West Meets East: A Cross-cultural Look at American and Russian Public Relations Students' Perceptions of Leadership Style and Ethics

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This research study represents an attempt to examine ethical inclination, similarities and differences between public relations students in Russia and the United States. Scholars recognize that perception of an ethical issue is an important prerequisite for the ethical decision process, and this survey explored perceptions of 377 American and Russian public relations students regarding professional ethics and leadership styles. Results found Russian participants less likely to follow ethical codes than American respondents. The more respondents believed in the effectiveness of the transformational style, the more they appeared to follow professional ethics, or vice versa. There was a correlation between participants' adherence to ethical conduct and their beliefs in the effectiveness of the transformational leadership style. The results of this study suggest there is a need for greater emphasis on ethics education in university public relations programs in both countries.

Introduction

Much of the research on public relations has been done in the United States and reflects its social and cultural environment. Meanwhile, the public relations field has globalized (Curtin & Gaither, 2007; Hachten & Scotton, 2007), and thus there is the need for more extensive research on public relations in the global environment. In such multicultural settings, it is crucial to understand diverse cultural expectations, including prospects of a leader and ethical norms, to help avoid miscommunication or poor decision-making, which might have a negative impact on employee satisfaction and productivity (Ayman, 1993). Cross-national public relations research can help assess similarities and differences in the meaning of leadership styles and ethics in different cultures, contributing to the development of public relations theory and practice.

Grunig (2000) pointed out that the ethics of the public relations profession might be different from ethics of individuals and organizations. It might be implied that if there is diversity in the beliefs of "what is right and what is wrong" within the country, there would be differences in ethics perceptions between two countries as well. However,

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others might argue that belonging to a common profession—public relations—might stimulate the development of a common vision among practitioners from various countries. Such an outlook might be formed through many ways, including PR education. For example, Russian PR textbooks and university curricula are largely based on the Western model (Azarova, 2003). The question arises, whether this phenomenon influences students' values and beliefs rooted in the Russian culture. As an example, American scholars believe that even though the majority of PR graduates enter technician roles, they still have their right to examine management's questionable decisions, and they should try to influence ethical organizational action (Shick, 1996). It might not be the case in Russia, where PR students tend to conform to the authorities rather than challenge them (Berger & Erzikova, in press). However, regardless of cultural values, it is never too early to adhere to ethical conduct. This might be considered a rationale for ethics education: To help students to develop ethical awareness and skills in ethical decision-making before they face ethical issues in the workplace (Hutchinson, 2002).

This study explores perceptions of 377 American and Russian public relations students regarding professional ethics and leadership styles. The study found that Russian participants appeared to be less likely to follow ethical codes than were American respondents. As for a leadership style, there was a correlation between participants' adherence to ethical conduct and their beliefs in the effectiveness of the transformational leadership style. The more respondents believed in the effectiveness of the transformational style, the more they appeared to follow professional ethics, or vice versa. Significant differences on the basis of gender were not present in both samples. However, significant differences were found between American and Russian females and males. The discrepancies were more pronounced between female participants than male participants on the ethical scenarios and the Leadership scale. The results of this study call for greater emphasis on ethics education in university public relations programs.

Relevant Literature and Research Questions

Public Relations Ethics and Culture
Public relations was conceptualized as a "multicultural field that entails an ongoing competition and cooperation among a finite number of cultural voices" (Leichty, 2003, p. 277). Such a cacophony of voices calls for shifting attention from reaching consensus to managing dissensus in a global village (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). Thus, sensitivity to cultural diversity and pluralism becomes a synonym of ethicality in PR.

The importance of national context was reinforced by Spicer, Dunfee, and Bailey (2004) in their investigation of ethical evaluations of American managers working in Russia. The researchers found that national context influenced managers' ethical decision-making process by attuning them to local norms.

While recognizing the significance of beliefs and customs within a particular culture, it is also necessary to discover traits and characteristics that would serve as a common denominator in the process of cross-cultural comparison. As for public relations, there are different opinions about a universal ethics code. Wright (1993) argued that such a code has inherent problems, whereas other discussants proposed that a general code is feasible because many moral values are shared globally (Marshall, 2002; Roth, Hunt, Stavropoulos, & Babik, 1996; Kruckeberg, 1993; 1989). This suggests the possibility of developing effective and mutually beneficial relationships not only among international communicators but also between a company that "going global" and publics in a host country. However, such an optimistic theoretical assumption is constantly challenged by immediate international experiences. Both anecdotal and empirical evidence suggest that often times, companies' public relations professionals lack cultural competency, and they view foreign cultures from the ethnocentric perspective (Creedon & Al-Khaja, 2005; Nelson, 2003; Roth et al., 1996; Gruban, 1995; Botan, 1992). As a result, such public relations practice might fail to bridge cultural norms.

