroom is similar to a formal education environment. Journalists have to continually

research the subjects of their news stories and they are constantly being stimulated by the multitude of people they come in contact with in the course of writing articles. Also, the idea of being a part of a larger social context may be more relevant to journalists since the products they develop – news articles – are distributed and consumed by mass audiences. On the other hand, the profession of advertising is more business-oriented, creating products that will give their clients a large financial return. While the products of advertisers also have the potential to reach mass audiences, the goal of the product is to convince consumers to purchase a product or service – not to stimulate or make aware of issues.

Cunningham (2005) found that the advertising professionals in her study scored even lower when asked to deliberate on advertising-specific ethical dilemmas and she believes that these findings suggest that advertising professionals suspend their moral judgment in professional settings and focus primarily on financial implications. Similar to Cunningham's findings, the students in this study scored the lowest on an advertising-related dilemma and the scores for the other two media-related dilemmas were third and fourth out of six dilemmas.

These results coincide with Cunningham's findings that people in the field of mass communication are capable of higher levels of ethical reasoning, but some suspend that ethical judgment when deliberating on media-related dilemmas.

It should be noted that there were demographic differences between the journalism students and advertising students in the sample. While both groups had a majority of upperclassmen, the journalism students had 42% sophomores in the group and the advertising students only had 5% sophomores. The only freshman in the sample was a journalism student. The majority of advertising students had either completed or was currently enrolled in a media ethics course (60%) while only 20% of journalism students had completed or were enrolled in the course. Since there were no differences in P scores between the total sample of students in

regards to the media ethics course, the differences between these two groups should have had a minimal impact on the total P scores. Also, while it has been found that a college education does promote moral development, Rest (1988) discovered that the evidence suggests that college itself is not necessarily the cause of moral development, but that those who go to college increase their development because college students tend to be more academically oriented and experience continued intellectual stimulation. So the fact that more advertising students were seniors and juniors should not have too much of an effect on the P scores either.

The moral development of students who have completed a media ethics course was not significantly different than those who had not taken a media ethics course. This finding suggests that completing a course in media ethics has little or no effect on the moral development of the students. One possible explanation for this could be that the media ethics courses, though growing in number in universities across the U.S. (Lambeth et al., 2004) still need to be improved to produce significant results in moral development. Rest (1986, p. 85) concluded that moral education programs emphasizing dilemma discussion and personality development produce modest but definite effects so perhaps mass communication programs should reevaluate these courses and make sure that both of these items are the main focus of the course.

Finally, the moral development of students with professional media experience was not significantly different than those who had no experience. Hanson (2002) found in his survey that both students and media professionals think the best laboratory to learn about journalism ethics is the workplace but according to these findings, professional experience in the workplace did not effect the moral development of students. Possible explanations for this could be that most professional experience while in college is through internships where students may not be in a position to make ethical decisions but instead do clerical tasks with occasional media-related projects. Other media experience could be with university media outlets like the campus

newspaper where all colleagues are also undergraduate students and therefore the students have no mentors or experienced professionals working with them in that setting.

Typically, college students score between 35 to 46 on the DIT, with freshmen having a P score of 35.7 and seniors having a P score of 46.4 (McNeel, 1994). Rest (1994) found that high school students in their senior year usually score in the 30s and undergrads average in the 40s. While the mean P score in this study is a bit lower than the averages, the range is still similar to other studies of undergraduate college samples. Cartwright and Simpson (1990) found undergraduate student teachers had an average P score of 36 and Ponemon's (1993) sample of undergraduate accounting students had an average P score between 38.6. Ultimately, since the moral development of the students in the sample was on par with other undergraduate samples, these findings suggest that mass communication students are just as equipped as other students to make principled moral decisions in their future professions. Improving the moral development of students is always a positive goal, so tweaking media ethics courses or creating better internship situations will be beneficial to both students and professionals.

When comparing individual dilemma scores, a few statistically significant differences were found between groups. Journalism students scored significantly higher on the dilemma about the escaped prisoner than advertising students. In this dilemma a man sentenced to 10 years in prison escaped after one year and worked hard to start his own business. A neighbor recognizes the escaped prisoner eight years later and has to decide whether he should report him to the police. Both journalism and advertising students scored high on this dilemma, but journalism students' scores were significantly higher. One possible explanation is that this dilemma is comparable to a journalistic situation – especially in the context of divulging the identity of anonymous sources or determining whether to run a story or to protect someone's

privacy. While it's a stretch to say that students in journalism have dealt first hand with situations like these, it is likely that these topics have been discussed in classes and in textbooks.

