Millennials' Approaches to Ethical Decision Making:
A Survey of Young Public Relations Agency Employees

Patricia A. Curtin, Ph.D., Tiffany Gallicano, Ph.D., and Kelli Matthews, M.A.

This study reports data from a nationwide survey of the Millennial Generation of public relations agency employees examining their approach to ethical decision making and their relationships with their agency employers. The survey employed Hon and Grunig's (1999) scales to measure relationship outcomes: control mutuality, trust, commitment, and satisfaction. The results of the organization-employee measures were reported in previous research, and they are only used here to illuminate the relationship between ethics and the organization-employee relationship. In addition, the survey explored the usefulness of Bowen's (2005) practical model for ethical decision making from the perspectives of Millennial agency practitioners. Our findings demonstrate that Millennials value transparency and clear ethical rules and expectations, experiencing much better relations with those agencies that both talk the talk and walk the walk in terms of social responsibility.

Many agency managers view new public relations graduates with dismay because "the most important target is themselves in all aspects of life, including time management" (Porter Novelli, 2008, p. 10). One agency no longer hires recent graduates, citing a lack of work ethic (Hollon, 2008). Another manager says new hires believe "work should be fun and that dues-paying is for suckers" (Porter Novelli, p. 2).

Generation bashing is nothing new: "Bemoaning the self-involvement of young people is a perennial adult activity" (Rosenbloom, 2008, p. G1). Yet critics are singling out this generation for particularly harsh criticism. For example, while "members of other generations were considered somewhat spoiled in their youth, [members of this group] feel an unusually strong sense of entitlement" (Alsop, 2008, p. 2F) and are "more American Idle than American Idol" (Generation Y, 2009, p. 47).

The object of criticism is the Millennial Generation, also known as Gen Y, defined here as those born in 1982 or later (Hoover, 2009). Children of the Baby Boomers, they are the largest and most racially diverse generation, almost 40% minority, and the fastest growing segment of the workforce (Armour, 2005). Their managers, however, consistently express exasperation over Millennials' sense of entitlement, difficulty in taking direction, self-indulgence, greed, short-sightedness, poor skills, and lack of work ethic (CareerBuilder, 2007; Harris Interactive, 2008; Randstad, 2008).

Little empirical study exists, however, concerning Millennials' perspectives on work and ethics, particularly in public relations. To fill this gap, we received a Public Relations Society of America Foundation grant to survey Millennial agency practitioners about their relationships with their employers and their approaches to ethical decision making.

Our goal is to extend theoretical development in ethics and employee-organization relations while providing agency management with guidance on how best to train and mentor this generation.

Generational studies may be inherently problematic because they can promote stereotyping. Many studies, however, have shown that generational demographics often translate into demonstrable psychographic differences, particularly concerning respect for authority and workplace expectations (e.g., Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008; Weston, 2006). In fact, our results indicate both wide differences in individual decision making and strong commonalities in general expectations concerning workplace ethics, both of which provide insight into productively managing these young practitioners.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

A Harris Interactive (2008) poll found that Millennial Generation professionals expect to work hard, although their older colleagues don't perceive them as hardworking, and they respect members of older generations, although that respect is not returned. In fact, according to scholars, Millennials are more accepting of rules and authority than their predecessors, Gen X, and they are more likely to exhibit trust in authority figures (Hershatter & Epstein, 2006).

Millennials don't do well with ambiguity and risk, however: "They're very reliant on people to tell them what they need to do. . . . they're not very good at accepting end-line responsibility" (Hershatter & Epstein, 2006, para. 17). They're also conflict averse and seek consensus (Berger & Reber, 2006; Winograd & Hais, 2008) to the extent that "Millennials are alarmed by the *prospect* of even apparent ethical dilemmas or conflicts" and believe conflict can be resolved through information gathering (Chobi, 2008, para. 4).

Our first research question, then, asks
RQ 1: How do Millennial public relations agency employees approach ethical dilemmas?

A few empirical studies suggest that Millennials distinguish between innocuous (i.e., "white lie") transgressions and serious breaches of ethics (Freestone & Mitchell, 2004; Pelton & True, 2004) based on a respect for authority, which leads to deontological (rules-based) reasoning, as well as a valuing of trust, which leads to a concurrent use of utilitarian (consequence-based) reasoning. According to Bowen (2005), however, combining deontological and utilitarian reasoning is not feasible for practitioners: Mixing paradigms "leaves no single approach as the clear or safe choice. . . . [and] might lead to confusion for both internal and external publics" (p. 209). Instead, she developed a "layperson-accessible practical model for ethical decision making" based on deontological principles established by Kant (Bowen, 2005, p. 192; Figure 1)

Ethical Issues Management Practical Model

Autonomy Section

START HERE by asking yourself the question below:

Am I acting from the basis of reason alone?

Can I rule out:
a.) political influence
b.) monetary influence
c.) pure self-interest

Yes → Proceed to decision making

Individual Decision
Group Consensus Decision

No, I am subjective →

Defer decision to another issues manager or use group consensus decision making

Question Section

Each person should consider the following three questions:

Could I (we) obligate everyone else who is ever in a similar situation to do the same thing I am about to do (we are about to do)?

Would I (we) accept this decision if I (we) were on the receiving end?

Have I (we) faced a similar ethical issue before?