Public relations is one of many human activities affected by globalization. Curtin and Gaither (2007) argued that cultural relativism and disparities between the rich and poor are ethical challenges posed by international public relations practice. The researchers noted that what defines ethical behavior—norms and customs—varies by culture, and this is why there no "more ethical" or "less ethical" cultures. In the United States, for example, bribery is a criminal act and it is not valued by cultural norms; whereas in India, a gift giving practice is a cultural norm (Curtin & Gaither, 2007). In Russia, although the law prohibits bribery and the general public considers this practice unethical, bribery is tolerated due to its widespread and unavoidable character. According to Curtin and Gaither (2007), new ethical approaches teach public relations practitioners to perceive absolute principles and situational particulars as a continuum (not dichotomies) to avoid condemnation of practices that do not fit their own cultural values.

It might be argued that to teach ethics means to make students understand and appreciate different cultures, along with other outcomes. Almost 20 years ago, Stacks and Wright (1989) noted that the academic community generally agreed that "ethics can be taught" (p. 54). They expanded Ryan and Martinson's (1984) study of ethical values of PR practitioners with media students, intending to determine the effect of teaching ethics at a university. Stacks and Wright argued that facing an ethical dilemma, PR practitioners made judgments on the basis of their experiences, whereas students did not have such experiences and thus, their ethical choices should stem from an ethics course. The researchers found that compared to practitioners, students did not have the same degree of decision-making confidence.

In general, studies that have examined the impact of ethics instruction on university students brought mixed results. Ludlum and Mascaloinov (2004) noted only modest differences in ethics perceptions between business students who took an

ethics course and those who did not have ethics education. Nevertheless, the authors advocated ethics courses by arguing that years in a college might be the only time when students engage in ethics discussions. These years are crucial because the views shaped in the college would reflect industry's climate for the next 30 years.

Gale and Bunton (2005) surveyed 242 alumni with majors in public relations or advertising and found that graduates who had completed a media ethics course were more likely than those who had not to value ethics more highly, better identify ethical issues, and view personal and professional ethics as undistinguishable.

Hanson (2002) in his study of journalism students and professionals found that both groups prioritized the workplace before the classroom as the best place to learn about ethics, whereas Surlin (1987) found that media ethics course made issues of freedom and equality more salient to students at the end of the course.

Although international public relations has become a significant domain in public relations research (Sriramesh, Kim, & Takasaki, 1999), few studies have examined public relations practice through the prism of societal culture and ethics in countries other than the United States. Meanwhile, the contemporary generation of students has more chances to work abroad or in multiethnic companies in a home country than the cohort that entered the PR profession ten years ago (George, 2003). Public relations students as prospective professionals should not be overlooked by scholars who intend to theorize about the future of the PR profession. The first research question, therefore, is:

RQ 1: How are students' perceptions about professional ethics alike and different in Russia and the United States?

Culture and Leadership

Conceptions of leadership have been classified in numerous schemes, which might be grouped into three broad sets: authoritative or transactional; pluralistic; and charismatic or transformational (Aldoory & Toth, 2004; McWhinney, 1997). The last one was conceptualized as almost synonymous with the notion of the "ethical leadership" (Ciulla, 2003). However, McWhinney (1997) argued that liberal Westerners are not comfortable with charismatic leadership because "the presence of such focused energy typically threatens liberal (social) agenda" (p. 120). In this regard, are American PR students comfortable with transformational style? Do they accept it as the most appropriate for PR field?

Meanwhile, Russians have demonstrated an inclination toward a strong, or charismatic, leader for many centuries. Simons and Strovsky (2006) noted that in Russia, deep authoritarian tradition is partly rooted in harsh living conditions. Russians preferred to rely on a strong leader to survive. Choldin (1985) argued that Russian rulers have been ambivalent toward the Western influence since the end of the 17th

century, when Peter the Great "cut through the window on the West." Russian incumbents have welcomed Western technologies, and, at the same time, they have resisted Western values and ideas. In light of this complicated attitude, it is worthwhile to take an empirical look at the way public relations is grafting in Russia.

Lowe, Kroeck, and Sivasubramanian (1996), performing a meta-analysis of the transformational leadership literature, found that this style was associated with work unit effectiveness. They argued that in the past, organizations focused on the development of leaders at the upper level, whereas new organizational paradigms, emphasizing a more active involvement in decision-making process, imply the development of leaders across organizational levels. This suggests that interviewing practices would involve not only the assessment of technical skills of prospective lower level leaders but also the evaluation of their interpersonal abilities. An implication for teaching public relations is that more attention should be paid to development of leadership qualities in students who might be expected to be effective leaders at their work place despite of their young age.

Although hundreds of studies on leadership have appeared in the social science literature (Pavitt, Whitchurch, McClurg & Peterson, 1995), there has been little research on leadership and leadership styles within the public relations field (Aldoory & Toth, 2004). It also unclear to what degree culture affects the perception of PR leadership styles in different countries. Thus, the second research question is:

RQ 2: How are students' perceptions of effective leadership style alike and different in the United States and Russia?

Method

Participants
The purpose of this study was to investigate student perceptions about professional ethics and leadership style. The sample included 377 American and Russian students who were studying public relations in U.S. and Russian universities. The researchers selected a student sample to assess knowledge and perceptions of professional ethics and leadership among those who will begin practicing PR in the near future. In addition, this sample and approach can provide PR educators with some insights into ethics pedagogies to help create programs that favorably influence professional ethics and enhance understanding of leadership in the classroom.