The females in this sample scored significantly higher than the males on the student newspaper dilemma. In this particular dilemma, a student in high school began publishing a newspaper with the approval of the school principal, but once students start gathering and protesting some of the topics in the articles, the principal ordered the student to stop publishing the newspaper. It is interesting that the only significant difference between males and females is one where the females scored higher than males. Gilligan (1982) noted that the stage concepts of moral development – especially Kohlberg's – resulted in few women being able to reach the highest stages. She argued that women develop differently than men by going through a development based on care rather than justice. Overall, no significant difference was found between the P scores of males and females, despite this being an oft debated aspect – among DIT researchers – as a significant variable in predicting moral development. Rest (1983) asserts that gender plays no role in explaining differences in P scores, but other studies have found this relationship to be true with women scoring higher in moral development (Thoma, 1986).

The image of media professionals today is one surrounded by controversy due to scandals and criticism of unethical behavior by journalists and advertising professionals exercising bad judgment. This image needs to be improved so that consumers of the media can trust and turn to credible and truthful information. Students in mass communication programs today will soon become the professionals that will either enhance or degrade the image of the media profession as a whole.

Previous studies found large discrepancies between the moral development of journalism professionals and advertising professionals, and this study attempted to uncover whether the source of the disconnect began in college. The sample in this study had no significant differences



in moral development of advertising and journalism students – suggesting that these students think about ethical problems similarly. Therefore, the students in this sample will most likely enter the workplace with similar levels of moral development. Whether or not the advertising students will find that their profession has an adverse effect on their ethical thinking is yet to be determined. More research needs to be done to test this by doing longitudinal studies on advertising professionals' moral development.

For the sake of this study, and for mass communication educators, this sample shows that students in either major – journalism or advertising – can both benefit from media ethics education. Unfortunately, this sample showed no significant difference between the students who had media ethics training and those who did not. In order to see whether media ethics courses in the mass communication curriculum are effective in developing students ethical thinking, experimental studies need to be done pre-testing and post-testing students during a one semester ethics course.

Research using the DIT to test the effectiveness of ethics training has been done in the past and could be used as a guide for future studies. These studies showed that medium duration (4-12 weeks) and longer-duration (13-28 weeks) ethics training was more effective in producing significant changes in moral development than short duration, less than 3 weeks (Rest 1986, p. 83). It was also found in one study that students who were required to complete community service alongside an ethics course had significant gains in their P score on the DIT (Boss, 1994).

Future research could test a semester long course in media ethics and require an experimental group to complete community service alongside the ethics course to see if there are significant gains in moral development. The results of these future studies could help mass communication programs across the country to create more effective media ethics training for

their students. As mentioned previously, mass communication programs need to focus on the quality of media ethics training rather than the quantity.

This study helps shed light on the moral development of students in mass communication programs – specifically those majoring in journalism and advertising. Despite the limitations of the study, advertising and journalism professionals can learn that the students they hire who graduated from mass communication programs appear to be on the same level of moral development with each other and with other undergraduate populations. Even though media ethics education could possibly be improved, these students' ethical thinking is on par with their peers.

#### LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Despite this research's ability to build new ground in the quantitative study of moral development of students in mass communication, there were some limitations. The study utilized the Defining Issues Test in an online survey format, while this was cost-effective and convenient, the students had to – on their own time – go online and complete the survey. The researcher visited many mass communication classes at Louisiana State University to ask students to complete the survey, but finding students from other universities proved more difficult. Emails were sent to instructors of advertising and journalism classes of universities across the nation utilizing contacts from within the Manship School of Mass Communication. Emails and messages using the social networking site, Facebook, was the only other communication the researcher had with respondents from other universities, which could be why there was such a small response from these students.

The sample was a convenience sample versus a probability sample and mainly consisted of students at Louisiana State University, therefore these results cannot be generalized to the population of mass communication students as a whole since it is not 100% representative of the

population. Also, since it was a self-reported study, there is no perfect way to gauge the concepts being analyzed and does not guarantee that a participant's response on ethical dilemmas is how they would behave in a real world setting.

Professionals hiring graduates demand that the newly hired employees possess better critical thinking skills (Ruminski and Hanks 1995) and the students in this sample show that they are capable of using higher levels of moral development to think about ethical dilemmas. While the question of whether the advertising profession causes professionals to regress in their moral development remains partially unanswered, today's advertising professionals can rest assure that their future colleagues from this sample are not less morally developed than their peers in the mass communication program. Hopefully these students will continue to develop morally and possess the skills to use higher levels of ethical thinking in their future profession.

By developing students who are able to use high levels of ethical reasoning, mass communication programs will help provide the professions of journalism and advertising with ethical workers. Ethical professionals who not only abide by the laws that govern their work, but also abide by post conventional ethics, will contribute to creating a more credible and honest media and allow the consumers of the media to be more confident in the truthfulness of the information they receive.