(Next page)

Ethical Consideration Triangle

Consider each point of the triangle with each group inside of the triangle

DUTY
Am I doing the right thing?

Self
Publics
Society
Stakeholders
Organization

INTENTION
Am I proceeding with a morally good will?

DIGNITY and RESPECT
Are dignity and respect maintained?

Communication

Communication with groups in the triangle

Communicate Considerations through Symmetrical Model of Public Relations (i.e., Two-way communication with publics; do formal and informal research; inspire change in organization and publics, mutual understanding, and relationship maintenance)

End Result

of using model
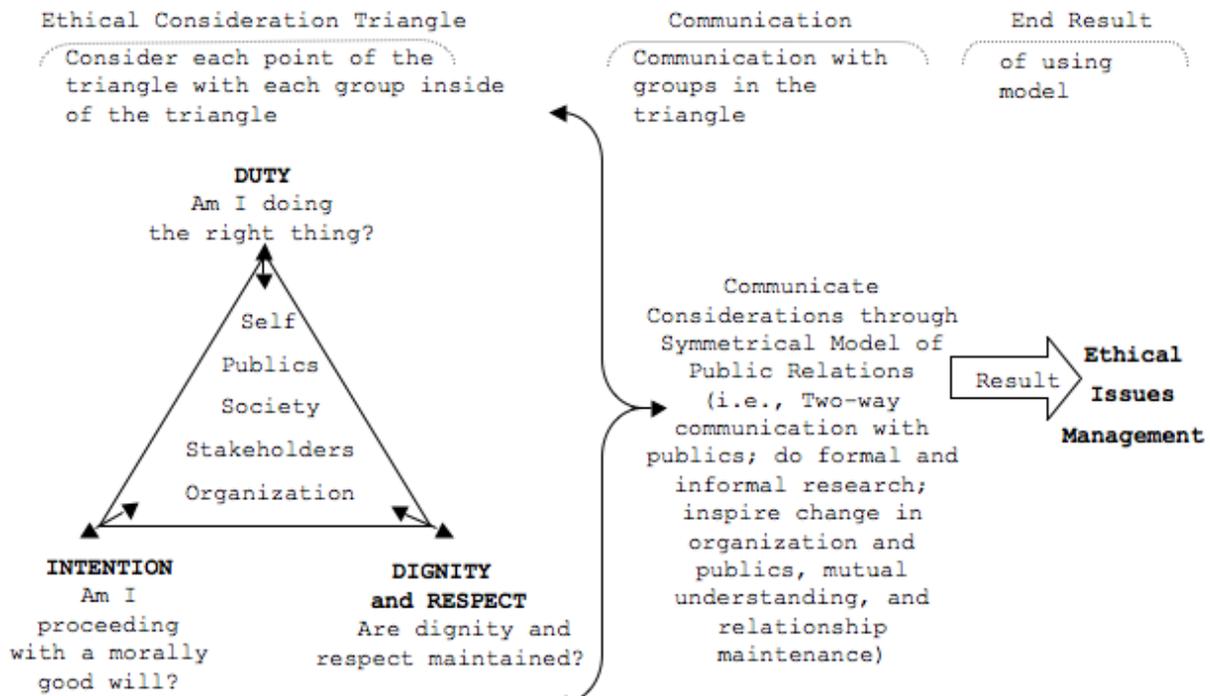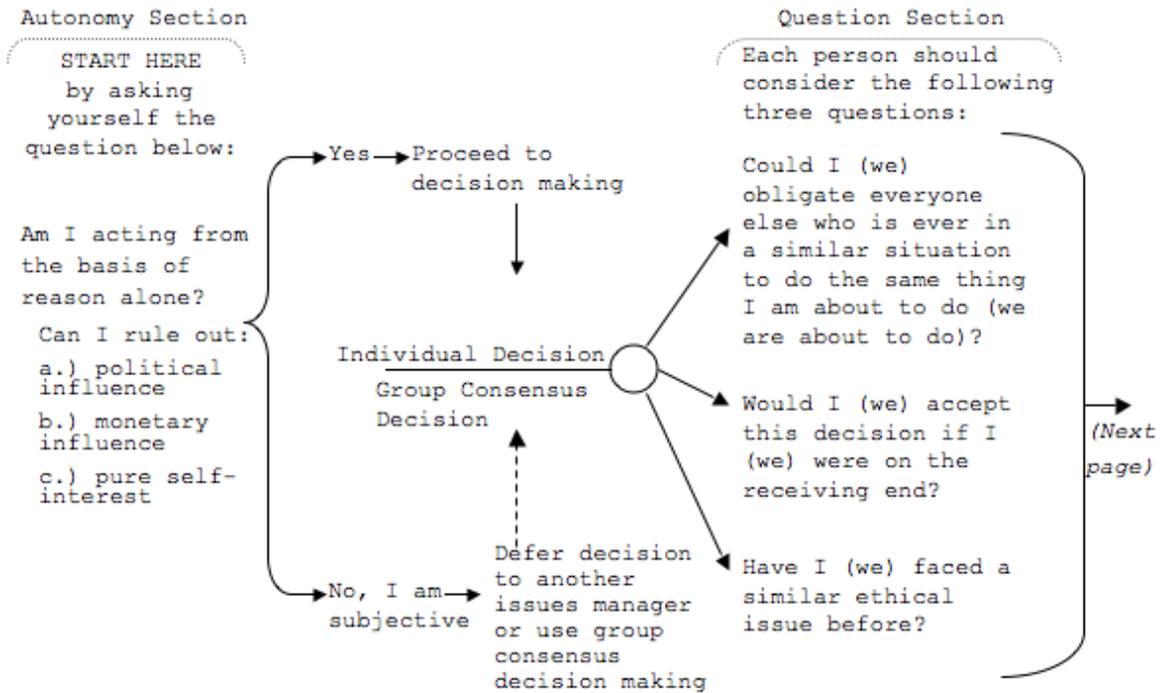
Result → **Ethical Issues Management**

Figure 1.