Identical questionnaires were administrated to convenience samples of PR students in Russia (n=181) and the United States (n=196). The total sample included 87 males and 290 females. The average age of the students was 20.41 (*SD*=2.12).

The Russian data were gathered in a Russian university with 510 public relations majors in June, 2007. Overall, 181 Russian public relations students participated in this study. Ages ranged from 17 to 37, with a mean of 20 years old (*SD*=2.45). The majority

of participants (87/177) were 18 and 19 years old. The sample consisted of 19 freshmen, 55 sophomores, 60 juniors, 14 seniors, and 33 fifth year students (higher education in the Russian Federation requires completion of five years). The fact that only 11 percent of the overall participants were males reflects the general situation in the public relations field in Russia, where the majority of practitioners are women (Tsetsura, 2005). In addition, statistical data from the university in which the surveys took place indicate that 12 percent of all PR majors in the university were male.

In September 2007, 196 American public relations majors (67 males and 129 females) participated in the same study. American students were recruited from an introductory PR course and two upper-level PR courses at a large southeastern university with more than 500 PR majors. The majority of students completed the survey outside of class time and received credit for their participation. Similar to the Russian sample, the American pool was a convenience sample with a predominance of females (66%). According to statistical data, about 73% of all PR students in this university were females in 2007. This number also is consistent with the overall figure of females (70%) in the public relations field in the United States (Aldoory & Toth, 2002).

Participant ages ranged from 18 to 29, with a mean of 20 years old (*SD*=1.74). The majority of American participants (108/196) were 19 and 20 years old. The sample consisted of 20 freshmen, 65 sophomores, 63 juniors, and 48 seniors.

Various courses at both universities include discussions of ethics, and a specially designed ethics course was mandatory for Russian PR majors in their third year of study.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire included three parts. First, to measure respondents' ethical inclinations, eight hypothetical scenarios were developed. The scenarios were grounded in PRSA code of ethics' provisions such as free flow of information, competition, disclosure of information, safeguarding confidences, and enhancing the profession. Several scenarios were borrowed and adapted from Sowa (2006) and Wilcox (2001); all cases were based on reasonably well-known issues in public relations practice, though they were modified to eliminate direct associations with the actual cases. The focuses of the scenarios were: a false rumor about a city official contracting HIV; a deceptive campaign targeting teenagers as potential smokers; a company president's unlawful possession of marihuana; a bribery of a journalist; an excessive level of lead in children toys; disclosure of a company's confidential information; setting up a "false" independent organization; and an unethical action of a member of the Public Relations Society of America or the Russian Association of Public Relations.

Each situational ethical dilemma used in this study had a possible solution, which consisted of four statements based on individual and collective levels of cultural values (the third value—universal—was excluded) (Hofstede, 1984). For example, in the

second scenario, a PR professional was offered an opportunity to develop a promotional campaign for allegedly safe cigarettes for minors. A self-worded provocative assertion, which followed the scenario, was: "You should carry out the campaign as described because the new business is important to your job."

Two other statements aimed to assess respondents' collective values as they are defined within American and Russian cultures. The participants' tendency to sacrifice ethical standards to the prosperity of their companies was measured by an assertion: **"**You should carry out the campaign as described because it is important for your company." To investigate an inclination toward an unethical behavior that might hurt society, the next challenging phrase was proposed: "You should carry out this campaign because society benefits from new products and services."

Finally, to examine students' legal versus ethical perceptions, the following assertion was created: "You should carry out this campaign because it is legal to do so."

The construction of the statements—Self, Company, Society, and Legal Issues —was similar for all scenarios. Respondents used a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) to indicate the degree of their agreement or disagreement with proposed solutions. The order of the scenarios was randomly varied in to ensure that order was not a compounding variable.

Second, to investigate students' preferences of leadership style, the researchers used a modified Leadership Attitude scale that first was employed by Aldoory and Toth (2004) in their study of current members of Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). Their research examined relationships between leadership perceptions and gender. The modified scale consisted of 16 statements that measure students' perceptions of transformational leadership style, which is a synonym of ethical leadership (Ciulla, 2003). The scale included 16 questions that participants responded to based on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree). In March 2007, the reliability of the scale was checked with 280 students majoring in political science and communication in a large south-eastern university, and the Cronbach's alpha was .77.

The third part of the questionnaire asked for demographic data.

The questionnaire was translated into Russian by one of the researchers. Two Russian English-speaking university PR instructors then examined both versions, English and Russian, independently and offered several suggestions for improvements, which were incorporated into the final survey instrument.

Results

The first research question examined whether there were similarities and differences in students' perceptions of professional ethics based on the country of origin.

To perform T-tests, first, eight additional variables were computed by combining individual scores on each scenario in both samples. Second, four additional variables were computed by combining respondents' scores on Self, Company, Society, and Legal Issues' statements throughout all scenarios to investigate whether there were differences between American and Russian students on the basis of individual and collective levels of cultural values. T-tests showed a significant difference between two samples on each variable (Table 1). Russian PR students demonstrated that they were more likely to disregard ethics in their professional lives than their American counterparts.