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## Appendix A: Modified Dilemmas

Cheryl Webster is an account manager in a small advertising agency. One of her largest clients, a local car dealership, plans to run a series of commercials. The client approved storyboards and the ads went to production. In casting actors to play salesmen for the dealership, the best available actor, Jon Li, was Chinese. While Webster herself didn't have anything against Asians, she was afraid that her client would dislike the ad. Webster has heard her client make racial jokes. Webster worried that she might lose the account. When Li asked Webster if he could have the job, Webster said she had already hired somebody else. Webster really had not hired anybody, because she could not find anybody who was a good actor besides Li. What should Webster have done?

Should have hired Li

Can't Decide

Should not have hired Li.

1. Does the account manager have the right to make his own business decisions?
2. Whether there is a law that forbids racial discrimination in hiring for jobs.
3. Whether Webster is prejudiced against Asians herself or whether she means nothing personal in refusing the job.
4. Whether hiring the actor or paying attention to her client's wishes would be best for her agency's business.
5. What individual differences ought to be relevant in deciding how society's roles are filled.
6. Whether the greedy and competitive capitalistic system ought to be completely abandoned.
7. Do a majority of people in Webster's society feel like his client or are a majority against prejudice?
8. Whether hiring capable men like Li would benefit society by reducing stereotypes.
9. Would refusing the job to Li be consistent with Webster's own moral beliefs?
10. Could Webster be so hard-hearted to refuse the job, knowing how much it means to Li?
11. Whether the Christian commandment to love your fellow man applies here.
12. If someone's in need, shouldn't he be helped regardless of what you get back from him?



Chris Stevens is the owner of a small advertising agency. Until now, his company has worked on relatively small, regional accounts but the quality of work has attracted some national attention. Recently, Stevens was invited by a leading, national beer distributor to pitch a \$150 million beer account. He has said in the past that most alcohol advertising is irresponsible in the way it targets younger adults and promotes “partying.” Still he recognizes that landing an account like this could mean great things for his agency. Stevens asks several of his employees, friends and colleagues what to do and receives mixed answers. Some say they would be have no problem working on a beer account, while others say they would be uncomfortable promoting alcohol. Stevens wonders in which direction he should take his agency. What should Stevens do?

Pitch the account

Can’t decide

Decline the account

1. Stevens’ competition is pitching the same account; if he doesn’t take the business, his competition will.
2. Landing a major account like this will help Stevens’ agency’s reputation for producing big-budget, national advertising.
3. Whether limiting information, even controversial or dangerous information, can cause greater harm to society.
4. Alcohol is a legal product so there should be no problems with promoting it.
5. Children may be exposed to the messages and be persuaded to drink before they are 21.
6. What would best serve society?
7. The public has a right to receive product information in order to make informed consumer choices.
8. How alcoholics who are struggling with addiction will feel when they see these ads.
9. A chance to work on an account like this may not come along again.
10. Whether Stevens has an opportunity to produce socially responsible alcohol advertising.
11. How the public balances protection from harm with freedom of expression.
12. Stevens may receive criticism from friends, colleagues and employees for accepting the account.

## Appendix B: Demographic Survey

### Demographic Information

Directions: Please select the appropriate answer or fill in the blank when necessary.

- 1) Gender:
  - A) Female
  - B) Male
  
- 2) Age: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 3) Ethnicity:
  - A) Caucasian
  - B) African-American
  - C) Hispanic
  - D) Asian
  - E) Other
  
- 4) Name of your university: \_\_\_\_\_
  
- 5) Year in School:
  - A) Freshman
  - B) Sophomore
  - C) Junior
  - D) Senior
  - E) Graduate school
  
- 6) Major:
  - A) Journalism (print or broadcast)
  - B) Advertising
  - C) Public Relations
  - D) Other
  
- 7) Grade Point Average: \_\_\_\_\_ (optional)
  
- 8) Have you completed a full-semester media ethics course:
  - A) Completed
  - B) Currently enrolled
  - C) Have not taken this course
  
- 9) Do you have any media-related professional experience? (i.e. working for college newspaper, internship, etc.)
  - A) Yes
  - B) No

## Vita

Stephanie Marino, born and raised in Louisiana, graduated *Magna Cum Laude* from Louisiana State University with a Bachelor of Arts degree in May 2005. Marino majored in mass communication with a concentration in print journalism and a minor in history. During her undergraduate studies, Marino wrote for an independent campus newspaper, *Tiger Weekly*. Marino also volunteered her time with student campus groups helping with communication campaigns. Marino worked as a communication intern at the University of Louisiana System for two years where she designed newsletters, web graphics, flyers, banners and signs. In September 2005, Marino began her graduate studies at Louisiana State University working toward her Master of Mass Communication degree concentrating in journalism. Marino also worked as a graduate assistant to several professors helping conduct research and maintain databases. Upon graduation, Marino will work as a graphic designer and communication specialist for Louisiana REALTORS Association.