The model's first step requires practitioners to ask if they're making a decision free from the influence of workplace politics, personal ambition, and financial influence because, according to Kant (1997), only an autonomous subject is capable of moral action. After determining autonomy, the model provides six principles in the form of questions: "Could I (we) obligate everyone else who is ever in a similar situation to do the same thing I am about to do (we are about to do)?"; "Would I (we) accept this decision if I (we) were on the receiving end?"; "Am I proceeding with a morally good will?"; "Are dignity and respect maintained?"; "Have I (we) faced a similar ethical issue before?"; and "Am I doing the right thing?" Only if a person can answer all questions affirmatively is he or she capable of ethical decision making.

Bowen (2005) successfully tested the model on older, well-established practitioners. Other studies, however, have found that older individuals tend to follow rules and adopt deontological approaches more frequently than do younger, which might make the model inherently less appealing to younger practitioners (Coleman & Wilkins, 2009; Kim & Choi, 2003; Pratt, Im, & Montague, 1994). Thus, this study asks

RQ 2a: Do Millennial public relations agency employees find Bowen's model helpful for making ethical decisions?

Other researchers have criticized rational approaches, such as this, for privileging white male forms of ethical decision making (Cortese, 1990; Gilligan, 1982), although empirical results to date have been mixed (Coleman & Wilkins, 2009). Thus, we also ask

RQ 2b: Do Millennial public relations agency employees differ by gender or ethnicity in how helpful they find Bowen's model?

Additionally, the literature is divided on whether practitioners of any age find codes of ethics or education and training helpful in making ethical decisions (see Bowen, 2004; Curtin & Boynton, 2001; Gale & Bunton, 2005), leading us to ask

RQ 3: Do Millennial public relations agency employees find educational training and codes of ethics helpful for making ethical decisions?

In terms of Millennials' expectations of others, in a nationwide survey of 37,000 undergraduates, 39% said high ethical standards were their top consideration when choosing an employer (Green, 2006). Additionally, 79% wanted to work for a company that was socially responsible, 64% were loyal to their employers because of the employers' values, and 56% would not work for a socially irresponsible company (Cone, 2006). An international survey conducted two years later confirmed this trend: 88% of Millennials wanted to work for an organization with matching social responsibility values, and 92% of U.S. respondents said they would leave an employer whose values didn't match theirs (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2008).

In fact, preliminary research suggests that Millennials, contrary to popular opinion, don't tend to complain about the amount or type of work they do, they complain about a work culture that isn't meaningful (Gerdes, 2007; Gursoy et al., 2008). In a study of public relations professionals, Blum and Tremarco (2008) found that for those employed by an agency for two years or fewer, which would include Millennials, job satisfaction was significantly correlated with the belief that "My firm has strong values—and lives them," and job satisfaction was significantly correlated with perceived ethical dealings with employees (p. 15).

The connection between job satisfaction and ethical dealings with employees has been explored through the lens of relationship management theory, particularly the subfield of organization-public relations (OPR) known as employee-organization relations (EOR). Scholars have used EOR to evaluate relationships between employees and their organizations in terms of four outcomes: satisfaction, trust, control mutuality, and commitment (Hon & Grunig, 1999). Trust is the belief that the organization is fair and competent and keeps its promises. Satisfaction is the extent to which an organization meets positive expectations. Control mutuality measures satisfaction with the amount of influence employees have in the relationship, and commitment refers to the extent to which the relationship is worth the time and effort required to maintain it.

Scholars have made connections between an ethical decision-making climate at an organization and subsequent good organization-public relations (e.g., Bowen, 2006). Kim (2007) found that one antecedent of good relationship outcomes with employees is organizational justice: Employees have an expectation of "fair behavior by management and fair organizational policies and systems" (p. 191). Additionally, practitioners believe an organization's ethical decision-making climate should be marked by respect, trustworthiness, and openness, which are also key aspects of good relations (Boynton, 2006). Another study (Kang, 2010) suggested a link between the organizational environment and ethics, but the response rate was too low to lend much validity to the findings.

To further explore this link, we ask
RQ 4: What is the relationship, if any, between EOR and Millennial public relations agency employees' attitudes toward ethical decision making?

METHOD

Given the lack of a sampling frame for this demographic, we recruited survey participants through a mixture of convenience and snowball sampling. PRSA sent a solicitation letter and two follow-up reminders on our behalf to people who had been members for no more than 2 years. Because this list included members outside our target group, we used two qualifying questions to ensure respondents were Millennials and worked at an agency. To avoid recruiting only those participants who were the most professionalized (i.e., members of PRSA), we also solicited participants through online channels (blogs, PR Open Mic, Facebook) and encouraged participants to share the survey link with fellow Millennial agency employees.