Table 1: *T-test Comparison between Russian (n=181) and American (n=196) Participants' Perceptions of Professional Ethics*

| Variable | Russians | | Americans | | |
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
1. Scenario # 1	8.49	2.67	5.89	2.83	9.12*
2. Scenario # 2	9.78	2.99	8.23	3.09	4.95*
3. Scenario # 3	10.84	2.62	8.66	3.30	7.09*
4. Scenario # 4	11.12	2.28	9.80	3.07	4.72*
5. Scenario # 5	7.57	2.49	6.64	2.86	3.38*
6. Scenario # 6	9.82	2.57	7.80	3.08	6.21*
7. Scenario # 7	11.66	1.83	9.70	3.23	7.16*
8. Scenario # 8	10.00	2.17	7.50	2.70	9.86*
9. Self	21.30	3.64	17.45	4.83	8.67*
10. Company	22.77	3.41	18.39	4.99	9.87*
11. Society	21.16	3.20	17.77	4.77	8.05*
12. Legal issue	21.25	3.62	16.95	4.67	9.94*

Note: df=375; *Significant at $p < .001$.

For hypothetical ethical scenarios, the minimum score would be 4.00 (the strongest disagreement with an ethical behavior) and the maximum result would be 20.00 (the strongest agreement with an ethical misconduct). Russian respondents showed the strongest disagreement with ethics violation in a dilemma concerned with the detection of an excessive level of lead in children's toys (*M*=7.57; *SD*=2.49), whereas American participants' strongest worry was about teenage girls targeted by a tobacco company (*M*=5.89; *SD*=2.83). Importantly, both samples revealed their strongest concerns about minors put at risk in the scenarios grounded in such a provision of PRSA code of ethics as "Disclosure of information."

The situation, in which a PR manager had to decide whether to bribe a media person to assure a promotion for a product, appeared to be the least harmful for American respondents (*M*=9.80; *SD*=3.07). As for Russian participants, they perceived as the least harmful the scenario in which a PR professional was expected to set up a supposedly independent organization to show a public support for a project (*M*=11.66, *SD*=1.83).

For variables constructed to measure individual and collective levels of cultural values (Self, Company, Society, and Legal Issues) the minimum score would be 8.00 (the strongest disagreement with an ethical behavior) and the maximum result would be 40.00 (the strongest agreement with an ethical misconduct). Compared to American respondents, Russian participants scored significantly higher on these variables, identifying themselves as individuals who were less likely to follow ethical standards while making decisions in their professional lives (Table 1).

T-tests did not show significant differences on the basis of gender within both samples (Table 2). In the Russian sample, the difference was found in males and females' perceptions of the transformational leadership style (*t*=-2.33, *df*=179, *p*<.001). Russian females reported a higher degree of its acceptance with the mean of 5.23 (*SD*=.77), compared to Russian males (*M*=4.88; *SD*=.63). The only statistically significant result in the American sample was the "bribery" scenario (*t*=2.02, *df*=194, *p*<.001). American males indicated they were more likely than American females to bribe a journalist to receive publicity for a product.

Table 2: *T-tests Comparison between Russian and American Males and Females*

Variable	Russian males (n=20)		Russian females (n=161)			American males (n=67)		American females (n=67)		
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*t*
Scenario # 1	9.30	3.59	8.39	2.53	1.44	5.85	3.19	5.91	2.65	-.14
Scenario # 2	9.06	3.23	9.87	2.95	-1.14	8.48	3.02	8.10	3.02	.82
Scenario # 3	10.62	3.23	9.87	2.95	-.40	8.67	3.48	8.66	3.22	.03
Scenario # 4	11.10	2.85	11.12	2.21	-.04	10.41	3.02	9.48	3.05	2.02
Scenario # 5	8.15	2.12	7.51	2.53	1.09	6.84	3.06	6.53	2.76	.71
Scenario # 6	9.18	3.34	9.90	2.46	-1.19	8.19	3.30	7.90	2.97	.62
Scenario # 7	11.19	1.95	11.71	1.82	-1.21	9.70	3.40	9.70	3.14	.01
Scenario # 8	10.25	2.10	9.97	2.19	.54	7.46	2.91	7.52	2.59	-.14
Self	20.84	4.76	21.36	3.50	-.60	17.75	5.07	17.30	4.71	.61
Company	22.06	4.50	22.86	3.26	-.99	18.65	5.47	18.25	4.73	.53
Society	21.59	3.81	21.11	3.13	.62	18.35	5.15	17.47	4.55	1.23
Legal issue	21.60	4.71	21.21	3.48	.45	17.31	5.02	16.76	4.48	.79
Leadership	4.88	.78	5.23	.62	-2.33	5.59	.58	5.74	.52	-1.85

Note: df=179 (Russian sample); df=194 (American sample). *Significant at *p* < .001.

A T-test indicated a significant difference between Russian and American females. First, they scored differently on the Leadership Attitude scale (*t*=-7.44, *df*=288, *p*<.001). Compared to American females (*M*=5.74; *SD*=2.65), Russian females (*M*=5.23; *SD*=.63) showed a less favorable attitude toward the transformational leadership style. Second, Russian females' scores on eight hypothetical scenarios and Self, Company, Society, and Legal Issue variables showed that they were less likely than American females to follow ethical codes (Table 3). Compared to Russian and American females, significant differences between Russian and American males were not so pronounced. T-tests revealed similar attitudes in five out of eight scenarios (Table 3).

Table 3: *T-tests Comparison between Russian and American Females and Russian and American Males*

Variable	Russian females (n=161) M	SD	American females (n=129) M	SD	t	Russian males (n=20) M	SD	American males (n=67) M	SD	t
Scenario # 1	8.39	2.53	5.91	2.65	8.10*	9.30 3.59	5.85	3.18	4.12*	
Scenario # 2	9.87	2.95	8.10	3.02	5.03*	9.06	3.22	8.48	3.24	.70
Scenario # 3	10.87	2.50	8.66	3.22	6.62*	10.62	3.53	8.67	3.48	2.20*
Scenario # 4	11.12	2.21	9.80	3.05	5.31*	11.10	2.85	10.41	3.03	.91
Scenario # 5	7.51	2.53	6.53	2.76	3.12*	8.15	2.12	6.84	3.06	1.79
Scenario # 6	9.90	2.46	7.90	2.97	6.28*	9.17	3.34	8.19	3.30	1.17
Scenario # 7	11.71	1.82	9.70	3.15	6.84*	11.18	1.95	9.70	3.40	1.86
Scenario # 8	9.97	2.19	7.52	2.59	8.73*	10.25	2.10	7.46	2.91	3.98
Self	21.36	3.64	17.30	4.71	8.41*	20.84	4.76	17.75	5.07	2.42*
Company	22.86	3.26	18.25	4.73	9.80*	22.06	4.50	18.65	5.48	2.53*
Society	21.11	3.13	17.47	4.55	8.06*	21.59	3.81	18.35	5.15	2.60*
Legal issue	21.21	3.48	16.76	4.48	9.52*	21.60	4.71	17.31	5.02	3.40*
Leadership	21.21	3.48	16.76	4.48	9.52*	21.60	4.71	17.31	5.02	3.40*

Note: df=288 (Sample of Russian and American females); df=85 (Sample of Russian and American males). *Significant at *p* < .001.

However, such variables as Self, Company, Society, and Legal Issue showed significant difference between male participants from the two countries. Russian male participants seemed to be likely to act selfishly, disregard ethics in behalf of the company's interest, possibly hurt society, and act unethically if the law is not being violated. Also, Russian males (*M*=4.87; *SD*=.77) differed from American males (*M*=5.59; *SD*=.57) on the Leadership Attitude scale, revealing themselves as future professionals who were less supportive of the transformational leadership style (Table 3).

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated for the relationship between participants' beliefs in the transformational leadership style and their perceptions of ethics. A high score on the leadership scale meant a higher degree of acceptance of the transformational leadership style. A low score on hypothetical scenarios indicated

participants' adherence to ethical conduct. A moderate negative correlation was found ($r(375)$=-.288, $p < .01$), indicating a significant relationship between the two variables. The more respondents believed in the effectiveness of the transformational leadership style, the more they appeared to follow professional ethics, or vice versa.

Multiple regression analysis was performed to investigate the extent to which attitudes toward the transformational leadership style might be predicted by such variables as age, education level, experience in PR, the reason why students were interested in PR, their intentions after graduation, and nationality. A significant regression equation was found ($F(7,369)$=13.127, $p<.001$) with R^2 of .199. Four out of seven variables appeared to be significant predictors (Table 4).

Table 4: *Multiple Regression Analysis Results for "Leadership" as the Dependent Variable*

Variable	*Coefficient*	*Beta*	*t*
Age	.010	.033	.569
Gender (1=male)	.202	.131	2.667*
Educational level (1=freshman)	-.037	-.063	-1.073
Experience in PR (1=worked as a PR professional)	-.113	-.102	-2.071*
Interest in PR (1=PR is a well-paid job)	-.013	-.019	-.378
Intensions after graduation (1=to work as a PR practitioner)	-.073	-.138	-2.850*
Country (1=Russian)	.581	.449	8.712*
Intercept	4.615		11.063

Note. *Significant at $p<.001$; R^2 is .199.

First, female participants were more likely than male respondents to follow the transformational leadership style. Second, the more PR experience surveyed students had, the more they believed in that style. Third, those who decided to work as PR practitioners after graduation were more likely to adhere to the transformational style. Fourth, as with the T-test results in Table 1, American participants were more likely to choose the transformational style as the most appropriate for public relations practice.