Following a pretest, which resulted in slight wording changes, we posted the survey online. A total of 433 people accessed the survey, but 152 were not of the correct age and/or not employed by agencies, leaving 281 qualified respondents. Of those, 223 answered the majority of questions, for a completion rate of 79%. In accordance with IRB guidelines, respondents could skip questions; thus, the total number of respondents for each varies. Given the sampling method, we cannot say how representative this group is of the population or accurately generalize our findings within a certain margin of error to the larger population. Since our purpose at this point was descriptive, however, we believe that 223 respondents allow us to paint a broad picture of Millennial agency employees and their concerns.

To determine how respondents approached ethical decision making, the survey included three workplace dilemmas. We provided closed-ended choices for each, with each succeeding dilemma offering a narrower range of options. To test the perceived utility of Bowen's (2005) model, three 5-point Likert-scaled questions asked respondents to rate their autonomy in terms of perceived pressures from workplace politics, the need for job security, and personal ambition. Three questions used a 5-point scale (significantly to insignificantly) to measure the degree of impact each of these three factors had on their ethical decision making. Three additional questions asked whether these factors resulted in more or less ethical decision making or made no difference. Respondents then rated how useful they would find each of the model's six principles on a 5-point scale ("not useful at all" to "very useful"). Using the same scale, respondents rated the utility of education/training and PRSA's Code of Ethics.

To measure relationship outcomes (control mutuality, trust, commitment, satisfaction), we used the 5-point Likert-scaled items from Hon and Grunig's (1999) study. (Factor analysis confirmed the four dimensions, and Cronbach's α for the scales ranged from .886 to .958: The full results of the EOR portion of the survey were reported previously and are used here only to illuminate the relationship between EOR and ethical decision making). Demographic questions addressed gender, race/ethnicity, and income. Open-ended comments were sought throughout the survey to lend context to the quantitative findings.

RESULTS

The average respondent was a Caucasian female who earned $30,000 to $39,999 per year, which approximates the demographic profile of recent public relations graduates (Table 1; Culp, 2007; Vlad, Becker, Olin, Wilcox, & Hanisak, 2009), providing support for the use of inferential statistics.

TABLE 1
Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Category	%	n
Gender	Female	83.2	159
	Male	16.8	32
Ethnicity	African American	3.4	6
	American Indian or Alaskan Native	1.1	2
	Asian	6.3	11
	Caucasian	83.5	148
	Hispanic, Latino or Latina	5.7	10
Income	<$20,000	4.0	7
	$20,000 to $29,999	13.6	24
	$30,000 to $39,999	45.5	80
	$40,000 to $49,999	27.3	48
	>$50,000	9.7	17

How Millennials Approach Ethical Dilemmas

The first dilemma addressed job security. Participants responded to their boss requesting them to not disclose a medical source's corporate ties when pitching a story. Most respondents (53.5%) skirted the dilemma by saying they would refer the issue to a superior and solicit help. Just over a fourth (26.5%) agreed to the request. Another 15.0% said they would reject the assignment, despite running a risk of being fired; another 5.0% said they would make the pitch but reveal the truth if pressed.

In the second dilemma, addressing personal ambition, a colleague asks for volunteers to pose as unaffiliated citizens at a town meeting and ask either an easy question of the agency's client or a difficult question of the opponent. Again, most respondents (69.5%) avoided the situation by waiting for someone else to volunteer, even though it might curtail their career advancement. A total of 22.1% volunteered to ask either question; 8.4% would ask the easy question only. The last dilemma invoked workplace politics. Respondents were forced to choose whether or not to spy on an activist group. The results were almost evenly split: 52% would pose as a member of the group; just under half (48%) would decline the assignment.

Forty respondents provided comments. One said, "I honestly don't think these sorts of things happen," but five said they had faced similar work situations. As to how problematic they were, comments ranged from "I wouldn't work at a PR agency that was using these tactics" to "These aren't that big of a deal." The four respondents who deemed the situations unethical used deontological (rules-based) reasoning, employing transparency as the guiding principle. The eight respondents who thought the dilemmas were not ethically challenging used utilitarian (consequence-based) reasoning (e.g., "Pretending to be a volunteer is just what a reporter will do to get a good story. I don't think anyone is really getting hurt."). Six respondents said they would pretend to be an activist group member if they agreed with the group's goals; they didn't assume they were being asked to monitor the group because its goals were at odds with the client's.

Some respondents (14.2%, n = 33) skipped the dilemmas, although 10 of these contributed comments. Six didn't answer because they didn't believe the choices provided were sufficient: "There is almost always another solution," requiring "more information" and "deeper looks." Four said they would never face these situations; they wouldn't work for an agency that asked such things of its employees. As one said, "Our agency holds tight to our core values. No one in my agency would ask me (or participate) in any of the above actions." Another added, "I would not want anything to do with [these situations] and would seek solutions to stop them. If I got fired, I would take pride knowing that I did the right thing . . . although that doesn't pay the bills."

Applying Bowen's Model

The first step of Bowen's (2005) model requires subjects to ask themselves whether they are capable of being autonomous moral agents, free from political, monetary, or pure self-interest influences. Respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed with statements such as the following: "Because of internal politics in my workplace, I make decisions about ethical issues that I am not entirely comfortable with." Most respondents believed they were autonomous, with few saying that workplace politics, the need for job security, or personal ambition led them to make decisions with which they were not entirely comfortable (Table 2). Workplace politics was the most influential factor (15%) in making at least slightly uncomfortable ethical decisions, followed by the need for job security (12%) and personal ambition (7.5%).