The effects of the independent variables mentioned above (Table 4) on such dependent variables as Self and Company (Table 5), Society and Legal Issues (Table 6) was also determined by employing multiple regression techniques. Significant models emerged in all four cases: ($F(7,369)$=12.381, $p<.001$) with R^2 of .190 for "Self;" ($F(7,369)$=14.317, $p<.001$) with R^2 of .214 for "Company;" ($F(7,369)$=10.367, $p<.001$) with R^2 of .164 for "Society;" and ($F(7,369)$=14.616, $p<.001$) with R^2 of .217 for "Legal Issues." The variable, Country of origin, was found to be significant in the prediction of whether participants intended to act ethically while pursing self- and company's interests,

weighing chances to hurt society, and choosing the legality of the action over its ethicality. In the four cases, Russian participants appeared to be less likely to follow ethical codes than did American respondents. Participants' age appeared to be helpful in the prediction of their intentions to follow the professional ethics when they make decisions about personal gain versus ethics violation. The older respondents were, the more likely they indicated respect of an ethics code.

Table 5: *Multiple Regression Analysis Results for "Self" and "Company" as the Dependent Variables*

	Self			Company		
Variable	*Coefficient*	*Beta*	*t*	*Coefficient*	*Beta*	*t*
Age	-0.354	-0.159	-2.712*	-0.137	-0.06	-1.039
Gender	-0.417	-0.037	-0.755	-0.185	-0.016	-0.331
Educational level	0.212	0.05	0.836	0.055	0.013	0.214
Experience in PR	0.392	0.049	0.987	0.438	0.053	1.094
Interest in PR	0.007	0.001	0.026	-0.078	-0.015	-0.298
Intentions	0.086	0.023	0.461	0.05	0.013	0.267
Country	-3.835	-0.408	-7.873*	-4.378	-0.454	-8.900*
Intercept	31.213		10.247	29.002		9.428

Note. *Significant at $p<.001$; R^2 is .199 for Self; R^2 is .214 for Company.

Table 6: *Multiple Regression Analysis Results for "Society" and "Legal Issues" as the Dependent Variables*

	Society			Legal Issues		
Variable	*Coefficient*	*Beta*	*t*	*Coefficient*	*Beta*	*t*
Age	-0.153	-0.073	-1.229	-0.121	-0.054	-0.942
Gender	-0.935	-0.089	-1.77	-0.609	-0.055	-1.119
Educational level	0.051	0.013	0.211	0.119	0.028	0.477
Experience in PR	0.579	0.077	1.527	0.419	0.052	1.072
Interest in PR	-0.045	-0.009	-0.183	-0.192	-0.037	-0.747
Intentions	0.004	0.001	0.02	0.057	0.015	0.31
Country	-3.57	-0.404	-7.674*	-4.334	-0.46	-9.038*
Intercept	27.991		9.621	28.023		9.345

Note. *Significant at $p<.001$; R^2 is .164 for Society; R^2 is .217 for Legal Issues.

The second research question asked whether students' perceptions of effective leadership style depend on the country of origin—the United States or Russia.

A T-test indicated a significant difference between the two samples on the Leadership Attitude scale (*t*=-8.09, *df*=375, *p*<.001). The overall mean for the Russian sample was 5.19 (*SD*=.65), whereas the same statistics for the American sample was 5.69 (*SD*=.55). Data in Table 7 demonstrate the differences in means and standard deviations between Russian and American participants regarding perceptions of leadership style. In general, Russian participants appeared to believe in the effectiveness of the transformational leadership style less than did American respondents.

Table 7: *T-test Comparison between Russian (n=181) and American (n=196) Participants' Perceptions of the Transformational Leadership Style*

Variable	Russians		Americans		
	M	SD	M	SD	t
1. Effective leaders think outside the box.	5.57	1.26	6.11	0.91	-4.71*
2. Good leaders need to change self-interests into group needs.	5.25	1.19	5.51	1.28	-2.01*
3. Today's leaders need to challenge traditional ways of doing things.	5.10	1.31	5.19	1.26	-0.67
4. Effective leaders know that good rapport with employees is a key.	6.10	1.07	6.02	0.87	0.79
5. An effective leader puts others' needs first.	4.71	1.38	5.70	1.14	-7.62*
6. Leadership is about creating personal connections with employees and others.	5.16	1.49	5.94	0.99	-6.04*
7. The best leaders are those who share decision-making power.	5.44	1.34	5.60	1.21	-1.22
8. Successful leaders practice participative management where employees have a strong decision-making role.	5.33	1.32	5.32	1.16	0.12
9. Successful leaders build good relationships with their employees.	5.50	1.09	6.26	0.87	-7.52*
10. A successful leader sacrifices himself/herself to the company and employees.	4.02	1.41	5.25	1.32	-8.75*
11. To be successful, a leader doesn't need to have good relationships with his/her subordinates.	4.74	1.62	5.56	1.27	-5.46*
12. To be a successful leader, it is not necessary to create a cooperative environment.	5.49	1.16	5.82	1.42	-2.45*
13. A good leader goes beyond self-interest for the common good.	4.92	1.24	5.77	1.15	-6.89*
14. Before making a final decision, a good leader finds out opinions of his/her subordinates.	5.00	1.32	5.57	1.16	-4.44*
15. An effective leader has a creative solution for a complicated problem.	5.54	1.09	5.77	1.04	-2.04*
16. For leaders, it is important to be conservative and follow traditions.	4.69	1.39	4.49	1.34	1.39

Note. Statements # 11, 12, and 16 were reverse coded due to its negative phrasing.   *Significant at p < 0.001.

After data were entered in SPSS 15.0 for Windows, the reliability of the Leadership Attitude scale was checked again. Cronbach's alpha in the actual sample was higher than in the pre-test sample (.78 versus .77). After the statement #16, *For leaders, it is important to be conservative*, was removed, the Cronbach's alpha grew to .80.

Discussion

Cohorts of public relations professionals entering the profession at a different point of time might produce some differences in ethical norms (Shamir, Reed, & Connell, 1990). This study aimed to examine ethical perceptions of American and Russian public relations students found that students of one age studying in different countries might have fairly dramatic differences in their perceptions of ethics.

In accordance with previous research on students' attitudes toward ethics (Erzikova & Berger, 2007a; Erzikova & Berger, 2007b), this research found that the country of origin predicts professional values best. In general, American public relations students appeared more ethically grounded and supportive of the transformational leadership style than their Russian counterparts. However, keeping in mind Curtin and Gaither's (2007) statement that there are no more or less ethical nations, it is necessary to address the reasons that might have influenced Russian students' self-reports.

Presumably, Russian students' attitudes toward ethics were determined by at least three factors: (1) a difficult economic situation in the country; (2) Russian authoritarian culture (Bahry, Boaz, & Gordon, 1997); and (3) the developmental stage of public relations in Russia (Guth, 2000). It might be implied that these factors do not work separately from each other and their interplay leads to their reinforcement.

The willingness to sacrifice ethical standards for success was more pronounced in the Russian sample than in the American sample presumably due to the atmosphere of the survivorship in Russia. Except for large oligarchic corporations, small and average size enterprises struggle to remain in business because of the tax system and corruption (Spicer et al., 2004). Previous research found that in Russia, companies that face financial crisis fire PR managers among the first employees (Erzikova & Berger, 2006).

A low level of social activism in Russia also might have contributed to students' perception of ethics. In the West, organizations must not only satisfy consumers with products but also consider their long-term desires to avoid negative publicity. As an example, a public protest made tuna producers stop killing dolphins in the process of catching tuna (Chandler, 2007). Such a victorious campaign is hardly possible in Russia. Despite of the fact that the level of social dissatisfaction with current governmental reforms, for example, might reach the level of 70-80 percent of the population, the percentage of Russians who participate in protest actions would be 0.5

(Chuvashova, 2007). It might be argued that compared to American students, Russian students felt little virtual support from the general population if they ring the bell, making information about unlawful activities described in hypothetical scenarios available to the public.

As for the second factor, the Russian predominantly collectivistic culture presumes that employees tend to obey the leader's decisions rather than challenge him or her. What makes this relationship even more complicated is that the Russian mass conscience perceives a person who does not mind using violence in a critical situation as the "real" leader (Gaman-Golutvina, 2005). The author argued that if the president of the U.S. directed tanks to attack the Congress, he would be immediately dead as a political leader. Meanwhile, the rating of the Russian president Yeltsin, who was responsible for a military attack of the Russian parliament in 1993, was not significantly affected by the violent event. Gaman-Golutvina (2005) argued that in Russia, the usage of coercion and violence as the management model for more than 500 years has promoted the formation of the tradition in which "violence became the most effective technology of the political communication" (p. 19). This suggests that authoritative leadership has remained dominant in the cotemporary Russia (Lipman & McFaul, 2001). Despite significant political, economic and social changes the country has undergone in the last two decades, it is still a time of cynicism with no apparent values or ideology (Aslund, 2007).

If in the United States public relations is considered a young profession (Marsh, 2001), then in Russia the profession is an infant. However, Russian PR was not *tabula rasa*. From its initial stage in the late 1980s, Russian PR has carried a negative Soviet "heritage," being associated with propaganda (Tsetsura, 2001). Although the image of the Russian PR recently has improved (Tsetsura, 2004), there is still a belief that the most effective PR is "black," or manipulative and deceptive. Such "PR" is practiced predominantly in the political sphere and often times employs efforts to ruin a rival's reputation instead of creating a client's positive image.

The managerial role is presumed in the public relations profession (Guth, 2000). However, both empirical and anecdotal data suggest that Russian public relations practitioners are currently following the model role of communication technician (Guth, 2000). Moreover, company managers tend to disregard PR practitioners as members of the decision-making team (Erzikova & Berger, 2006). This aspect also might have contributed in Russian students' attitudes toward ethical conduct. Efforts to be moral might not make a difference when a PR professional's activities depend on an unethical authority. Compared to American PR practitioners who have made significant progress in taking on a management role in organizations, Russian PR practitioners still have a long way to go before they are recognized as decision-makers.