TABLE 2
The Relative Role of Autonomy Factors in Ethical Decision Making (%)

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Workplace politics	34.5	40.6	9.8	13.5	1.5
Job security	40.2	38.0	9.8	10.9	1.1
Personal ambition	41.4	42.0	8.7	6.4	1.1

When Millennials were asked to rate the impact of these autonomy factors on their ethical decision making, however, the order changed (Table 3). In response to questions such as "To what extent do internal politics at your workplace affect the ethical decisions you make?" almost a third (31.3%) thought the need to keep their jobs was a significant influence, closely followed by personal ambition (29%). Only 13.4% fingered workplace politics as having a significant impact on ethical decisions.

TABLE 3
Degree of Impact of Autonomy Factors on Ethical Decision Making (%)

	Significant	Somewhat Significant	Neutral	Not Too Significant	Not Significant
Workplace politics	1.8	11.6	29.3	27.4	29.9
Job security	9.8	21.5	17.0	19.3	32.3
Personal ambition	10.7	18.3	18.8	21.4	30.8

The final set of autonomy questions asked respondents whether each of the three factors led them to make more or less ethical decisions (Table 4). In every case, most respondents said these factors didn't play a role. For the remainder, however, a larger number of respondents said that these constraints on their autonomy led them to make more ethical decisions, rather than less, with personal ambition demonstrating the strongest positive influence on ethical decision making.

TABLE 4
The Influence of Autonomy Factors on Ethical Decision Making (%)

	More Ethical	Less Ethical	No Role
Workplace politics	35.4	27.0	37.6
Job security	26.5	22.1	51.4
Personal ambition	35.6	16.5	47.9

No significant differences emerged by gender. Minorities, however, reported feeling a significantly greater influence from the need for job security ($t = 2.31$, $df = 173$, $p = .022$) and personal ambition ($t = 2.08$, $df = 171$, $p = .039$) than did non-minorities.

According to Bowen's (2005) model, practitioners who can rule out these influences may proceed to the next step: determining if they could affirmatively answer six questions. (Practitioners who cannot rule out these influences should "defer the decision to another" or "use group consensus decision making"; p. 193.) Based on the pretest, changes were made to four of the questions. "Could I (we) obligate everyone else who is ever in a similar situation to do the same thing I am about to do (we are about to do)?" was adjusted to "Should everyone else who is in a similar situation do the same thing I am about to do?" "Would I (we) accept this decision if I (we) were on the receiving end?" was changed to "If I were the customer (or other public), would I accept this decision?" "Am I proceeding with a morally good will?" was changed to "Am I proceeding with good intentions?" Finally, "Are dignity and respect maintained?" was changed to "Will the dignity and respect I have for myself and others be compromised by this decision?" This last question now requires a negative answer. We didn't change "Have I (we) faced a similar ethical issue before?" and "Am I doing the right thing?"

Respondents found all six questions useful, with responses for somewhat or very useful ranging from 60.2% for having everyone in a similar situation do the same thing the

practitioner is considering to 93.7% for not compromising dignity and respect for self and others (Table 5). Conversely, about a fifth of the respondents did not believe requiring everyone in a similar situation to do the same thing useful, and about 15% did not find putting themselves in the other's shoes or relating to a similar situation useful.

TABLE 5
Perceived Utility of Bowen's Six Principles for Ethical Decision Making (%)

	Not Useful	Not Too Useful	Neutral	Somewhat Useful	Very Useful
Other shoes	3.9	10.7	7.8	43.4	34.1
Similar situation	2.9	12.1	14.0	47.3	23.7
Right thing	1.5	2.5	7.0	18.9	70.1
Everyone else same thing	4.9	14.6	19.9	30.1	30.1
Good intentions	2.4	6.3	6.8	29.6	54.9
Dignity and respect	1.0	2.5	2.9	16.2	77.5

Although literature suggested men would find the model more useful than women, women were significantly more likely than men to find the questions about doing the right thing ($t = 2.23$, $df = 168$, $p = .027$), requiring everyone in a similar situation to do the same thing ($t = 2.50$, $df = 171$, $p = .020$), and proceeding with good intentions ($t = 3.16$, $df = 171$, $p = .002$) to be helpful. No significant differences were found between minorities and non-minorities on any of these measures.

To further test the utility of the model, correlations were run between the autonomy factors and the perceived usefulness of the six questions (Table 6). Workplace politics did not significantly correlate with any of the six. Those who believed job security was an issue they faced were significantly less likely to find treating themselves and others with dignity and respect to be useful. Personal ambition was significantly negatively correlated with the utility of four of the six principles: putting themselves in the other's shoes, asking if they were doing the right thing, proceeding with good intentions, and not compromising their own or others' dignity and respect.

TABLE 6
Correlation of Autonomy Factors and Six Principles

Principle	Workplace Politics	Job Security	Personal Ambition
Other shoes	-.087	-.124	-.151*
Similar situation	.050	-.013	-.066
Right thing	-.116	-.122	-.238**
Everyone else same thing	-.019	-.125	-.133
Good intentions	-.012	-.024	-.172*
Dignity and respect	-.089	-.165*	-.248**

Note: * correlation is significant at the .05 level; ** correlation is significant at the .01 level.