Public relations majors like other students who study at universities might be considered "individuals in between." They are not the general public anymore, and they are not professionals yet (Hanson, 2002). This position needs to be taken into account

while analyzing results of the present study. Hanson suggested that students still might think like the general audience in spite of university's effort to acculturate them. Thus, students' self-reports might have reflected low-level expectations the general public has about public relations (Baker & Martinson, 2002). Moreover, Bowen's (2003) study of PR undergraduates of two American universities showed that students might have negative perceptions of the profession even if they chose public relations as a major.

Like previous research (Stacks & Wright, 1989; Ryan & Martinson, 1984), this study found that the nature and depth of concern for the public depends on the extent to which people are put at risk by a decision to conceal or to withhold information. Both American and Russian students reacted more negatively to life- and health-threatening scenarios than to vignettes about "back-stage" activities with a distinct flavor of corruption (bribery of a TV person and setting up an allegedly independent organization).

Traditionally, females were found to be more ethically grounded than males (Bowen, 2005; Ludlum & Moskaloinov, 2005). Previous research on PR majors in these American and Russian universities also supported the phenomenon (authors' names are deliberately omitted here). However, the present study did not indicate a well-pronounced gender difference in ethics perceptions in both samples. An explanation for this might lie in the specific survey instrument or in a particular sample configuration.

Although it has been argued that moral values are developed at the age of seven (Pratt, 1991), scholars have paid increasing attention to the importance of teaching professional ethics in education and to what ought to be taught (Gale & Bunton, 2005; Hutchinson, 2002; Coombs & Rybacki, 1999; Neff, Walker, Smith, & Creedon, 1999; Stacks, Botan, & VanSlyke Turk, 1999). Heath (1991) argued that when the discipline is on its way toward professionalism, curriculum may follow or even *lead*. It might be argued that the impact of education on the profession comes from educators' dedication to frame each class as an ethical issue, regardless of whether a free-standing course in ethics is present in curriculum or not. Hutchinson (2002) opined that educators should focus "more on what we morally should do" instead of emphasizing "what we legally can't do" (p. 308). In other words, more value should be attached to developing obedience to ethics codes than to teaching students to comply to avoid lawsuits.

Acknowledging the fact that public relations professional ethics is largely based on personal ethics, the Commission on Public Relations Education (2006) nevertheless called for an emphasis on ethics in all content of public relations professional education. Although scholars' opinions about the best methods to teach ethics vary, they agreed that ethics should be taught across the curriculum (Elliott & Koper, 2002; Hutchinson, 2002; Toth, 1999; McInerny, 1997-1998; Bivins, 1991; Pratt, 1991; Harrison, 1990).

Importantly, Russian PR professionals also are concerned with the quality of education (Tsetsura, 2001). Erzikova and Berger (2006) surveyed the top of Russian PR practitioners and found that their biggest concern was the weak value of PR education in the country. The professionals said that one of the reasons business people and the general public disrespect the profession is the poor job performance of PR graduates.

Ethics education starts with ethical self-identification. To deal with world diversity, a public relations practitioner first needs to have a sense of self-identity and understand his or her own values (George, 2003; Allert, 1999). This task is consistent with the role of PR professionals as the consciences of their organizations (Pratt, 1991). The fact that PR executives do not become the "consciences" over night, calls for more thoughtful and rigorous pedagogies that will help students realize that ethics is the foundation for decisions and strategies in their professional lives. According to Bowen (2008), moral philosophy provides PR practitioners with ethical decision-making guidelines to solve complex moral dilemmas with integrity.

Conclusion

Triandis (1993) stated that when it comes to scientific investigation, "culture is the greatest of all moderators" (p. 168), and cross-cultural research, indicating differences and highlighting similarities, helps researchers understand a phenomenon that might not have looked so fascinating until it was investigated in different social and cultural contexts. The findings of the present study indicate that culture, economy, and the degree of development of public relations, including professional education, may have influenced the ethical perceptions of American and Russian students.

This study is a reflection of the need for research on international public relations articulated in number of studies (see the special section of Public Relations Review, 33, 2007). Today PR graduates or entry-level practitioners go to work in foreign countries (Neff, the public relations panel at the 2007 National Communication Association's annual conference), but the concern is that public relations scholarship has not provided them with models to deal with socio-cultural differences (Sriramesh & Vercic, 2007).

The importance of the present study is in its attempt to examine ethical inclinations of PR students who will define the industry profile in the near future. Perception of an ethical issue is regarded as an important prerequisite for the ethical decision process (Hunt & Vitell, 1986). Although the investigation of ethical attitudes of respondents provides a valuable insight into their perceptions of professional ethics, one should be careful with any conclusions about future behaviors of the respondents. First, beliefs may not determine behaviors. Second, a country cannot be taken as a culturally homogeneous group but rather as a collection of diverse cultures (Ludlum & Moskaloinov, 2005; Tsetsura, 2001); this is why a study of PR students in other U.S. and Russian regions might bring different results. Third, like similar studies (Hanson, 2002), this study did not control for the tendency to give socially desirable answers to

questions about sensitive issues. Fourth, the respondents represented a convenience, not random sample. The next step of investigation might be to see how students' reported beliefs translate into actual behavior.

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