Thirty respondents commented on this section. Six respondents said they didn't feel pressured at work. For example: "I've actually found (and appreciated) that my agency strongly considers my personal opinion of what is ethical. I haven't been in many situations where I've needed to make decisions based on ethics, but when I was, I was pleased to see that my employer appreciated my thought process and input."

Many more, however, blew the whistle on what they believed were unethical actions either committed by their employers or asked of them by their employers. Among these, six mentioned phantom experience (i.e., inflating credentials and capabilities). One participant wrote, "Sometimes my employer makes me tell clients that I have more work experience than I really do." Five mentioned financial misdeeds. One commented: "My employer has a bad habit of taking clients to dinner and offering to pay. When we return to the office the next day, I am given the receipts and told to complete an expense report and bill the total charge to the client under "administrative costs." This is both unethical and unprofessional, and when I voiced my concern, I was told that "all the agencies do it—it's no big deal." It is unfortunate that lying to clients is considered acceptable practice."

Another who mentioned financial misdeeds said, "I felt I had no choice but to comply with his requests in order to keep my job." Five respondents mentioned lying to clients separate from phantom experience and financial misdeeds, including "I was told to lie about feedback I've gotten from reporters about the level of 'newsworthiness' of an announcement." Three others mentioned media relations issues, including puffery and "relentless" pitching to uninterested journalists.

One respondent was asked to astroturf for a client but simply neglected the assignment, noting, "Thankfully, my supervisor never asked about it or followed up with me on the project." Two mentioned problems because their values did not align with those of the client in terms of environmental or corporate responsibility, leading one to conclude that "Public relations was fun in college to learn, but it's not fun to do."

Overall, the comments revealed a distinction between those who felt they had autonomy on the job and those who didn't, such as the respondent who wrote "At this point in my life, a job is a job, and in terms of ethics, I'll do what I have to do to keep my job, my personal feelings will take a back seat. With the economy so bad, it's just one of those things. I can't afford to let my personal feelings complicate my career."

The Role of Education/Training and Codes

In terms of the utility of education/training and the PRSA Code of Ethics, most respondents (73.6%) rated education/training useful or somewhat useful, while not quite half (46.7%) rated the code the same way. Only 10% didn't find education/training useful, whereas 23.2% didn't find the code useful; the remainder were neutral.

Fourteen respondents commented. Two said family values and upbringing significantly guided their ethical decision making. Three mentioned teachers who had inspired them to think more about ethical issues. Four were unfamiliar with PRSA's Code of Ethics, even though one was a PRSA member. Three stated the code wasn't helpful because it wasn't enforced, wasn't the focus of PRSA activities, or simply wasn't practical: "PRSA is a nice organization but when making day-to-day decisions, you're not going to bring up the 'code of ethics' with your boss. Come on."

The Relationship between EOR and Ethical Decision Making

To explore the relationship between employee-organization relationship outcomes and ethical decision making, post-hoc correlations were run between the four relationship outcome indices and the autonomy factors, their impact on ethical decision making, the six questions, and the utility of education/training and PRSA's Code of Ethics. Table 7 shows the strong relationship between the autonomy factors and the relationship outcome indices.

Table 7
Correlations between Relationship Outcomes and Autonomy Factors

Outcome Index	Work-place Politics	Job Security	Personal Ambition	Impact of Politics	Impact of Economics	Impact of Ambition
Control Mutuality	-.425**	-.414**	-.369**	.277**	.278**	.126
Trust	-.455**	-.476**	-.388**	.245**	.271**	.171*
Commit-ment	-.331**	-.376**	-.326**	.234**	.188*	.093
Satisfaction	-.454**	-.473**	-.416**	.250**	.197**	.100

Note: * correlation is significant at the .05 level; ** correlation is significant at the .01 level.

Lack of trust significantly correlated with all autonomy factors and their impact. Lack of control mutuality, commitment, and satisfaction significantly correlated with all except the impact of personal ambition. Poor employer-employee relations, then, are tied to a felt lack of autonomy on the part of employees. Testing the relationship between the six questions with the relationship outcome indices resulted in only one significant correlation: Those who believed that the dignity and respect they had for self and others was useful for ethical decision making also reported greater satisfaction ($R = .193$, $p = .011$). No significant correlations were found between the utility of education/training and PRSA's code and the relationship outcomes.

A few comments addressed aspects of the interrelationship of good employer relations and ethical decision making. The most common came from four respondents who mentioned problems associated with their superiors lying and with a general lack of transparency, which led to ethical stress and poorer relations, particularly since these transgressions went unpunished. Another two mentioned financial improprieties and the relationship stresses they engendered, such as

I do not have much respect for my bosses. I feel that they are unethical people who only care about themselves or the money they are making. They do not offer guidance or good ideas. I'm disappointed with the lack of leadership in my firm.

DISCUSSION

We address each research question below, including implications for public relations theory and recommendations for public relations agency managers.

RQ 1. How do Millennial public relations agency employees approach ethical dilemmas?

Our findings confirm that this generation is conflict averse; the majority prefers to avoid an issue rather than take a stand. Almost 15% of respondents avoided dilemmas entirely by not responding to the questions; the majority of the remainder ducked the situation when possible. For those who took a stand, more followed the boss' orders than not, suggesting they value organizational rules.

Qualitative data, however, also support the anecdotal literature (e.g., Chobi, 2008) that suggests Millennials will use utilitarian reasoning to avoid confrontation and achieve consensus. They perceive information as inherently value neutral and information gathering as positive, thus making it a permissible means to achieve a desired end. In fact, some have dubbed this group Generation Why because they continuously seek information and knowledge to understand the context for what they are doing. As one respondent said, "I like to know why we do things, not just how to do them." Providing context and demonstrating how work contributes to agency goals and missions fulfills this need to know and generates more enthusiasm for work and better insight into issues that might arise. As Carolyn Cone (2006), chairman of Cone Inc., notes, "Companies need to provide hands-on cause-related experiences and then clearly and consistently share related societal impacts" with their Millennial employees.

Conversely, because Millennials have been raised in an information society, they don't often realize the ramifications of information gathering—or sharing, for that matter. They value transparency and the free flow of information. Managers need to lay out clear rules about what work information can and should be shared, providing their young employees with clear reasons why such restrictions on information are necessary.

RQ 2a. Do Millennial public relations agency employees find Bowen's model helpful for making ethical decisions?

Step 1: autonomy. Most Millennials (about 75%) did not agree with the model's presupposition that they had to be autonomous moral agents, free from influence, to make ethical decisions. In fact, about 80% of respondents said the autonomy factors either had no effect or caused them to make more ethical decisions rather than less.

It's possible that being asked to consider these factors stimulates Millennials' moral imagination, leading them to think more deeply about ethical issues, or that the organizational culture of most agencies encourages young practitioners to actively factor in these influences when making ethical decisions (see Bowen, 2010). More qualitative research is needed to determine what individual and organizational culture factors are at play and whether the model might be more applicable if it asked whether each autonomy factor might constrain the practitioner's ability to make an ethical decision. In this way the model could tie in with literature linking Maslow's hierarchy of needs with public relations practitioners' ethical decision-making process, which found that practitioners often feel forced to make less ethical decisions when having to meet basic or security needs (Boynton, 2001). As one respondent noted, "At this point in my life, a job is a job, and in terms of ethics, I'll do what I have to do to keep my job."

Should autonomy not be possible, the model suggests using group consensus decision making instead, which may be inherently appealing to this group. Having an open workplace discussion of the context within which ethical decisions are taking place, giving Millennials "the big picture," might help them more easily approach ethical issues and tackle them with more finesse and assurance.

Step 2: six questions. Our pretest demonstrated that the wording of four of the six questions in the model's second step didn't resonate with Millennials, suggesting that its utility would be enhanced by simplifying the language to sound less like 18th-century philosophy.

Millennial practitioners rated the utility of the six questions highly, lending support to a deontological model for the industry. This study, however, did not test how Millennials would apply the model in actual situations. Further research should use methods that better capture process, such as ethnography. Because the model is normative, however, it does not suggest how to engage the vocal minority of those who prefer utilitarian approaches. The answer may lie in education and training, addressed below.

RQ 2b. Do Millennial public relations agency employees differ by gender or ethnicity in how helpful they find Bowen's model?

Contrary to expectations (see (Coleman & Wilkins, 2009; Kim & Choi, 2003, Pratt et al., 1994), women found half the questions significantly more useful than did men. Given the increasing feminization of the field, the model may be able to gain traction among these young practitioners.

Of great concern, however, is that minorities, who constitute almost 40% of Millennials, reported experiencing significantly more constraints on their autonomy. Consequently, the model may systematically exclude this growing group from decision making, requiring them to either refer a dilemma to someone else or engage in group consensus decision making. Given the pressures of job insecurity and internal politics faced by the minority respondents in this study, referring ethical dilemmas might not be pragmatic, particularly when supervisors make ethically questionable requests. More work is needed to identify the structural barriers still facing minorities on the job and integrate these factors into theory. Additionally, more work is needed to parse out differences among races and ethnicities so that resulting theory is not build on broad dichotomies of minority versus non-minority, which obscures important distinctions among groups.

Given that young minorities feel relatively disempowered and possibly pressured to make less ethical decisions, managers would do well to revisit the organizational climate at their workplaces in terms of sensitivity to minority concerns and issues. More efforts are needed to provide a safe place and space for minorities to air their concerns and talk through issues they face.

RQ 3. Do Millennial public relations agency employees find educational training and codes of ethics helpful for making ethical decisions?

Contrary to previous studies (e.g., Curtin & Boynton, 2001; Gale & Bunton, 2005), most Millennials believe education and training are useful, and almost half value the PRSA Code of Ethics, although the contextual data suggest many believe it lacks workplace traction because of lack of enforcement and difficulty of application.

These results support the anecdotal literature that Millennials value ongoing education and mentoring and like clear instructions (Hershatter & Epstein, 2006). As one respondent wrote, "I am very lucky to have an immediate supervisor with an extremely strong commitment to ethical practice . . . an important step for a young professional." Assigning mentors to these young employees, then, will help them work through ethical dilemmas rather than avoid them and will likely produce more employee loyalty and productivity. The findings suggest Millennials will also be more apt to value codes of ethics or statements of values that are readily available and made part of the day-to-day organizational culture, which could address the concerns noted with the vocal minority of utilitarian young practitioners noted above.

RQ 4. What is the relationship, if any, between EOR and Millennial public relations agency employees' ethical decision making?

Relationship outcomes did not significantly correlate with decision-making tools and principles, such as education, training, or the six questions of the model, except for a weak correlation between satisfaction and treating self and others with dignity and respect, which may simply be an artifact of the data. What yielded robust findings were the correlations between relationship outcomes and autonomy measures.

The findings provide strong evidence that Millennial Generation agency employees believe they have a significantly better relationship with their employers when they experience fewer constraints on their ethical decision-making autonomy. As one said, "I have expressed concern on actions that I felt would be unethical and as a result convinced the team not to move forward." Where relations were strained, respondents often suggested that they felt ethically constrained because their employers lacked ethics.

Millennials respect authority, but that authority is dependent on trust and respect established through a strong sense of organizational mission and integrity. The results lend support to the trade literature that this generation desires work that is socially responsible and values driven (Cone, 2006; Porter Novelli, 2008). Millennials want to work for organizations whose values align with their own. As a couple respondents observed in relation to the ethical dilemmas, "Our agency holds tight to our core values. No one in my agency would ask me (or participate) in any of these actions," and "I would not take a position with a company that forced me to make this choice; it's an unfair situation to be placed in."

Respondents often employed a strict deontological stance, noting that lying was never ethical and that the "everyone is doing it" argument lacked validity. Managers would do well to perform an "ethics audit" at their workplaces to determine areas where the rules seem to say one thing, whereas agency behavior might suggest another. Such conflicts are inherently problematic for these young employees. Despite the few extant empirical studies that suggest Millennials distinguish between innocuous (i.e., "white lie") types of transgressions and serious breaches of laws and ethics (Freestone & Mitchell, 2004; Pelton & True, 2004), most of our respondents took a fairly black and white view of right and wrong. They don't generally tolerate creative bookkeeping on clients' accounts or inflating facts to clients or journalists because it violates their sense of trust and expectation of transparency.

Interestingly, agency size, which we collected data on, was not a significant factor in any of our measures. Sheer size didn't matter, but contextual data suggest that having a clear mission or values statement that was well known by employees and evidenced every day in the workplace was key to Millennials' satisfaction. For any ethical decision making model to be useful, it will need to have traction in the workplace by having managers refer to it as dilemmas arise, rather than having it gather "dust as an infrequently employed and often-forgotten policy document" (Bowen, 2010, p. 29).

In terms of relationship management theory, this study lends strong support to the extant literature that posits the interrelationship of EOR and practitioner ethics. The main contribution of this study is to parse out that factors affecting ethical decision-making autonomy are strongly related to relationship outcomes, suggesting an environmental linkage. Practitioners who experience more autonomy feel empowered to make better ethical decisions and report higher levels of trust, satisfaction, control mutuality, and commitment with their employers. More research is needed to tease out

the dimensions of this relationship. While previous literature suggests that practitioners see a link between relationship outcomes and ethics in general (Boynton, 2006; Kim, 2007), further research is needed to determine if the strong relationship between autonomy and relationship outcomes holds across other age demographics.

CONCLUSION

As one article notes, "Whenever someone older needs to place blame for all that goes wrong in this world, they can pin it on the newest generation. They've got no morals, we say, they've got no work ethic" (Walton, 2008, p. E1). These findings suggest that contrary to popular opinion, Millennials don't lack ethics. It might be better said that they may have different values than older generations, but many also demonstrate a strong belief in ethical decision-making processes that align with those of older practitioners. In fact, our findings suggest they might hold a greater allegiance to deontological thinking and to the principles underlying PRSA's Code of Ethics than have their predecessors.

It's notable that a number of these young practitioners felt compelled to share what they saw as their employers' unethical actions. Most often, these ethical infringements involved issues addressed by the PRSA Code of Ethics, such as not lying, and by a recent PRSA Board of Directors professional standard advisory (PSA-10) on phantom experience. Ironically, a problem managers have reported with Millennials is that of lying or embellishing experience on résumés (Dorsey, 2008); our study suggests the problem is not theirs alone. It may be more productive, then, to examine how Millennials' values differ and how managing those differences can be profitably accomplished.

Our conclusions, however, are tempered by the limitations of the study. We lack a good sampling frame for this demographic, and while our results confirm much of the previous anecdotal and scholarly literature, they should still be viewed with some skepticism. We're also limited in what we can say from a survey—we didn't interview participants to get their perspectives, nor did we observe ethical decision making in action. What we can do is paint a broad picture of how Millennials report their relations with their agency employees and their approach to ethical decision making.

Millennials value integrity and social responsibility, and they are quite loyal to employers who not only espouse similar values but who also live them. Loyalty suffered when Millennials believed that their agency employers lacked integrity or were willing to sacrifice values, especially when immediate supervisors were not reprimanded for ethical infractions. Their trust, then, must be earned through not just talking the talk but also walking the walk. This is a generation that has been brought up to value transparency, and they use transparency as a principle by which to judge actions.

What they ask is that agencies have clear value statements and adhere to them, and that they are given a glimpse of the big picture so they know where they fit and can better do their work. From our perspective, these are suggestions that can only improve the profession.

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Correspondence concerning this study should be addressed to
Tiffany Derville Gallicano
School of Journalism and Communication
University of Oregon
1787 Agate Hall, Room 124
Eugene, OR 97403-1275.